Bunkers as Contested Cultural Heritage

What the bunkers of Albania tell about the processing of a nation's Communist memory

Marjolein Helena van der Boon

Figure on front cover (previous page): A postcard rack in a souvenirship in Berat, Albania. Source: own photograph.

Figures on title page (next page): A variety of Communist heritage, souvenirs and bunkers. Sources: own photographs.

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Abstract

For almost fifty years, Albania was an isolated Communist dictatorship. 28 years ago, the regime fell and free travel, democratic values and capitalism were embraced in the country. This past however still has great influence on life in Albania. Traces from communism are visible in people's minds, in society, in politics and in the country's architecture. The most prominent material heritage from the communist period are bunkers. To defend the country against a war that never came, 200.000 to 750.000 bunkers have been built. Many of them still stand, and there is no clear idea on what to do with them. By some they are considered a waste of finances and labour: the money could and should have been spent on those who had no food or no apartment. Scholars often consider them to be a constant reminder of a traumatic period of time, although some recognise elements of nostalgia. Since a few years, discussions on the meaning of the buildings are slowly starting to rise by museums and small initiatives, yet it is still a difficult subject for certain groups within the population. Simultaneously, the younger generation seems to have forgotten all about it.

Since the fall of the regime, many bunkers have been destroyed. They are a source of scrap metal, they are considered inaesthetic and they create a problem for farmers when it comes to ploughing. Today, the Albanian landscape is rapidly transforming and bunkers are destroyed in the course of construction projects. Many of them however still stand. On what used to be strategic locations, they can now be found on the most unexpected and seemingly random places: in neighbourhoods, graveyards, backyards, farms and alongside the road. These bunkers are often abandoned, but also find re-use in the most ingenious ways. They are functioning as storage facilities, sheds, restaurants, businesses, toilets and more. When repurposing occurs, ownership becomes an important issue since this is not always clearly defined. One cannot help but wonder how Albanians think of these objects: whether they are constantly reminded of the past due to this architecture. Are they an eyesore? Do people still see them? Do they play a part in the memory of Communism or are they 'just buildings'? Do they stimulate tourism? Are they considered heritage or are they destroyed when it is more convenient? Are these thoughts in line with how the population feels about Communism in general?

Acknowledgements

It was a returning expression amongst Albanians: "If you ask, you go to Istanbul". It meant that by asking, you can achieve a lot of things, since Albanians are known to be kind and helpful. If I can take anything away from my stay of two months in Tirana, it is the truth of this saying. Even without having a language in common, Albanians would always help in the best way they could. They would bring you to someone who could help, call their daughter who 'speaks English', give you a ride, keep an eye on the bus for you, or give you an orange from their tree.

On the morning I arrived in Tirana, I saw old men sitting in pairs or with three on coloured benches in a small city park. It was a cloudy day: they all wore hats and dark coats. I did not know what to expect from this city and from doing independent fieldwork research here. Tirana, as I learnt, is a city of kindness, of poverty, of hospitality, of street dogs, of excellent coffee and of very tasty olives. It is a beautiful place.

Source (below): own photograph

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1. Research design

1.1 Introduction

From 1944 to 1991, Albania was isolated in an strict Communist dictatorship. The borders were shut and the Party of Labour defined every aspect of life. When the regime fell 28 years ago, Albania was introduced to travel, capitalism and democracy. The transition period away from dictatorial rule is ongoing, and the Communist era has left a loaded heritage in people's minds, in the economy, in the government and in the landscape. Tangible Communist heritage exists of apartment buildings, factories, prisons and above all: a concrete defence system that was meant to protect against a possible nuclear attack from abroad. It existed of tunnels and underground shelters, but mostly of mushroom-shaped bunkers (*bunkerët*). Not only were they built in an ideology of defence, they also contributed to Hoxha's strategy of implementing fear and even paranoia within the Albanian society. No clear statistics exist on the number of bunkers, but estimates are made between 200.000 and 750.000. During the 1990s and still today, large-scale destruction of these bunkers has been taking place. However, many are also surviving. They form an important part of the material heritage of the Communist regime, and initiatives are taken to give some of them a purpose in today's society. This is done by museums and organisations, but also by individuals that transfer them into barns, storage spaces, sheds and even shops, restaurants and tourist attractions. The 'bunker phenomenon' has not gone unnoticed by foreigners, many of whom enjoy buying bunker magnets and postcards.

The odd mushroom-shaped structures raise curiosity: what are they still doing in today's modernising landscape? What meaning do they have now? Are they functional, or emotionally loaded? Are they ugly, traumatic or fascinating? Formerly located in strategic places, they now seem to be randomly placed in the mountains, in neighbourhoods, on fields, playgrounds, cemeteries and beaches. They hold different meanings and interpretations, which makes their existence complicated. The Albanian population has differing opinions about the period of time, and as a result they also have different views about what to do with the bunkers. There is no clear governmental decision on what to do with them.

This thesis studies what is going on with these bunkers. This is done by researching current processes of memory in Albania, the interaction with Communist heritage in general and a case study on bunkers. It is thus studied how Communism is remembered, how it is thought to future generations and what role heritage plays in this process. The research is based on a fieldwork period of two months in Tirana, from the 15th of February to the 17th of April 2019.

1.2 Problem statement and aim

Twenty-eight years ago, in 1991, the Communist regime in Albania fell and the country became open to travel, democratic transitions and many unprecedented forms of freedom. This relatively recent transition is still ongoing and has come with many problems, including corruption, poverty,

unemployment of youth and migration[1]. To understand contemporary society, it is valuable to study the past, because current problems make people reflect on how it was before, in comparison to how it is now. This thesis studies how contemporary Albanians look back on Communism, and how they process their difficult history in light of today. This phenomenon is studied by looking through the lens of contested cultural heritage, with a case study on bunkers. This thesis consists of three main chapters: reflecting on Communism, dealing with the Communist heritage in Tirana and dealing with bunkers.

Processing the communist past is a topic that has low priority for many Albanians, especially youth. Its importance however should not be underestimated. The Communist memory in Albania has not been addressed critically or comprehensively studied in the last thirty years. As noted by Godole and Idrizi (2019, 7): *"A significant lack of awareness regarding the complexity of the phenomena of experience and memory of Communism can be noticed* [in Albania]*."* It goes as far that the younger generation (read: under the age of thirty) is not aware of what their parents generation has lived through, and does not have an eye for the past of the country, only for the future. A narrative about this period of time is hardly taught, so that children do not learn about the lessons that can be taken away from it. Furthermore, the Communist mentality is not only historical, but also entangled in contemporary politics. The aim of this thesis is to study contemporary society through the lens of the Communist heritage of Albania, to answer questions such as: What kind of narrative is being created about Communism and transferred to future generations? How is the cultural heritage used in this narrative? And taking bunkers as a symbol, what do we see? These form the basis of the research questions, explained in the next section.

1.3 Research questions and structure of the thesis

The above questions led to a main research question (mrq) that will be answered by the study of three sub questions (sq). Each sub question is treated in an empirical chapter that builds onto the theoretical framework in chapter three.

Mrq: *Given the difficult relationship with their Communist past, how do contemporary Albanians relate to the remaining bunkers as part of the contested cultural heritage from this period?*

Sq 1: *How do contemporary Albanians relate to their Communist past?*
Heritage cannot exist without history. However, historical and heritage narratives do not always co-align, as will be explained in the theoretical chapter. To understand whether or how this is the case, the memory of Communism is studied in the first empirical chapter (chapter 5). This chapter explains the complexity of the communist memory. It can thereafter be studied how this is reflected in material heritage. A set of phenomena related to the processing of the past has been observed: the national narrative on communism, the memories and opinions about the communist regime,

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[1] Albania scores 36 on a scale from 0 (very corrupt) to 100 (very clean) (www.transparency.org). It ranks 68th on the UNDP poverthy index and has 30% youth unemployment (http://hdr.undp.org). The population has been declining since 1990 (when the borders of the country opened), from 3.3 million people to 2.9 people in 2017 (https://data.worldbank.org).

silencing in families and schools, the historical disconnection of youth and silencing in the government.

Sq 2: *How do contemporary Albanians relate to the contested cultural heritage from Communism?* The second question aims to find a relationship between the monuments of history and current social processes. Who gets to remember and how? What is preservable? It gives an overview of the Communist heritage of Albania and elaborates on existing debates about it. It also includes museum efforts of explaining the past, (dark) tourism and the commercising of communism.

Sq 3: *How do contemporary Albanians socially interact with and relate to the remaining bunkers?* The third sub-question focuses on the bunker situation of Albania. It studies how people interact with bunkers and how they feel about them. Social practices, relations and reasoning as to dealing with this heritage are explained, as well as the ways in which people make these places inhabitable and/or enjoyable. It is studied how these bunkers symbolise the treatment of the communist past in Albania.

1.4 Justification of the research

"*To neglect heritage is a cardinal sin, to invoke it is a national duty*" (Lowenthal 1998, xiii).

Why to include heritage in a sociological study about Communism in Albania? According to Iacono and Këlliçi (2015), Communist heritage is important for two reasons: to remember the misdeeds of the regime, but also because its memory still 'haunts' parts of Eastern Europe, including Albania. Furthermore, heritage is *"the chief focus of patriotism and a prime lure of tourism"* according to Lowenthal (1998, xiii). By choosing this heritage perspective, a practical and hands-on approach is taken to analyse contemporary issues. Therefore, this thesis combines two inherently interdisciplinary studies: heritage studies and international development studies.

Communist Albania was chosen as a case study because of its unique history, the fact that it has many social problems and that it is largely understudied. Its neighbouring countries, Greece, former Yugoslavian countries, and Italy, have received more attention in literature. Although Albanians are a small population, they live all over the world, they have become one of the most international populations of the planet. The reason to focus on bunkers, is that they objectively seem the most obvious heritage from a the contested period of Communism: they can be found everywhere in the most unexpected places. The word 'obvious' was chosen to describe the bunkers as heritage because they are so easy to see in all kinds of landscapes, and everyone knows that they are there. That also means that every Albanian can be interesting as a respondent.

The research for this thesis has been largely done in the surroundings of Tirana, which lies in the middle of the vertically elongated country of Albania. It must therefore be noted that the results described in this thesis do not apply for Albania as a whole, since the country knows great regional variation. The reason to focus on Tirana was that it is the biggest city, the centre and the capital of the country. Many problems come together here and many people from different regions of the country live here. Also, during Communism, it was the city where the regime and the Sigurimi were most concentrated. The area of Blloku in the city centre was the residential area of the leaders, including Enver Hoxha. It therefore also has a symbolic meaning.

The phenomena described in this thesis therefore do not account 1:1 to other regions of the country. Specific, regional factors there might play important roles, that do not account in Tirana. This is especially the case for Northern Albania, which was even more secluded during Communism. The far south might therefore have completely different feelings towards bunkers than the north.

A final justification for this study is that it might bring more attention for the presence of the heritage in the country. Bunkers are becoming a forgotten subject, since there are more stressing contemporary issues related to poverty and unemployment (see footnote 1 on page 10) that demand attention. It is not claimed that heritage is a first priority, but it is hoped to shed some light on the potential of heritage as a powerful tool of remembering and education. This thesis is based on the assumption that the past is an important factor in studying and preparing for the future, and that complex social processes can only be understood by studying what people have come from.

1.5 Situating the thesis in existing literature

Not too much has been written about the Communist heritage of Albania, and about bunkers even less. It is a small, understudied country in the shade of former Yugoslavia and Greece. While researching the topic of Communism and bunkers in Albania, the same authors kept recurring. Also during fieldwork, when interviewing respondents, certain names would pop up again regularly. It is a small niche.

A few previous studies on the Communist heritage of Albania were particularly relevant for this thesis. In 2015, an unprecedented quantitative survey was held on 'citizens understanding and perceptions of the communist past in Albania and expectations for the future', by the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE). They measured throughout the entire country, differentiating four regions, three age categories and by gender. The survey had 995 respondents. This source has been used to support some of the findings in the empirical chapters. Another study, by Stefa and Mydyti (2012) describes the bunker situation in Albania in detail, and proposes ways in which they can be actively reused for contemporary purposes. In two articles by Eaton (2011) and Eaton and Roshi (2014), the material Communist heritage of Albania is studied in order to deal with the traumas of the past. The master thesis of Myrhberg (2011) explores the Communist heritage of Tirana by asking whether it is unwanted. She found that opinions vary, and the claim of 'unwanted' is thus complex. An article by Iacono (2018) was useful for the understanding of the 'revolutionary' transfer from a dictatorship into democracy, and in Iacono and Këlliçi a case study on nostalgia is given of "Piramida", a pyramid-shaped piece of architecture built by Hoxha as a museum in the centre of Tirana. That heritage can be powerful and influential, is learnt from Galaty and Watkinson's (2004) *heritage under dictatorship.* Godole and Idrizi (2019) very recently explained the *'public and private recollections of Communism in contemporary Albania'.* Finally, an insightful article was written by Lagerqvist (2015), who describes the complexity of heritage in line with societal development with a case study on Gjirokastra.

This thesis distinguishes itself from existing literature by framing the complexity of the heritage situation on a broader level, not only in material relations or in light of development issues, but also in connection to wider phenomena in the remembering of Communism. It is a general study that does not focus on one particular site or building, but studies complex phenomena as a whole. This

has not been done yet on a large scale. While studying the bunkers of Albania it was impossible to not land upon the broader Communist heritage of Albania, the complex politics and the multidimensional way that is being reflected on this period of time. There is a great variety of opinions on the heritage of Communism, which is deeply layered into contemporary Albanian society. This thesis aims to describe this complexity.

2. Theoretical framework – Storytelling through contested cultural heritage

2.1 Contested cultural heritage

This research is shaped in the theoretical framework of contested cultural heritage. Tangible heritage is a visual reminder of a past. When this is a difficult past, and memories of it diverge, its heritage can be(come) contested, as is the case in Albania. The topic of Communism is in many regards still sensitive and its corresponding material remains are a reflection and reminder of this. The concept of contested cultural heritage has existed for over 30 years in a range of disciplines including anthropology, archaeology, history and tourism (Silverman 2011). *"This is because we live in an increasingly fraught world where religious, ethnic, national, political, and other groups manipulate (appropriate, use, misuse, exclude, erase) markers and manifestations of their own and others' cultural heritage as a means for asserting, defending, or denying critical claims to power, land, legitimacy, and so forth" (Silverman 2011, 1).* Within studies of contested cultural heritage, there is often conflict on ownership, on identity, or historical events in which the heritage plays a symbolic role. Heritage is both a social and cultural process: it not only engages us in where we came from, but also in where we are going (Smith 2006). It can influence cultural, social and political change (Smith 2006). Policies, as well as practices concerning cultural heritage are political in nature, which mean that they are vulnerable to manipulation (Silverman 2011). We can ask many questions in this regard: *"What is considered heritage? Why? By whom? Why? What is not? Why? What is well managed? Why? What is ignored or erased? Why? What is included in the discourse of nationhood? Why? What is excluded? Why?"* (Silverman 2011, 24). In many cases, history influences a people's identity. This can be on a small scale, one's family, or on a large scale, for example patriotism. Heritage can provoke feelings because it can make one feel closer to a certain past. This can be good or bad, but often involves a complex grey area. Sentiment, grandeur, jealousy and conflict are only a few of the possible feelings that can be triggered by (small and large) objects of memory.

"The ability to control your own identity, to define who you are and to establish a sense of community belonging is emotionally and politically a powerful act. A sense of identity must inevitably draw on a sense of history and memory – who and what we are as individuals, communities or nations is indelibly formed by our sense of history and the way individual and collective memory is understood, commemorated and propagated." (Smith 2006, 35-36)

When heritage, tangible or intangible, triggers a mix of feelings from a variety of groups, or when the heritage reminds of a traumatic event, we speak of 'contested' (cultural) heritage. The concept is not always referred to in these words (Silverman 2011), sometimes it is called 'difficult heritage' (Silverman 2011), 'heritage that hurts' (Uzzell and Ballantyne 2008) or other variations. It is related to the term of '*hot interpretation*' (Uzzell 1989 in Uzzell and Ballantyne 2008): "*interpretation that apprecieates the need for and injects an affective component into its subject matter, where appropriate*" (Uzzell and Ballantyne 2008, 503). Uzzell implies that visits to heritage are often not solely cognitive and objective experiences, but that "we are subject to a full repertoire of emotional responses"(Uzzell and Ballantyne 2008, 503). Eaton and Roshi (2014, 315) explain that heritage

processes usually *"focus on particular sites that bear witness to a significant past".* Pierre Nora (1989) called these 'Lieux the mémoire': spaces of memory.

2.2 David Lowenthal (1985): a malleable past

One of the early founders of the study of contested cultural heritage is professor David Lowenthal. By connecting anthropology, sociology, history, archaeology and heritage he laid the groundwork for studies on remembering, preservation studies, history and heritage (although of course he was inspired by others, such as Hobsbawn's essay on invented traditions from 1983). In 1985 he published an unprecedented and influential book called 'the past is a foreign country'. This title was based on the first paragraph of the novel *'the Go-between'* by L.P. Hartley: '*the past is a foreign country, they do things differently* there' (Hartley 1953 in Lowenthal 1985). In a major work of almost 500 pages, Lowenthal explains how history, memory and heritage reveal the past but also create the past that we want. It is thus malleable (Lowenthal 1985).

Thirteen years later, in 1998, he published a successor called 'the heritage crusade and the spoils of history', in which he addressed the effects of heritage. He writes that its popularity can both bring benefits and harm, that it can trigger possessive rivalry, and that there is a distinction between history and heritage. History is an effort to learn what happened in the past, and heritage borrows from this and then tailors it to present-day purposes (Lowenthal 1998). "*Yet history too is a heritage. The history we normally accept without demur stems from seldom-tested faith in the cumulative probity of historians, even when we know their chronicles were forged- often trumpeted- in the crucible of self-interest*" (Lowenthal 1998, xi). This statement reminds of the famous saying of 'history is written by the victors', or at least by its survivors.

Although over twenty years have passed since 'the heritage crusade' appeared, both works are well-respected, often cited and relevant up to this day. 'The past is a foreign country' changed academics' perceptions of the past. The phenomena described by Lowenthal are tested and demonstrated in many different studies, including many different essays in the book 'Contested Cultural Heritage', edited by Helaine Silverman (Silverman 2011). The books are of a general nature, contain lots of cases studies but do not focus on a particular region. Together, 'the past is a foreign country' and 'the heritage crusade' form a ground base for studying difficult heritage in any context. In this thesis, it is used as a theoretical foundation in studying the relationship between Albanians and their Communist history, and the role that heritage plays in this. Below, a few elements from these books have been chosen, to which the fieldwork for this thesis is reflected. In 'the past is a foreign country', Lowenthal (1985, XIX-XX) widely describes three main phenomena which explain how the past is being shaped by individuals and collectives. These can roughly be called 'remembering the past', 'learning about the past' and 'changing the past'. They will be elaborated on below. 'Learning about the past' is included in 'changing the past', since they influence each other strongly in this thesis. Then follows a section on heritage, which is considered one of the tools for changing the past, which is malleable.

2.2.1 Remembering the past

Lowenthal explains that the past can both enrich and impoverish us, and people can either embrace or shun it. The past can have benefits, but also fears and drawbacks. Sometimes people can feel nostalgia for childhood and early life, in which they embrace imagined pasts. For others, *"to endure present life we may want to forget or obliterate a malign or traumatic heritage. A glorious heritage may likewise overwhelm, its superiority extinguishing even the will to rival it"* (Lowenthal 1985, xx). This quote explains that the past can be numbing: it can withhold a variety of narratives that together would form a more realistic truth about the past. Dealing with a difficult past can be problematic. *"We mainly idealize or demonize the past not as a foreign country, but as close kin to our own present-day homeland."* (Lowenthal 1998, ix). However, Lowenthal writes, unlike historians have long believed, human nature was not the same in the past, and *"denizens of other times thought and acted in ways and for reasons unlike our own"* (Lowenthal 1998, ix).

In addition to this, Mondale (1994, 20) contributes by saying that *"the past means different things at different stages in life. For youngsters, the past is what happened to other people. Adolescents are likely to rebel against an immediate past and perhaps idealize a past beyond their memories. Middle-aged people tend to put the past off to one side. The elderly- and there are more of us all the time-tend to sift through memories, increasingly as they age, often as a means of connecting a blurring present with increasingly vivid memories of a remote past."* This adds to a further variety of reflecting on the past.

A relevant article on dealing with a difficult past in the specific context of eastern Europe is written by professor Mitja Velikonja (2009). He made an analysis of the way post-socialist countries deal with the communist past. The transitional stage in which Albania is at the moment, with its difficult political and economic situation, is not unique to Albanians alone. The transition from Communism to democracy might have happened later for Albania than for former Yugoslavia, they underwent similar processes. And these processes do not run smoothly. Velikonja describes how the 'post-socialist transition', aside from positive changes such as social, political, economical and political pluralisation, *"opened a Pandora's box of unexpected troubles"* (Velikonja 2009, 537). He describes negative processes such as the demolition of the welfare state, 'turbo-capitalism', the rise of social injustices, re-patriarchalisation, re-traditionalisation, clericalisation and nationalist conflicts. *"Not one post-socialist country, not even the most successful, was spared such negative consequences, their malign effects varying only in intensity."* (Vilikonja 2009, 537). Velikonjas divides the relations of Eastern Europeans with their Communist past into four categories: anti-nostalgia, amnesia, historical revisionism and nostalgia.

With anti-nostalgia he means renunciation: the blacking out of socialist times. *"New ideologies such as nationalism, liberal democracy, the free market, and consumerism are created and developed on the basis of a complete condemnation of everything that came before. We hear angry words about the Communist Reich, decades of terror, culture of death, terrible years, bloodthirsty tyrants, red beast of Communism, and the like."* (Velikonja 2009, 537). In many former Communist Eastern Bloc countries, the heritage of Communism however is highlighting the negative and traumatic character through terms as 'difficult', 'dissonant' and 'unwanted' (Iacono and Këlliçi 2015). Iacono and Këlliçi (2015) describe that in the process of shaping memories, these theories are centred around the experience of trauma.

Amnesia ignores everything that happened before the fall of Communism, as if it never

happened. "*Here arise the familiar metaphors of the spring of nations, democratic awakening, or the new start.*" (Velikonja 2009, 537).

Historical revisionism fully reinterprets the socialist past (Velikonja 2009), by blaming it fully on a particular phenomenon or individual, or by framing it in a particular narrative. "*—for example, as something merely imposed by the Soviets, or by a fistful of local Bolsheviks, terrorizing the majority, and so on.*" (Velikonja 2009, 537).

Nostalgia is uncritical and glorifies the past, despite reality. This links to what Lowenthal (1985) wrote about embracing the past. Nostalgia is a recurrent theme in the study of post-socialist memory. In fact, it can be seen for every severe period of repression. Iacono and Këlliçi (2015) write that in Albania, historians and cultural experts recognise a sentiment of nostalgia for certain aspects of life during the regime. Although anti-nostalgia and nostalgia sound contradictory, their coexistence is rather common (Iacono and Këlliçi 2015). They argue that because Communism still 'haunts' parts of Eastern Europe, including Albania, studies on unwanted heritage and post-Communist nostalgia have run parallel (Iacono and Këlliçi 2015, 102). After studying Hoxha's Piramida in Tirana, they conclude that "*historical buildings [...] collect fragments of personal histories that cannot be pigeonholed into an all-encompassing category of traumatic memory.*" (Iacono and Këlliçi 2015, 112). There can also be fond memories.

2.2.2 Changing the past

"*We change what has come down to us*" (Lowenthal 1985, xix). People change the narrative of the past and their memories, which effects society and ourselves. This is because "o*ur recollections and our surroundings make us aware of the past, and [...] we respond to such knowledge*". (Lowenthal 1985, xix). Lowenthal (1985) describes the ways in which we become informed about the past. "*The past itself is gone – all that survives are its material residues and the accounts of those who experienced it*" (Lowenthal 1985, xxii). This means, according to his theory, that there is no absolute evidence about how the past occurred. What survives lives in books and in our heads, which is already a selection that will be altered over time (Lowenthal 1985). Perhaps it is already altered. "*There can be no certainty that the past ever existed, let alone in the form we now conceive it, but sanity and security require us to believe that it did.*" (Lowenthal 1985, xxii). He describes that memory shapes personal identity, the links between personal and communal memory, that different types of memory allow us access to the past, that there is a power of forgetting, and that time changes existing memories, and invents new ones (Lowenthal 1985).

Memories are changed when they are revised (Lowenthal 1985). Lowenthal (1985, 206) explains that the past is not a fixed given, but that "*recollections are malleable and flexible; what seems to have happened undergoes continual change.*" When certain memories are raised in light of particular events, they are reinterpreted in the context of these events and present need (Lowenthal 1985). "*We remould the past for reasons that mirror the benefits*" (Lowenthal 1985, xxiii). This remoulding, 'the malleable past', is necessary. "*Without a past that is malleable as well as generously preserved, the present will lack models to inspire it and the future be deprived of a lifeline to its past.* (Lowenthal 1985, 411). However, according to Mondale (1994), it is also always problematic. It is therefore crucial to be self-critical and self-reflective when decisions have to be made about what should be remembered, and what can be forgotten. She describes that specific pasts to preserve have to be selected: "*when we conserve a past, we make history. We make history because we must, to understand ourselves and our present circumstances.*" (Mondale 1994, 15). However, this is (or

should be) built from constant negotiations with all stakeholders (Mondale 1994). If not, it is imaginable that groups of people feel ignored, or that decisions are based on an incomplete set of information. She warns about this also: "O*ur pasts have consequences: if we celebrate a meretricious* (deceptive) *past, we cheapen ourselves." (*Mondale 1994, 15). Barbara Bender (1992) writes something similar: freezing the past and embracing nostalgia neutralises the politics that are involved with the creation of that past.

Lowenthal distinguishes history from heritage: history studies growing pasts and heritage clarifies this past and links it with contemporary purposes (Lowenthal 1998). History reaches for the 'truth' of what happened in the past and heritage is what the past means to a society today. It is often narrated for a beneficial purpose. He sees a large gap between the two schools of thought. Some of his critics argue that they have a common cause, but Lowenthal (1998) doubts this possibility in a world of mass-entertainment, and the fact that most of the history that is learned in schoolbooks is taken from heritage sources. "I*n most school texts, history remains one-dimensional even where controversy is rampant."* (Lowenthal 1998, 117). Lowenthal (1998) does stress that "*the two enterprises are inextricably conjoined"* (Lowenthal 1998, xi)*,* because history cannot be studied without passion or personal interest, and heritage cannot disregard history because it must be believable. However, he says, it is important to notice that their intents differ. He argues that history constantly inspects and reflects on the past, while adapting when truths get outdated. However, heritage shapes the past, which makes it inflexible and steers it in such a way that it benefits society and identity of a particular individual or people. It is not reflective: "*heritage is held to fossilize, to preclude ambivalence, to tolerate no doubts"* (Lowenthal 1998, 88). "*Historical faith is instilled in school [...], textbooks are not to be questioned.* (Lowenthal 1998, 116). Lowenthal (1998) stresses the gap and argues that heritage shapes history into a certain truth that does not always co-align with the complex processes that in reality happened. And this happens everywhere in many different ways.

Heritage and history may differ in purpose, both are equally vital. A balance must be existent in which heritage represents history and narrates the different opinions on the past. "*We need to understand what impulses drive us [...] to ravage the past in the very act of revering it and to censure others for faults equally our own. Yet we should also realize that in thus corrupting we also enhance the spoils of history, breathing new life into them for ourselves and our inheritors by fabricating heritage anew."* (Lowenthal 1998, xvi).

2.3 The tool of heritage in the malleable past

Heritage plays an important role in the malleable past, because it impacts countless realms of contemporary life (Lowenthal 1998). "*The spoils of history lie all around us"* (Lowenthal 1998, xvi). Heritage is reflected in 'patriotic credos', 'self-serving anachronisms', the 'certitudes of school history', the 'delusory dreams of Disney' and in the 'squabbles of rival claimants to relics and emblems' (Lowenthal 1998, xvi). Heritage determines what is worth preserving and what can be destroyed or thrown away, and thus what narratives are worth telling, and which are not. Heritage has the power to both celebrate victory and consecrate loss (1998). However, *"the legacies of victors are protean, [...]the legacies that peoples most admire often alter over time."* (Lowenthal 1998, 68).

In a way, heritage explains how we feel and validates how we act (Lowenthal 1998). Lowenthal (1998, xvi) calls it "*a menacing minefield as well as a nourishing marvel".* It plays a role in national identity, in our relationships with our ancestors, offspring and neighbours and it makes us feel rooted (Lowenthal 1998). However, it also plays a role in national conflict, in racism, in genetic determinism, global theft and illicit trade (Lowenthal 1998). It can be oppressive, defeatist and decadent (Lowenthal 1998). It guides museum and commemorative policy and decisions on repatriation. It creates the story about the past, which is taught to youth and outsiders.

Lowenthal (1998) abundantly speaks of the battle between history and heritage, that many critics argue that heritage would be biased and influenced and that history is more 'true'. Yet, the positive power of heritage is hardly described. When dealt with in a noble manner, heritage can be powerful and even stimulate processing a traumatic memory within a country. Re-signification of material heritage, for example, can assist in confronting the past (Eaton and Roshi 2011). However, indeed, when abused, it can be dangerous. Lowenthal (1998) explains that when the benefits of the past are hyped, and its dangers are exaggerated, "*heritage by its very nature excites partisan extremes"* (Lowenthal 1998, xiv). A recourse to patrimony or heritage can fill people's needs, but glamorizes narrow nationalism (Lowenthal 1998). "*Vainglory vindicates victors and solaces the vanquished, justifying jingoism* (chauvinism) *and inflaming partisan zeal."* (Lowenthal 1998, xiv). This means that if abused by people in power, heritage can reaffirm the position of the winners and consolidate those who lost, while justifying chauvinism and the vain of extreme ideas.

Another phenomenon that Lowenthal (1998, 78) describes is that "*history is still mostly written by the winners. But heritage increasingly belongs to the losers. Even victors now aspire to a legacy of defeat."* The memory of traumatic events keeps the past in the present. He explains that defeat is just as much a heritage as victory, because "*misery forges lasting bonds"* (Lowenthal 1998, 74). It also can evoke sympathy, which can again be beneficial and problematic, when abused: "*Atrocities are invoked as heritage not only to forge internal unity but to enlist external sympathy"* (Lowenthal 1998, 75).

Lowenthal also explains the relation between individual and collective legacies. "*At first yours or mine, heritage soon becomes inherently collective. We share what we inherit among colleagues and communities, nations and faiths. [….] We are shaped by a congeries of disparate but overlapping legacies; allegiance compels painful choices. Personal bequests conflict with collective patrimonies also at odds. […] Each attachment, whether fixed at birth or freely chosen, presumes our fealty. Choices among personal and collective legacies vary with culture and stage of life."* (Lowenthal 1998, 55). Collective roots and private interests or personal legacies can both struggle in comparison to each other (Lowenthal 1998). Lowenthal gives the example of rebel youth and rugged individuals in the United States, who prioritise being self-made over tradition, society of family. On the other hand, personal legacies and collective heritage can also go hand in hand, such as in the elite in Britain (Lowenthal 1998). The dominance of either collective or private heritage can bring benefits and drawbacks. A danger can emerge when collective narratives cancel out individual perspectives, but also when there is no communality and shared memories of a space.

When a heritage is collective, it is often managed by a higher class: "*Populism notwithstanding, heritage normally goes with privilege: elites usually own it, control access to it, and ordain its public image. That heritage still buttresses elite perquisites strikes some as monstrous."* (Lowenthal 1998, 90).

Material cultural heritage

In this thesis Lowenthal's theory on heritage as a broad concept is focused specifically on material heritage. Iacono (2018) explains that with fast revolutionary changes, the past and its heritage are very important in laying a foundation for new value systems, and new social relationships. This also applies to material heritage. After all, heritage is a broad concept that encompasses many different aspects of memory and legacy, tangible and intangible. Material cultural heritage can exist of objects, buildings and landscapes. This type of heritage can be powerful because it is the only visual reminder of the past. "*The spoils of history lie all around us*" (Lowenthal 1998, xvi), in a literal way. Interactions with this visual heritage can be a 'readable' reflection about how people feel about that period of time, and what it reminds them of. Destruction, re-signification (Eaton and Roshi 2014) or abandonment can thus be very expressive acts. Furthermore, it can serve as a tool in explaining what happened, and to make sure it is remembered. As mentioned above, "o*ur recollections and our surroundings make us aware of the past, and [...] we respond to such knowledge*". (Lowenthal 1985, xix). Lowenthal (1985) says that the past only survives in books and in our heads, but it also survives in buildings and objects. They can be useful in teaching foreigners or younger generations that did not experienced this time what happened and what should be remembered. About this, Lowenthal (1985, 269-271) writes that *"Awareness of the tangible past is shaped as well as sharpened by signs telling where it is and what it was. Markers celebrating this relic or forbidding access to that one profoundly influence what we make of them. Even the least conspicuous sign on the most dramatic site affects how history is experienced. [...] Mere recognition thus transforms the visible past. Identifying and classifying may tell us much about relics but often occludes our view of them, sacrificing communion with the past to facts about it."* He also writes that "*showing off the past is the common result of identifying it. Labelling a relic affirms its historical significance; displaying it enhances its appeal*" (Lowenthal 1985, 271). He thus states that the way material heritage is presented or conserved, influences the way history is perceived.

Material heritage can become contested when it belongs to a traumatic period of time and often when there is a variety of stakeholders. It has the power to misrepresent an era, or highlight only certain elements, on purpose or by accident. It can also steer the narrative that is being told in the way the building or object is restored or maintained in favour of particular groups. Throughout history, all over the world, this has been a recurring form of abuse. It is thus certainly contributing to the malleable past.

2.4 Studying the malleable past of Albania

The theory described above indicates the complexity in which the past can be reflected on and dealt with. The past is malleable: what happened factually can be and is reinterpreted over time. (Material) heritage can play an important role in this. These issues are studied in the case study of Albania, where the Communist history is recent and has not been processed yet. It is therefore an interesting country to study these phenomena. Eaton and Roshi (2014) speak of various Communist sites in Albania that Nora (1989) would consider as 'Lieux de mémoire', political prisons (such as Spaç), central Shkodra, the castle of Gjirokastër, the Communist pyramid in Tirana, the city plans of socialist cities, *"and defensive works, such as the hundreds of thousands of mushroom pillboxes or nuclear bunkers [...]."* (Eaton and Roshi 2014, 315). Many of these sites have survived, sometimes as ruins. However, they still have a powerful significance and a way to address them has not been

decided yet. This thesis aims to understand how the communist past in Albania is malleable and/or fossilized, and in which direction it is being shaped, by studying contemporary processes in the creation of narratives about this history. This is done by looking at individual memories, social or political programmes, by private or state museums and the management of Communist sites, particularly bunkers. Is there a power of forgetting (Lowenthal 1985)? Are the results from (mis)management problematic, as described by Mondale (1994)? Does re-signification assist in confronting the past? Who benefits from the remoulding of the past? Is history written by the winners or the losers?

The first empirical chapter concerns both remembering the past and changing the past. It will be studied if the past 'enriches or impoverishes' Albanians, and whether this is embraced or shunned (Lowenthal 1985). It is also studied whether the heritage of Communism is individual or collective, and whether individual and collective legacies struggle in comparison to each other. The theory of Velikonja on feelings towards this past (anti-nostalgia, amnesia, historical revisionism and nostalgia) will be studied in the findings from the interviews in this thesis. That different stages in life (Mondale 1994) have influence on the interpretation of heritage, is also something that will be studied. Finally, it will be researched how the past is transferred and taught to future generations, and how the past is accessed. These three elements all influence the malleable past in Albania.

The second chapter focuses on the efforts to address the past by looking at heritage. As Lowenthal (1998) describes, heritage directs the past for contemporary purposes. Whether this steering takes place, and in what way, will become more clear though studying the phenomena of how heritage is treated now in Tirana. It is studies whether heritage is managed while being 'self-critical' and 'self-reflective' in the creating of collective decisions about remembering and forgetting (Mondale 1994). Is a division between heritage and history visible? The perspectives that are conserved and ignored will come to light in this chapter.

The third chapter uses the same theory as the second chapter, but will focus specifically on bunkers. Bunkers are the most abundant Communist material heritage in the Albanian landscape. Is there a difference between the treatment of Communist heritage in general, and of bunkers? Does this material heritage reflect the way people are remembering Communism?

3. Methodology

This thesis is based on a literature study and a qualitative fieldwork period of two months in Tirana and its surroundings. The choice for this approach was made in line with the aim of the research: to look at bunkers and other Communist heritage in order to describe the complex variety of perspectives, narratives and processes around the communist past in Albania. Ethnographic fieldwork methods enabled me to understand complex processes and perspectives. The combination of informal, semi-structured and unstructured interviews, observations and a literature study assured method triangulation: by using two or more study methods, the design of the research is strengthened and the ability to interpret findings increased (Thurmond 2001). The results of the ethnographic fieldwork are based on 18 unstructured/semi-structured interviews and 22 informal interviews. Observations were held throughout the entire research period, which included many site visits of bunkers and museums.

3.1 Respondents

The respondents for this research were sampled through two methods: convenience sampling and snowball sampling. Before leaving for fieldwork, it was difficult to find an entrance into the Albanian society. Therefore, I seized the opportunities that were available. The snowballing method proved very useful here, and this allowed the planning of seven interviews in the first two weeks of arrival in Tirana. These were also achieved through e-mails to museums and organisations, sent in advance to the fieldwork. Once in Albania, respondents became more easy to find. Because I was not able to speak Albanian, almost all interviews were held in English. Two were held in Albanian with a translator, and in a few informal conversations Italian was spoken, since this is a language that many Albanians speak to a certain level because of the vicinity of Italy, and the influence it has on Albania's popular culture. One interview was surprisingly held in Dutch. Many respondents lived abroad during their youth or during their studies. For a few respondents, this was the Netherlands.

Almost everyone was willing to cooperate when asked. The advantage of this research topic was that it concerns everyone, and therefore everyone was interesting to speak with on this topic. On the other hand, this was also a difficulty: sometimes decisions had to be made who to speak with and who not to speak with. In one moment of the research, respondents became too many to process.

It was in the interest of the study to sample a large variety of people, with different backgrounds, ages and perspectives (as far as possible considering the language barrier). A distinction could also be made between 'normal interviews and 'expert interviews'. The normal interviews were held with two journalists, one television presenter, a retired English teacher, an unemployed woman, a retired military man and seven people working different tourism branches. The informal interviews also fall under this category. The expert interviews were held with an employee from 'cultural heritage without borders', two university professors (archaeology and architecture), a museum director, a zoologist and a heritage specialist who also was a former prisoner during Communism.

It is particularly important to notice the relevance of age in this research. Since the Communist regime fell in 1991, everyone under the age of 28 has not lived during the Communist

regime. Also, people in their 40's had different memories than someone in their 60's since childhood memories differed greatly from adult memories. The age categories of respondents were: 20-30 (3), 30-40 (4), 40-50 (6), 50-60 (1), 60-70 (2) and 70-80 (2). Some of the ages are an estimation. Unfortunately, no respondents from under 20 years old were interviewed, because the relevance of this was realised too late during the fieldwork period. The list of all interviewees with more detail can be found in appendix 1.

3.2 Methods
Site visits and observation

Overall, observations enabled me to become aware of certain processes or phenomena that were not spoken of during interviews. This was also the case to become aware about contemporary social problems. An example were the mentalities towards the many protests in Tirana. Furthermore, and important element of this study was the study of material aspects. Therefore many site visits were made. Observations were held in locations such as museums, statues, monuments and bunkers. The findings were all written down soon after or during observations, and also became field notes. Photography was a very important tool in this fieldwork method. Site visits of museums, statues and monuments were held in Tirana and Gjirokastër, a small city in the south of the country which is the birth town of Enver Hoxha. Site visits of bunkers were held mainly in the environment of Tirana.

In museums, it was observed what story is being told about Communism. Hereby attention was paid to the way objects were displayed, whether information was given and if so, what it said and in which languages, and what kind of atmosphere was created. At the national history museum, for example, the only exhibition on Communism focused on crimes and terror. It was one of the few rooms where photography was not allowed, and the dark sides of the period were portrayed strongly. At statues and monuments, it was observed whether and how people interacted with them, looked at them or spoke of them. For bunkers the same was done, with the addition of a study of their contemporary use. It was closely studied what the bunkers seemed to be used for, by registering traces of human presence. This could be garbage, graffiti, stored materials, etcetera.

Since the fall of the regime the number of bunkers in Albania is decreasing fast. Many have disappeared or are covered up. However, we still find them in abundant numbers in formerly strategic locations, now seemingly random in people's everyday landscape. A selection of the bunkers that were observed during the fieldwork period are indicated on figure 1. Included were the bunkers in the center of Tirana: at first sight only Bunk'art 1, Bunk'art 2 and the memorial park were noted, but later also better hidden bunkers were noted. These included a small mushroom bunker in the courtyard of the Rogner hotel, one in the pavement of a main street, one in a river bedding and multiple small ones in the cemetery of Sharres, in the southwest of Tirana. There was also a tunnel in the garden of the House of Leaves[2] and many small mushroom bunkers on Mount Dajti, a hill close to the city centre. Villages surrounding Tirana have private properties that use bunkers for farming purposes. At Kepi i Rodonit, a small peninsula north of Durres, popular amongst Albanians for its natural beauty, a row of large tunnel bunkers look out over the sea, and many small ones are seen along the hiking trail and on the beach. On 'bunker beach', two bunker tunnels are used as

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[2] The museum of Secret Surveillance in the center of Tirana.

restaurants and for storage. When leaving Tirana to the harbour city of Durres, many small bunkers lay alongside the road in private properties and between apartment buildings. In the harbour of Durres many bunkers can be seen, both on land and in the water. All were mushroom bunkers (large and small), mostly lying abandoned in the landscape as well.

Figure 1: map with indicated site visits of bunkers (a selection)
(Source: application maps.me, downloaded map of Albania, own added pins)

Literature study

The fieldwork period was accompanied by desk research, which happened before and after the ethnographic study. Prior research enabled me to be more prepared in the field and in advance be aware of existing issues and topics. A literature study after the fieldwork was done to clarify observed phenomena and place it into a theoretical framework. The literature included mainly primary and secondary sources, but also a few news articles and a social media study.

Unstructured and semi-structured interviewing

Both unstructured and semi-structured interviews were held during the fieldwork period. In particular meetings, it was difficult to tell the two apart. An interview could go in both directions according to the nature or tendency of the interviewee. Therefore, they are described together in this section.

Unstructured interviewing allowed me to have free conversations with the respondents, but with a clear plan kept in mind (Bernard 2011). I had little control over people's responses so that they had the freedom to open up and express themselves in their own way and in their own pace

(Bernard 2011). This method was mainly used with respondents that could be met more than once. Unstructured interviewing gave a lot of insight into the perspective of the respondent and clearly showed what he or she was passionate or felt strongly about. These interviews were often longer than the semi-structured interviews.

For most of the respondents that could only be met once, and with a limited amount of time, I chose a semi-structured interviewing method. This allows the respondents to take the lead, but it was based on an interview guide: "*a written list of questions and topics that need to be covered in a particular order*" (Bernard 2011, 158). This was necessary because one can make sure not to forget to address certain important topics thought of ahead. For each respondent the list of questions was adapted. An example of this interview guide can be found in appendix 1.

Often it was not clear beforehand how much time the respondent would have, and what the respondent expected from the interview. In prior contact, I always asked for a 'meeting', 'conversation' or 'having a coffee', instead of asking for an 'interview'. This created a more informal atmosphere which usually led to people opening up more and feeling comfortable. This also fitted best with the style of interviewing. The interviews were always prepared with an interview guide, yet throughout the interview I would decide whether to use it or not. Depending on how easily the respondent started talking, and in which directions this went, I decided to take an unstructured or semi-structured approach. This flexibility was fruitful because often, when the respondents spoke freely for a while without interrupting them with questions, they would become more personal after a while. Most of the interviews lasted one to one and a half hour.

The majority of the 18 interviews were planned a few days in advance, but some were spontaneous by seizing opportunities on particular moments. In most cases, the interviews were recorded, except for a handful in which I sensed it would not improve the quality of the interview, or when it would make the respondent uncomfortable.

Interviewing techniques

During some interviews, certain techniques were used to put the respondent at ease, or to receive more information on a particular topic. For example, upon meeting a respondent, I would always start with a brief, friendly conversation about something positive before getting on-topic. Attention was paid to giving respondents the space to talk freely, but also to interrupt them when the conversation was going in an unrelated direction for too long. Usually, I lead the conversation only a little to define the content: "…*get people on to a topic of interest and get out of the way. Let the informant provide information that he or she thinks is important*" (Bernard 2011, 160). Another useful tool was 'probing': "*[the stimulating of] a respondent to produce more information, without injecting yourself so much into the interaction that you only get a reflection of yourself in the data*" (Bernard 2011, 161). Many different types of probing exist (Bernard 2011), a few of which proved useful during this fieldwork. The first was the silent probe, in which I quietly waited for a respondent to continue talking. Sometimes she would nod, say 'hmhm' or write something down to give him or her the time to think. Not everyone talked as easily or fast as others. Some respondents opened up fast and others slow or not at all. This was a very important probe to keep this in mind: to give people time. An affirmative sound was also a form of probing: nodding along sometimes helped the respondent to feel more motivated to continue (Bernard 2011). It was hereby important to stay

engaged and look at the informants while doing so. Another form of probing that was used was 'echoing': paraphrasing or repeating what someone said and asking to continue by asking an open question such as 'really?', 'then what happened?', or 'how do you feel about that?'. These question ensured the respondent that what they said w as interesting and gave more insight in what the respondent was truly thinking or feeling about a subject. Then there was the 'long question probe' to break the ice. This consisted of asking a long broad question, to receive a longer and broader answer. Then, later in the interview one can become more specific. This is also called a '*grand tour question*' (Spradley 1979 in Bernard 2011, 163). This was sometimes used as an 'opening' of an interview, to let the respondent choose the direction in which to talk, according to his or her frame of reference. This sometimes gave valuable insights.

Informal interviewing

Informal interviewing was another important ethnographic fieldwork method that was frequently used during the research. Some of them were already held before leaving for fieldwork, by talking to people that have travelled to or lived in Albania. They provided prior insight into the country. They also provided the start of the snowballing sampling method, since I could use a part of their network to start finding respondents in Albania. During the fieldwork itself it also proved to be very practical on spontaneous encounters with people. Although these informal conversations lack structure or control, they were useful for me to settle in, to get a feel about certain topics and to *"[...] uncover new topics of interest that might have been overlooked"* (Bernard 2011, 156). I followed the conversations closely and wrote down the findings afterwards, as soon as possible. These became field notes. Altogether, 22 informal interviews were held, most of which lasted 15-30 minutes. There were some exceptions that lasted much longer, one to three hours. Informal interviews often happened by chance.

3.3 Data analysis

Most of the interviews were recorded. They have all been transcribed, which was largely done in Tirana and partly in Wageningen. Subsequently, the findings were analysed by coding the findings into categories that were in accordance with created categories and chapters/sections of the thesis. This enabled the large amount of information to be already divided over the right sections. Having this information together, the findings were subtracted, filtered and written down. The main codes that were used are indicated in table 1 on the next page.

Background	Communism	Bunkers practically	Bunkers in a larger picture
Politics • Nobody is happy • Everyone leaves • Communism is not over: the same people in parliament • Balkan spring	**Visions on Communism** • The youth does not care • Differences in generations • It has not yet been processed • It hasn't changed • Optimism • It was a bad time. And it still is. • There is no trust. • Painful subject • We are just starting the conversations. • People don't talk about it.	**Communist bunkers** • History of bunkers • Memory of bunkers • Locations of bunkers • How many bunkers • Types of bunkers • How common are bunkers?	**Bunkers are symbolic** **(Dark) tourism** **Commercialisation** **Heritage is not part of the political agenda, nor of the interest of youth** **Changing the layout of the city, but nothing real**
Communist heritage • In Tirana • Outside Tirana	**Types of remeniscing** • Nostalgia • Anti-nostalgia • Amnesia • Historical revisionism • The youth does not understand Communism	**What is happening to them** • Abandonment • Reuse • Projects • Destruction	**Museums** • Bunk'art 1 • Bunk'art 2 • Cold war tunnel in Gjirokastër
Albanian identity • Poverty • Religion		**What is thought of them** • Not an item • There are too many • Painful association • Waste of money • Should be kept: history and identity • Useful for contemporary purposes • Good for tourism (tourist views on bunkers) • Bunkers are identity	**Destruction** • For (urban) development • For iron
History: • 1997 • Memories from Communism • Historical explanations		**They should be kept** • It is our identity • They are useful • Bunkers and biodiversity • Bunkers for tourism	
		Ownership issues	

Table 1: the main codes used to analyse the fieldwork data.

3.4 Ethical considerations

While interviewing respondents, a few ethical considerations were taken into account. For any researcher, it is important to be reflexive during fieldwork. This was particularly important during this research, since the topic addressed an emotional post-conflict situation that I was not personally familiar with. Reflexivity results in more objective findings and reduces the risk of harming interviewees. This is in line with the idea of 'Do no harm/do some good' by Goodhand (2000). Any potential for physical or emotional harm to participants had to be avoided, during the fieldwork as well as during the writing of the thesis, and after submission and presentation. It was always asked whether the meeting could be recorded. At the end of each interview, I asked whether the name of the respondent could be used, for informed consent. This was usually the case, except for three respondents who wanted to see the text before approving. This has been respected. Furthermore, upon interviewing anyone, the reason for the study was always explained and that it was a master thesis. It was always made sure that the respondents were comfortable, and that they could withdraw from the research whenever they wanted. This was never necessary, but when a respondent became uncomfortable about a topic I made sure not to ask further. This was both to protect the interviewees, and to not obstruct future research. However, emotions themselves did not have to obstruct the research: they were sometimes important empirical data (Diphoorn 2012). Both the emotions of the informant and the researcher can provide a deeper understanding of the research setting (Diphoorn 2012). This was the case in multiple interviews, when respondents became fierce about particular topics of injustice. It was hereby easy to be drawn into these emotions. However, it was always attempted not to fully lose sight of the objectiveness of the research when sharing the emotions of participants. When this was not achieved during the research, it was reflected upon afterwards to not steer the research and data collection too much into that emotion.

Furthermore, I always made clear to be interested in the opinions and observations of the interviewee. It was sometimes noted by respondents that they did not know enough of the subject to help me along. In these cases, they were reassured, and explained why their opinions were truly interesting and valuable to the research, and that I was trying to learn from them (Bernard 2011). At the end of each interview I would always thank the respondent for his or her time. Often, I was thanked in return for the interest.

Finally, Giddens (1982) wrote about the phenomenon of 'double hermeneutics', which means that the data collected by a researcher is the researcher's interpretation of the participants' interpretation. When a translator is used, there is even a third interpretation. Therefore, the formulation of information never comes directly from the source. For this reason, I always tried to record an interview when possible, to stay as close to the respondent's interpretation as possible. However, data is never fully objective (Giddens 1982). Also, as a researcher, it is unavoidable to be influenced by one's own background and bias. One can only be as objective as one is aware of this bias. Coming from a different country, with values that are not 1:1 applicable to Albania, it was impossible to not be surprised or moved by certain statements or events. However, these personal feelings were always written down in field notes to be aware of the way one was influenced by the research setting.

3.5 Limitations and strengths
Limitations

The most important limitation of this research was language. In preparation of the fieldwork I practiced Albanian in an online course and at the start of the fieldwork I practiced it on a daily basis. This enabled me to have a very basic understanding of certain phrases and words. However, it was not possible to engage in a more elaborate conversation with a non-English/Italian speaker. This has influenced the type of respondents that participated in the research. All interviews were held in English, except for two which were held in Albanian with two different translators. Italian was helpful in certain situations also. One interview was held in Dutch.

A second limitation was access. For the majority of the time I did not have access to a car, and was limited to the public transport, which existed of buses and mini-buses. This sufficed, but disabled the access to certain interesting remote areas or the ability to stop in certain places where bunkers were seen. I always photographed bunkers along the road and indicated them on the app maps.me, so that later I could retrace the location if necessary. The winter season of the fieldwork was a further disadvantage, since many English-speaking locals working in tourism, for example, were not present in smaller towns during this time of year and locals were often surprised to see a foreigner. This did give the advantage that I was almost always kindly received. Usually people tried to communicate anyway with gestures.

Thirdly, a clear limitation was the time span. As with any research, there is a maximum of time available to do fieldwork and write the thesis. In two months I aimed to study, observe and become aware of as much information as possible, but it is likely that I also missed a lot. A lack of time also influenced the data collection. I transcribed and processed interviews as soon as possible, many already in Tirana. However, if I could have reflected on more interviews already during the fieldwork, I could have asked more specific questions to certain respondents. Some questions only proved to be valuable after starting analysing the data.

As to the research methods, in hindsight I would have done some elements differently next time. When starting the research, I focused on finding respondents with knowledge on the topic. It was only after a few weeks that I started to pay more attention to diversifying the type of respondents, because I realised that only people above the age of approximately 35 remembered the Communist era well (since it fell 28 years ago). Therefore, I started to look for respondents of different age groups, from middle-aged to senior. Through the network that I built up in the hostel, I also found a few respondents in their 20's. After returning to the Netherlands however, and while analysing the data, it became clear to me that it would have been an interesting addition to the research to also add the perspective of a child or a teenager, especially for the first sub-question. This was a lesson learnt.

Another lesson learnt was that next time, it might be better to consequently ask participants a few questions at the start of any interview, including: 'Where are you from?' 'How old are you?' 'Where did you grow up?' 'How long have you lived in Tirana?' From many respondents, this information became clear anyway, but not of all. In hindsight, this information proved to be more important than was initially thought. As a solution, the missing age of some respondents was estimated.

Strengths

A strength was the choice of accommodation type during the fieldwork period. The majority of the stay was at the Tirana Backpackers Hostel. This hostel provided many different contacts and entrances. Albanians were employed here and had friends coming over, there were long-term volunteers and many passing travellers, even in winter. This created a solid base to start a network and find respondents. By exchanging information with many different people, I was able to gain more understanding about Albanian society by comparing the perspectives of different Albanians, and also to compare it to a few perspectives from abroad.

Another strength was creative thinking and seizing opportunities. There were multiple cases where a respondent was found unexpectedly, and questions had to be formed on the spot. Fast and creative thinking was helpful in these moments. Once an interview was denied, at Bunk'art, because they were *" getting ready for the new season which we will be opening in April and we don't have a person who can meet up"* (e-mail from Bunk'art). I adapted and asked a range of questions through e-mail instead. Social media such as Facebook pages and Instagram was also included which sometimes gave additional insights. Not all opportunities could be prepared for however and it was therefore important to be flexible and to listen carefully. An example of this was during an interview, when a respondent told me about a conference (Memorial Days 2019) that was held on that very moment. I changed my plans and made sure to gain access to that conference.

As explained, access was sometimes problematic since many bunkers lie on remote locations that are not easy to reach by bus. To solve this, I kept up a list of locations that were valuable to visit throughout the fieldwork period. In the last weekend, I had the possibility to hire a car and travel together with a companion, in which I visited and observed all these locations strategically.

4. Background: Albania, a country in transition

This thesis aims to understand the difficult relationship that Albanians have with their Communist past, and the role that bunkers and other contested heritage play in this. This will be explained in the next three empirical chapters. However, it is crucial to first provide a background on three levels. The first is an introduction to the country, to understand its location in Europe and its geographical position. The second is a historical oversight of the Communist period and its collapse. History is an essential part of this thesis, and current processes of memory cannot be studied without an explanation of what has occurred. The bunkerisation programme is also introduced here. Thirdly, a sketch is made of contemporary issues in Tirana. Many respondents related Communism to issues in their contemporary life, wherefore it is valuable to explain certain processes that are currently occurring in Tirana, Albania's capital. Some reference is made to interview data in this chapter, to illustrate certain historical and contemporary explanations. In section 4.4, 'the contemporary situation of Albania', references are also made to highlight the dissatisfaction of people about contemporary issues within the country. During interviews, the conversation almost always ended up landing on these topics. This data is clearly distinguished from literary information in separated quotations.

4.1 Albania in a nutshell

The research area for this thesis was Tirana and its surroundings. As explained in the justification, Tirana lies in the middle of the vertically elongated country. It is the capital and counts over 400.000 inhabitants. This is almost one sixth of the country's population (which counts approximately 2.9 million people) (www.worldpopulationreview.com). Albania is a small country east of the Adriatic sea, neighbouring Montenegro, Kosovo, Macedonia and Greece, and Italy overseas (figure 2 and 3). It is a stretched country with an over 450 km long coastline. Geographically the country is varied with beaches and hills in the west along the Adriatic coast, and mountains and canyons in the east. Zooming out a little, Albania lies in the Balkan peninsula. Albania joined NATO in 2009, and formally applied for a membership of the European Union. Negotiations have not yet started.

During the Cold War, Europe was divided in two parts: the Communist east and the capitalist west. Most of the Balkan countries were included in former Yugoslavia[3]. Although it surrounded Albania like a hand, and Albania knew similar Communist oppression, it was never a part of Yugoslavia. It followed its own course in history. It therefore also has a unique language, which the population takes pride in. Multiple respondents told about the strong character of Albanians, that they were able to keep their language and character despite the change of occupying forces and religions. During the Communist regime religion was prohibited, but it returned during the 1990s. However, still today, patriotism trumps religion and ethnicity. One could see this as an inheritance form

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[3] Yugoslavia consisted of today's Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Serbia, Kosovo and North-Macedonia. It surrounded Albania like a hand, but Albania was never part of it.

Communism. Contemporary Albanians know a variety of religions: Islam, Bektashi Islam[4], Catholicism, the Albanian-orthodox church and more. Generally however, religion was not considered important by most respondents. For those who did call themselves religious, it was rather considered a culture or a family heritage than a practice. Before being religious, you are Albanian. Some respondents have referred to this as *Albanism,* or *Albanianism*.

Figure 2 (left): Map of Albania (Source: www.ezilon.com). Figure 3 (right): Location of Albania in Europe (Source: https://www.google.com/maps/place/)

4.2 The Communist history of Albania

4.2.1 Occupied, royalty, occupied, dictatorship

Albania knows a long history of occupation. It was dominated by Romans, Byzantines, Venetians, Normans and for roughly 430 years it belonged to the Ottoman empire. It is therefore unsurprising that Turkish traces are visible in Tirana's architecture, language and (food) culture. Albania was the last Balkan country to become independent from the Ottomans in 1912. In the next decade, different regions of the country fought guerrilla warfare against troops from Germany, Italy, Serbia, Greece, France and Yugoslavia. Albanians suffered from large scale poverty and havoc. In 1920, Tirana was chosen as the nation's capital. An important player in this decision was Ahmed Zogu, who first became minister, then president, and subsequently King Zog I of Albania in 1928.

King Zog I was a dictatorial leader and kept up his power position until 1939, when Mussolini

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[4] The Bektashi order is a liberal form of Islam. Albania (and Tirana in particular) houses the largest Bektashi community in the world.

invaded Albania to split the country up between Italy and Yugoslavia. Albania became a '*miniature version of the Italian Fascist state*" (Vickers 1999, 136, in Myhrberg 2011, 32)[5]. This is today still reflected in the capital's architecture: a straight boulevard south from Skanderbeg Square, and several iconic buildings in the centre of Tirana. The Italian troops were replaced by German troops in 1943, who kept the power for one year. Three years before, in 1941, intellectuals, students, youth and peasants came together in the popular Albanian Communist Party. It grew fast from a few hundred people to an army of 70.000 partisans. They wanted to fight both the Albanian nationalist organisations and the German occupation. This led to a civil war. The party founded a small government in 1944, with Enver Hoxha as its leader, who succeeded to unite the partisans (Lagerqvist 2015) and seized an opportunity in the country's history of foreign occupation: *"instead of rejecting this history, Hoxha embraced it, using it to argue for the importance of a strongly centralised, authoritarian government, a xenophobic foreign policy, and a powerful military."* (Galaty and Watkinson 2004).

4.2.2 The Communist regime
The Albanian Communist Party introduced the economic model, politics and ideology of the Soviet Union. At the end of 1944, industry, banking and transportation were all controlled by the state. When the Second World War ended new elections were held. All candidates were member of the Communist party. A land reform was implemented in 1945, in which land was redistributed amongst peasants all over Albania. In this period, Albania was the poorest country of Europe, with destroyed architecture and inaccessible roads, ports, bridges and mines. There simultaneously was a shortage of food and a fast-growing population. The UN and Yugoslavia started providing aid. In 1946, the People's Socialist Republic of Albania (PSRA) was founded. In addition to prime minister and minister of defence, Enver Hoxha declared himself foreign minister and commander-in-chief of the armed forces.

To the dissatisfaction of most Albanians, Yugoslavia wanted to unite with Albania. They broke relations in 1948 and Albania turned to the Soviet Union. They changed the name of the 'Albanian Communist Party' to the 'Party of Labour of Albania' (PLA). To address the severe poverty and underdevelopment, the economy was centralised, and aimed towards self-sufficiency through a (small-scale) heavy industry. This led to the building of the Lenin hydro power plant and the Stalin textile mills, and in the 1950s electrifying and industrialisation processes in the form of factories were installed. Albania became increasingly isolated, but electricity was brought to remote regions, agricultural development increased (with the intention to become self-sufficient), free education and healthcare was offered, and an equal status between men and women was implemented (Lagerqvist 2015). Over time, the entire country became more and more tightly controlled and everything, including landscapes, was turned to the purpose of the PLA (Eaton and Roshi 2014).

In the late 1950s, a few Eastern European States, the Soviet Union and China supported Albania economically, which gave the country its 'Golden Years' of economic growth, increased living conditions, better education, improvement of literacy and the founding of a university (Myhrberg

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[5] An interesting side note is that despite the occupation by fascist Italy and Nazi Germany, nearly 2000 Jews found refuge with Albanians, who treated them with their traditional custom of hospitality, called *besa*. A handful of respondents spoke of this. They were proud of this history.

2011). Stalin died in 1953. In 1961, the relations to the Soviet were broken when the new Soviet Party Secretary, Khrushchev, improved the relations whit Yugoslavia, to the dissatisfaction of the Albanians. Also, Khrushev disagreed on developing industry rather than agriculture. To secure the Albanian independence, and in line with always joining the most conservative wings of Communism (interview Eduard Kurtezi (70-80), retired English teacher and interpreter for BBC), Hoxha tightened its relations with China instead (Figure 4 and 5). This led to further economical problems, since China did not provide as much financial support as the Soviet Union had done. New industrial complexes were nevertheless built in the early 1960s.

Figure 4 and 5: propaganda posters of the partnership of China And Albania (1969) (source: https://chineseposters.net)

In 1967, Albania became a secular country. Under the Communist regime it was stated as the world's first atheist state. Religion was prohibited: people that were religious were imprisoned. It was especially hard for Catholics. Over 2000 religious buildings (churches, mosques and tekkes[6]) and Ottoman bazaars were transformed or demolished, only a few were preserved as cultural monuments. This influenced the layout of practically all city centres.   The socialist citizen was not to be interested in religion, since it was considered an 'opium of the people[7]', but in culture and entertainment (which was fully controlled by the PLA). Many cultural institutions were thus founded in the '60s and '70s. Communist propaganda in the shape of literature and art were stimulated, as were Albania's own movies. The PLA monitored the Albanian population to the extreme. There was no private property, everything belonged to the state. Hoxha's Communist way of ruling was more Stalinist than that of Stalin. *"Albania was the rough road of Communism"* (Interview translator (70-80) at newspaper). At the end of the '70s, Albania broke relations with their last ally, China, standing alone as the last Communist state in the world. Enver Hoxha feared attacks from Nato, the Soviet Union and elsewhere and started to increasingly isolate and fortify the country to protect it against foreign enemies and nuclear war. Many sources and respondents speak of his paranoia: spying, isolation and defence to keep Albania independent and self-reliant to any cost. The leaders secured their power by killing all their political opponents and the families of political adversaries were

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[6] A tekke is a religious building for the Bektashi order, a liberal form of islam of which the largest community lives in Albania.

[7] This is a well-known statement of Karl Marx: "*Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world and the soul of soulless conditions. It is the opium of the people.*" (Marx 1844 in O'Malley 1982, 131).

imprisoned and placed in work camps or prisons. The borders were shut and foreign travel was banned, closing off the country completely from the rest of Europe. In this state of isolation and self-reliance, the military and defence buildings played a key role. A 'bunkerisation' programme was therefore implemented in the 1970's (this is further explained in section 4.3). The PLA started this together with the organising of drills and military exercises to educate the military, and militarize the civilians (Eaton and Roshi 2014).

These massive investments in fortification, together with the breaking with China, led to an economic crisis with a severe shortage of food that peaked in the '80s. There was great poverty and food was rationed. Circumstances in the city were slightly better than in the countryside, where all the land was part of the cooperatives. Families had sheep, goats and a cow, but all products were collected in the cooperatives and were redistributed inefficiently. This made the economic crisis worst in remote villages. Foreign aid was not allowed. People were not free to move or work where they wanted: they were placed and could thus not change their situation.

There were further restrictions about free speech and a new law on propaganda. The Albanian population was extremely oppressed, and the idea of an ever-threatening war created nation-wide paranoia. Children were taught to spy on each other for doing their homework, spy on their parents (Myhrberg 2011) and brothers spied on brothers for better political positions (interview Resmije Allmeta (20-30), hostel receptionist). If someone listened to a foreign broadcast, wore jeans, had too long hair or only even complimented anything foreign, they would be severely punished (input from several respondents). (Life) imprisonment and the death sentence were used by the 'Sigurimi', a strict secret police that eliminated opponents of the government. During the Communist regime, 6000 people were killed, there was extensive use of torture, imprisonment and displacement (Iacono 2018).

Naturally, people have led many different lives under this regime. Some of the respondents also have good memories of their lives during Communism. Some of them were in their '40s, having happy childhood memories from that time.

4.2.3 The fall of Communism: the 1990s
Enver Hoxha died in 1985, and was replaced by Ramiz Alia, who was slightly more liberal but kept the regime in place for another six years. In a few months between 1990 and 1991, there was a revolution. The Communist regime was overthrown and Ramiz Alia was imprisoned. People were released from the political and ideological pressure. An important factor in the fall of the regime were unprecedented student protests. The students were supported by the population in Tirana, and in 1991 free elections were held as a result. After the elections however, a protest was held on the way the elections were organized. The police lost control and shot four men. In 1922, the democratic party took the power, lead by the new president Sali Berisha. It was a situation of crisis, with a severe economical collapse. Lagerqvist (2015) describes how in the last years of the dictatorial rule, efforts were made to keep up employment in the small industries. Factories were therefore hiring far more people than they needed. When the regime collapsed thousands of people lost their jobs in a short period of time. Albanian society was unstable and people were forced to move either to Tirana, or abroad (Lagerqvist 2015). State institutions had opened collaborations with foreign institutions since 1990, and travel abroad was made possible. This encouraged the first wave of mass emigration.

Albanians had no experience with the newly adopted market based economy. Many people

relied on a complex scheme of pyramid savings to finance upcoming businesses (Lagerqvist 2015). It was a chaotic period that collapsed in 1997: many Albanians lost their life savings or even their houses because of it. Again, civil unrest occurred, together with a second wave of mass emigration. It was a very unsafe period of time.

Simultaneously, during the 1990s the population rebelled against the Communist identity (Eaton and Roshi 2014). Since the state was portrayed negatively at the time, and citizens regarded it to be the owner of the Albanian heritage, this heritage lost its protection (Iacono 2018). As in the entire eastern bloc, Albania was 'de-communised' by destroying bunkers, defacing p ublic buildings and spaces from Communist symbols (Iacono 2018; Iacono and Këlliçi 2015). It was a first reaction: to destroy all the buildings from that period. The most iconic act was the pulling down of the large statue of Enver Hoxha in Gjirokastër in 1991[8]. Hundreds of roadside monuments, museums, military- and government buildings were destroyed, vandalized, raided and looted (Eaton and Roshi 2014). The economical collapse and the subsequent period of violent anarchy had made people angry (Eaton and Roshi 2014).

The entire arranging of cities was transformed: land was redistributed, building permits were easily given and illegal construction was scarcely restrained (Iacono 2018). The fall of the regime enabled the making of private claims on land, goods and built environment: the presence of the state was becoming smaller.

4.3 The bunkerisation programme of Enver Hoxha

The fear of an 'imagined war' that would make Albania lose independence caused Hoxha to spend twice as much money on a bunkerisation programme, as the French had done on the (equally unused) Maginot Line (Eaton and Roshi 2014). Tunnels and bunkers were built both for fighting and shelter, in case of a nuclear attack. He built underground shelters for administrative facilities, bunkers for submarines and airplanes, tunnels, barracks, magazines and gun emplacements (Eaton and Roshi 2014). Nothing however was so omnipresent and labour intensive as the hundreds of thousands large and small mushroom-shaped bunkers spread over the entire country. Different sources speak of different quantities, but estimates are made between 200.000 and 750.000 bunkers. The mushroom-shaped bunkers were prefabricated in factories and all had the same structure. In a large mushroom-shaped bunker in Ndroq, 16 km from Tirana in the direction of Durres, one could see the numbers on the different concrete elements. Their building and (pre)fabrication was fully organised. All these tunnels and bunkers created vast military networks. The shape of the spherical bunkers were meant to resist a nuclear attack. An attack on the country however never occurred and many Albanians consider the building of these bunkers to be an extremely poor investment: almost a quarter of the national budget went to the military, most of which was spend on bunkerisation. Simultaneously, a part of the population was starving.

The building process of bunkers influenced many facets of the everyday life of the Albanians. They occupied a portion of the population with construction work, they were used to defend the country

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[8] Enver Hoxha was born in Gjirokastër. In the centre of the city, a large statue of him once stood. Today, only the platform of where it was remains. See chapter 6.1.2.

and they were used to influence the minds of the population (Eaton and Roshi 2014). *"The military-industrial-ideological machine was intended to convince the populace that Albania was under constant threat of foreign invasion (as it had been for centuries prior) and to keep the people occupied, fearful, and constantly aware of the power of the state"* (Eaton and Roshi 2014, 313-314). The defence structures were thus more ideological than they were practical and functioned first and foremost to show the omnipresence of Hoxha's regime by placing buildings that represented state power in every corner one turned (Eaton and Roshi 2014). They were thus also propaganda. Finally, Enver Hoxha suffered from paranoia, which he transferred onto the Albanian population. Having been occupied by foreign forces for almost the entire history of Albania, Hoxha was determined to make Albania a self-sufficient country. Foreign invasions however, in his view, were constantly threatening to conquer it. He wanted to fight this with a frontal war, and thus invested significantly in a system of fortification.

When the regime fell, chaos followed, as explained. In 1997 this almost led to a civil war. In certain areas people's fears were fed by the fact that former military bases with tunnel bunkers were still filled with ammunition. Since its loss of power, the state had lost over the security of the military bases. This has brought the lives of many people at risk. Many (ammunition free) bunkers have been destroyed in the 1990's out of protest and many are being destroyed nowadays in the course of construction projects. In the region of Tirana, some searching to find them was therefore required. When one travels towards the south, they are more abundant than in the north alongside roads, in fields and along the coastline. Most of the tunnel- and mushroom shaped bunkers were placed in strategic locations, which means along the borders of Montenegro, Macedonia and Greece, near cities and along major roads and the coastline. However, also in the region of Tirana, when paying attention, despite their large scale destruction they can still be found in the most unexpected places.

4.4 The contemporary situation of Albania

Albania is a country with much potential, but has many problems, as explained in the problem statement. Approximately 13% of the population is unemployed (https://tradingeconomics.com) and there is 30% youth unemployment (http://hdr.undp.org). It was often seen that waiters and receptionists in Tirana have multiple university degrees and speak a variety of languages, but cannot find a better job. Students have to work full-time next to their classes in able to afford going to universities, some of which have no internet access or toilets. The majority of the Albanians suffer from poverty. Furthermore, there is large-scale corruption and low trust in politicians. The communist regime fell in 1991, but today the government includes a number of the same people. There cannot be spoken of a true democracy in Albania, only of democratic values. The government he government is largely focused on personal growth, wealth and there are many power plays. Within elections, votes are bought, within protests, demonstrators are paid to talk to the media in a party's favour. The population is tired of the 'superficial' democracy and its consequences and is leaving. A third wave of emigration is going on while writing this. People search for foreign jobs or marry another nationality and parents make sacrifices to send their children to be educated abroad.

During the entire fieldwork period, many protests were held in the centre of Tirana by the opposition. The capital is going through turbulent political times. There are three parties in

parliament, two of which have alternated over the last thirty years: the Socialist party (currently in power under leadership of Edi Rama) and the Democratic party. Protests of the opposition are very common in Tirana, but in December 2018, an unprecedented student protest was organised in which eight demands were made to the government. It was a big, peaceful protest, the entire country was following it. After these student protests, the opposition started protesting heavily. Smaller protests were held daily and large ones once every three weeks. On the 18th of February (2019), they left their seats in parliament and took it further in the streets in the form of demonstrations. They said that the government will not have one day of peace. This has never happened before: it went from political to physical. Often there are clashes and use of teargas by the police. Most respondents argued that the opposition is trying to take the power instead, and that it will not change the country in a real way, that the government will keep abusing public property and public money.

4.5 Concluding remarks

This chapter summarised the Communist history of Albania and briefly sketched the contemporary situation. This will be the starting point for this research. Iacono (2018) speaks of a post-revolution in the 1990s: a period of rapid change as a reaction on the revolution in the 1940s in which the country very quickly changed into an Communist state. "*Revolutions have critical effects on societies' ways of looking at their past and producing heritage*" (Iacono 2018, 1). What this looks like in Albania, and how they regard and shape their past (through heritage management) will be explained in the next three chapters.

5. Remembering the communist past

In the previous chapter, a chronological overview of the (Communist) history of Albania was given, together with a sketch of the contemporary situation for many Albanians. Now, it will be described how in light of this background, people reflect on this history. It answers sub question one: *What is the relationship of contemporary Albanians to their Communist past?* This will be explained in five sections: 'the national narrative on Communism', 'memories and opinions on the Communist regime', 'silencing the past in families and schools', 'historical disconnection of youth: a gap between generations' and 'silencing the past in the government'. In the next two chapters it will be studied how the relationship to the communist past is expressed in the treatment of its cultural heritage.

5.1 The national narrative on Communism

In 1882, Ernest Renan wrote that "*l'essence du'une nation est que tous les individus aient beaucoup de choses en commun, et aussi que tous aient oublié bien de choses*" (Renan 1882, 3). In 'Imagined Communities', Benedict Anderson (1991, 6) explains that "*all communities larger than primordial villages of face-to-face contact are imagined. Communities are to be distinguished, not by their falsity/genuineness, but by the style in which they are imagined*". With other words, nations naturally create narratives that forget and include particular elements of history. The result is an imagined community, with an imagined narrative of their past. This is what Lowenthal (1985) would consider the malleable past: it is created by choosing particular narratives and forget others. The heritage of the past has the ability to steer history to benefit the goals of nation (Lowenthal 1985). To overcome a traumatic past as a country, an imagined narrative can assist in taking lessons away from it, teach future generations and foreigners about the history of the country. Similarly it can be abused.

In the memory of communism in Albania, a common, national narrative was not strongly visible. This is not surprising, regarding the fact that the fall of the regime only happened 28 years ago. Literature, observations, interviews and informal conversations have indicated that this time was too short to create a national discussion and narrative about the processes and traumatic events that occurred. Eaton and Roshi (2011, 312) write that "*Twenty years after the fall of Communism, Albanians have gained the freedom to travel abroad, but have largely avoided addressing the legacy of this difficult past within their own society*" (Eaton and Roshi 2011, 312). The introduction of democracy allowed more space for discussion and the incorporation of nuanced views on what happened, but polarised opinions on the regime created a national tension, according to Iacono (2018). Public decision making on sensitive topics related to Communism are often postponed or even ignored. Eaton and Roshi (2014) gave the example of the long existing debate on whether Albania should open the archived files of the Sigurimi, the internal spying and secret service organisation of Albania. This would expose the identities and records of the vast informant networks of the Communist regime (Eaton and Roshi 2014). The discussion on this topic has been closed and reopened over six times. Multiple respondents argued that currently, the files of the former Sigurimi are being destroyed by the current government, to erase the evidence of performed criminal activities by former Communists that are currently still involved in parliament.

Still today, the current political debate carries many accusations about the past (Iacono 2018). He describes that since the isolation of Albania, there was no external party to blame for the terrible crimes that were done, and so the confrontation between victims and perpetrators was internal. This made the reflection on the memory of the regime controversial and complicated for a long time, there was no space for negotiation or a middle range and the state was timid in creating a new heritage of the communist past (Iacono 2018). According to Carr and Colls (2016 in Iacono 2018), it even became a taboo subject.

During this research, respondents did not consider Communism a taboo, and in private conversations people spoke of it freely. For some participants however, the subject was emotional. A tour guide of Tirana (40-50) explained that *"you can talk about [Communism] to your friends, but not just with everyone in a cafe or bar, because it can trigger a debate"*. Nevertheless, during interviews, also in public spaces, respondents spoke of the topic and gave their opinions without hesitation. A national narrative on the past is thus lacking, but slowly discussions start taking shape. According to Mirian from CHWB Albania, this is a recent phenomenon:

> *"It is a difficult discussion for the society because [in] many families [...] the memory of that period is still very alive. Now we are just kind of starting to have, let's say, more and more young people that are born after the '90s that do not have a direct relationship to the communist past. Théy are kind of trying to question [...]the experiences also. In a way all elements are coming together now for that discussion to really happen."* (expert interview Mirian (30-40) from CHWB Albania)

5.2 Memories and opinions about the Communist regime

The discussions mentioned above are difficult to have on a national level, because there is a great variety of opinions and memories about the Communist dictatorship. This section shows citations that indicate how the subject of the past triggered emotions among respondents. The next sections takes a broader perspective by studying what opinions were seen about Communism and Enver Hoxha.

5.2.1 Memories and emotions

In the background chapter, the historical events before, during and after the fall of the Communist regime have been explained. Many respondents have told me abou the Albanian (communist) history. Often, they considered it important to explain the context of the past and the present and wanted to share their visions on it. Many stressed the power of the regime, and the impotence of the population:

> *"[...] when you close all the institutions, when people feel a little bit afraid, when the younger generation is educated every day [that] religion is an opium for the people[9], of course, the result was in the favour of the Communist regime. **[...]** So, this was the situation."* (interview Eduard Kurtezi (70-80), retired English teacher and interpreter for BBC)

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[9] This is a well-known statement of Karl Marx: "*Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world and the soul of soulless conditions. It is the opium of the people.*" (Marx 1844 in O'Malley 1982, 131).

"Especially after China it was very bad, really very bad. Food was planned and given with portions. […] Foreign aid was not allowed by the constitution." (Mr. Kongoli (50-60), Albanian national tourism agency)

"If one would comment for example, that your shoes are better because they are from Holland (thus foreign)*, the persecutors could send you to prison for ten years."* (interview translator (70-80) at Tirana times)

"The party of labour of Albania [...] controlled évery aspect of the Albanian life. [...] We had all these purges, [in] '48, '52, '55, '60, just to keep the control of the party. If you had had the control of the party then, you had the control of the country. [...] People he thought would threat to his personal rule [were eliminated]. [...] But who were enemies? In the very beginning [...], rich people were declared enemies. Then [...] people who would not join the Communist movement and the struggle against fascism. Then [...] people who had another opinion about [...] the development of the country. [...] Another group of enemies were people who had another approach towards relations with the west." (interview Eduard Kurtezi (70-80), retired English teacher and interpreter for BBC)

"I am inside a little bit of the story, because my father has been [arrested] these years. My father was a member of central committee and it was 1973/'74 when Enver Hoxha started […] the first putch against the liberals, which was my father and my ex-father in law. […] And one year after, he made the putch in the army. […] He said 'you are traitors', […] and then he […] executed them […]. But this is his paranoia. […] he has mistrusted everyone and so he started to be sick. And so he gave the order to build bunkers, to make [a] frontal war. And then they started to build 750.000 bunkers, everywhere in the country." (expert interview Fatos Lubonja (68), heritage specialist, journalist and former prisoner)

The death of Enver Hoxha was big shock in the country. Some were devastated, others were relieved. Respondents that were children at the time remember it well. One respondent (40-50) remembered his father crying for the first time, another (40-50) said that his family did not speak of it. For others it was a moment of hope: the breaking with China resulted in years of economical crisis and a shortage of food. Ramiz Alia took Hoxha's place as leader of the country. Eduard Kurtezi explained the hope of the population for better times:

"In '85, my friend, we thought that things would change. Because, I remember, at that time I was 40, 45 years old. And we thought that [a] more liberal leader was coming. We thought that Alia, the president of Albania, the leader of the party of Albania, was more liberal, more flexible, you see. But [...] he didn't undertake reforms within the party, within the country, [he] tried to delay reforms, to drag this reforms and changes. At that time, [...] the other Eastern-European countries had started [...] the execution of Ceaucescu, the fall of Berlin wall, all these changes. And the party of labour Albania remained in the same position." (interview Eduard Kurtezi (70-80), retired English teacher and interpreter for BBC)

Then, in 1990, a revolution started and the regime was pressured to organised elections for the first time. Mr. Kongoli (50-60) from the Albanian national tourism agency was 21 or 22 when he participated in the student protest of 1990 and remembers this event well: *"It was the first demonstration in Tirana, it was amazing, a big mass protest!"* The regime fell, and the democratic party took over the power, for the first time. However, it led to a chaotic period of time. The society collapsed in 1997 with the Pyramid Schemes and civil unrest occurred. This went hand in hand with a second wave of mass emigration (the first wave being in 1991). This explained why many of the respondents of this research between the age of 20 and 35 grew up abroad. Many respondents stressed how unsafe this time was. It was referred to as a *"terrible time"*, *"on the edge of a civil war"*, and:

> *"1997 was a bad time in Albania: with the pyramid schemes. It was like a lottery: you put in 1000 euro's and then you would receive the double amount, without doing anything. This did not work of course. At the beginning it happened for a few people. And then if you saw this happening for your neighbour, you tried it yourself. So many people did. This way, very many people have lost a lot of money, and many people also their houses."* (interview Kliton Gerxhani (40-50), director 'Albania Holidays' (translated from Dutch)

> *"After 1990 at least you had not this political pressure, ideological pressure, which you experienced from morning til you fell asleep. So it was quite another life. But to be open, these years have been with a lot of problems. We had these pyramid schemes, where people lost a lot of money. We had a kind of rebellion in '97, [which was] terrible. We had the same events repeated in 1998. Big conflict, social conflict [...]. In 1997 we were on the edge of a civil war. Because people joined large protests because they lost money, wanted the money, but where to get the money."* (interview Eduard Kurtezi (70-80), retired English teacher and interpreter for BBC)

As explained in the background chapter, former military areas were filled with ammunition. They were no longer protected due to the loss of power of the state. This has brought the lives of many people at risk, including the Kuçi family in the village of Marikaj. They are the owners of a farm, which is located on a former military base. The property has five bunker tunnels. The landlady explained that during the conflict in 1997, "*a very dangerous time in Albania",* criminals would come with big guns to get the ammunition. However, they did not know of the damage that an accidental explosion could bring, she explained. She got upset while telling what happened on her and her husband's property: the soldiers had left because of the collapse of the state, and they and the villagers were very concerned about their safety. An explosion would both risk Tirana and Durres, an important harbour town near the capital. *"It would have been a disaster for the region".* The local population, including them, were protecting the area, and sometimes even helped with the transportation of the ammunition. *"But can you imagine we were not professionals and protected the area how we could. It was terrifying."* (interview ms. Kuçi, translated by Onelda Perndreca).

The emigration situation in Albanians has been, and still is, dividing many families. When visiting Hajdar Kuçi's farm in Marikaj, we spoke with an employee. When speaking of his five children, he was almost in tears because they all live in other countries. He missed them, and *"feels real hurt in his heart"* (translated from Albanian by Onelda Perndreca). Another respondent argued the following:

"It's a new wave, which is, much more in my opinion, desperate than the previous ones. Because it's normal that a small poor country emigrates. [...] But now here it's, after a lot of years that looked like everything is ok, and people were staying, now they are leaving again. And it's the middle class that is leaving: people with money. People who had good businesses [...].That's the peaceful way Albanians decided to react to this situation. Ok we're leaving. You can keep the country to yourselves." (Interview Edvin Parruca (43), television presenter and hostel employee)

Others were optimistic about the possibilities that travel has been providing to youth:

 "I'm a little bit proud as an Albanian that the Albanian parents sacrifice a lot for the education of their children. They did this during Communism, tried their best, to send their children to schools, and we came to a point, I think in late '80s that secondary education was almost 100%, [...] and a very great number went to university. [...] After the period of Communism, again, they sacrificed a lot, to send their children to be educated abroad." (interview Eduard Kurtezi (70-80), retired English teacher and interpreter for BBC)

In almost every interview, the subject landed on Albanians contemporary situation. Dissatisfaction about the current social and political situation in Albania is very high. Many respondents said they are unhappy. About their family members leaving, about the low level of justice and democracy, about the governmental reckless spending of public money and about the feeling of poverty.

"It's also that you are never happy. And everywhere [...] are these screams of the population for more justice and more democracy [...]. (About the prime minister:) *I have the government, I own your money and your public property, and do whatever [I want]. And it's so.. I don't know what to say* (sad*). I'm not pretending this to be a rich country, because poor countries remain poor countries, usually. But at least to have some dignity. [...] we all feel all so poor."* (Interview Edvin Parruca (43), television presenter and hostel employee)

After talking to many different Albanians in Tirana, the indication was given that the average wage lies around 300 euro's per month. For most inhabitants of the capital, this is not enough. A man (20-30) in the airplane said that his uncle, who lives in Albania and is a year older than his father, who lives abroad (61 and 60 years), seems to be 20 years older. *"Bad food and working so hard for your entire life: it is a hard life".* People are getting tired and fed up with the current situation. In Rruga Skënderbeg, the street which houses most foreign embassies and language centres, rows of people are waiting every day to get language certificates, visas and other arrangings for leaving. This is the third wave of emigration. Those who stay, are either making a statement or do not have the ability to leave.

"I am sad about the Albanians. The generation of my parents had hopes. The happiest people here are also the saddest, because they left. They don't belong anywhere: they move and become strangers there, but they also become strangers in their own country. [...] I also thought of leaving, but who will take care of my mum? The government? No. (becomes upset, silent). No one is happy here. My destiny is the

same as for all the Albanians here. [...] I have a good life, but I am not happy because I see the sadness around me." (interview Resmije Allmeta (20-30), hostel receptionist)

The current protests in Tirana were often mentioned. Respondents spoke positively of the student protest in December:

"There was never *violence, the whole country was shocked immediately. It was such a powerful vibe, going everywhere, that wooow, that something this big is happening, without touching any policeman or anything. Because people felt it was a genuine thing, like, it was real something representing everyone, that it's enough."*
(Interview Edvin Parruca (43), television presenter and hostel employee)

However, few were hopeful for the current protests by the opposition. In the view of most respondents, the opposition was "*not much better"* than the current government.

"We had last night one big demonstration in front of parliament [...]. They blocked the parliament, they blocked the entrances. ***[...]*** *There was teargas, there were clashes, for like three hours. [...] Tomorrow is another parliament session, it's another big protest, [...] they say: 'you will not have one day of peace'."* (Interview Edvin Parruca (43), television presenter and hostel employee)

Other respondents were more hopeful about Albania's future. Some were active and aware of their role in society, and wanted to build up their country. They are staying and working hard on their jobs and on the improvement of democracy. They argued that leaving was useless.

"*People should stay. That is why we are here with you now. To work on your country, on the improvement of democracy, people have to stay and start building up things. It is stupid to leave, what is that going to do*?" (expert interview Ols Lafe (40-50), Heritage Director at Aleksandër Moisiu University)

There was also visible pride among some respondents about the Albanian population. They have overcome a long history of occupation and still stand, as a peaceful people. Albanism, or Albanianism, indicates this also.

Albanism? *"Yes, being Albanian. Let's say, being Albanian is a religion in itself."* (expert interview Saimir Kristo (31), Vice Dean faculty of Architecture at POLIS Univeristy, Tirana)

"The fact that we kept our language despite all the fighting, tells how strong our character is. […] We have been occupied so much, […] religions have changed, but not the character of the Albanians." (interview Kliton Gerxhani (40-50), director 'Albania Holidays' (translated from Dutch)

5.2.2 Reflections on the past

In interviews with experts it has become clear that there are opposing views when it comes to the Communist regime. The different perspectives towards the time are not easily compatible and there are groups that hardly talk to each other. Mirian from Cultural heritage without Borders (CHWB) Albania explained this. His organisation coordinates events in which these groups are brought together for dialogue.

> *"[...] You'll hear two stories. In most cases the first ones say (complain) that nowadays we still tend to glorify the communist past and what the Communist dictatorship did for the country: [the] rectification of the country [by] building cities, building industries and stuff like that. The other people will say that these guys that suffered during Communism [...] deserved it, because they were spies, they were collaborators with foreign forces and stuff like that. [...] I would [...] divide it in terms of people whose families have suffered during that past, and people whose families [have] not suffered, that were either perpetrators or just standbyers, in a way. And this happens because none of these people is really exposed to the histories of other people. You see what I mean? So these guys that suffered during Communism are always hanging out together. [...] There [are] no multiple narratives, so in a way everyone sticks to [their own] narrative."* (expert interview Mirian (30-40) from CHWB Albania)

With multiple narratives, he meant a national, larger narrative in which the experiences of these varied groups are respected and included. A polarisation of opinions about Communism was also found in a study by the Organisation for Security and Organisation in Europe, in which is indicated how people think about former dictator Enver Hoxha and Communism in general (figure 6 and 7). The outcomes are almost 50/50 positive and negative, with some variations under age groups and education levels.
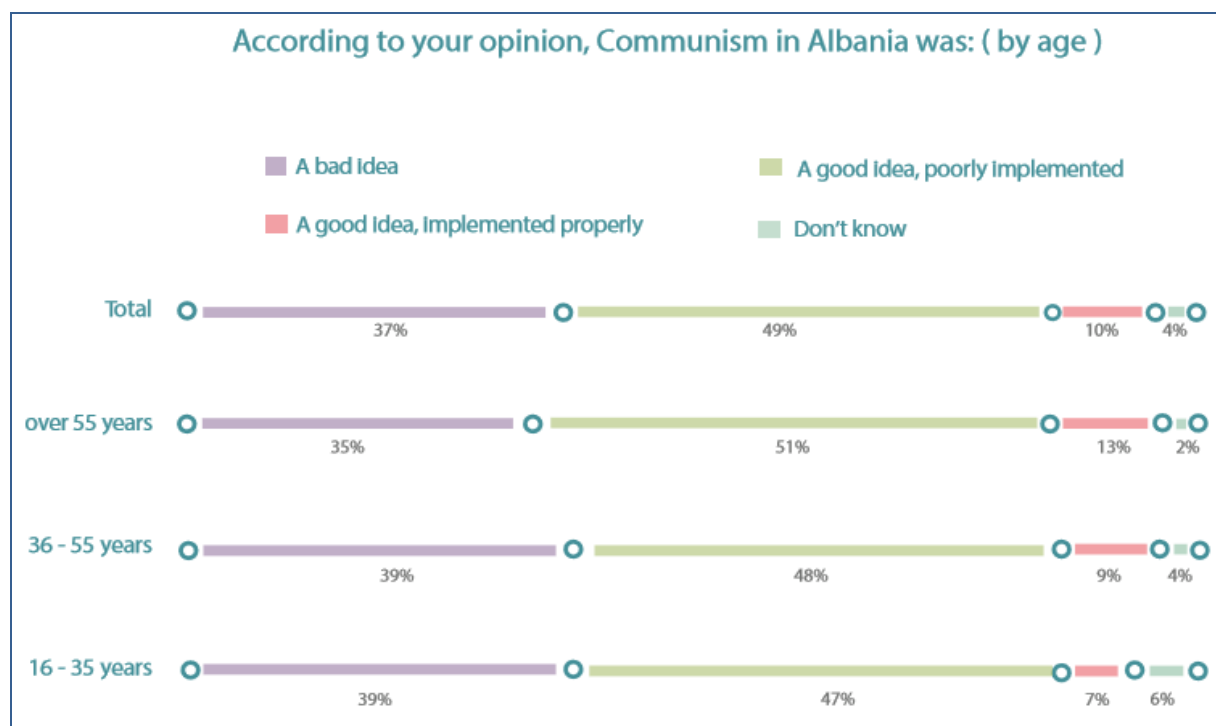
Figure 6: National opinions about Enver Hoxha (Source: OSCE 2015).
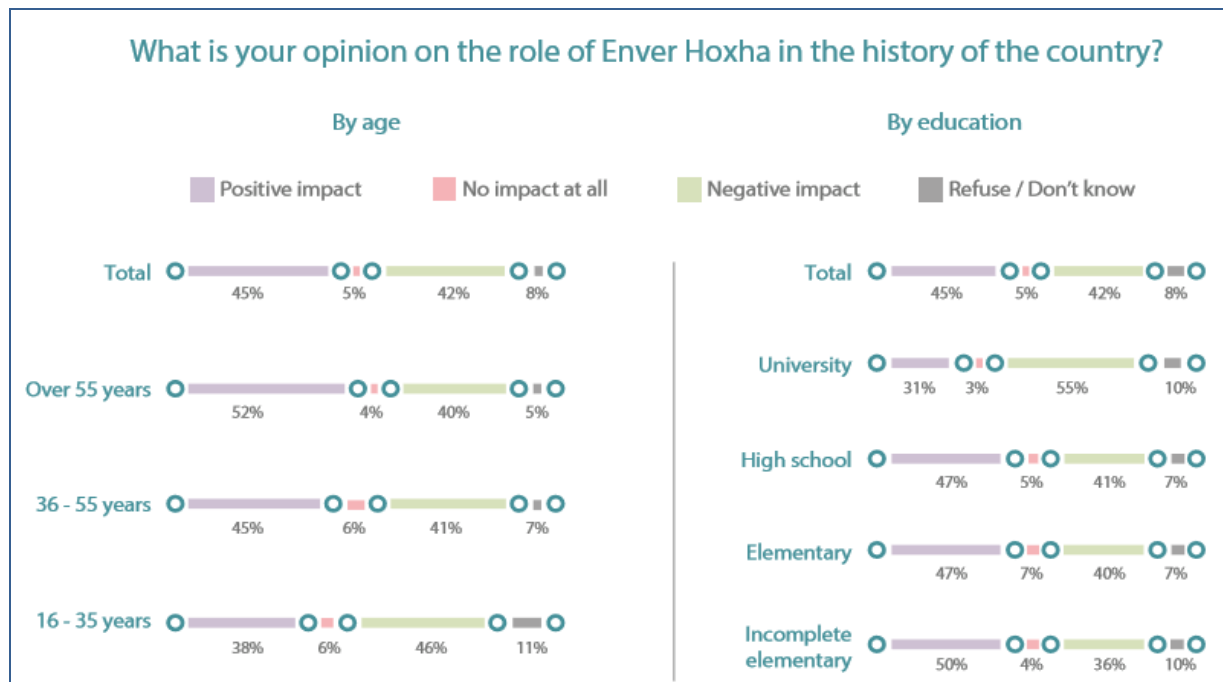
Figure 7: National opinions about Communism in Albania (Source: OSCE 2015).

The respondents of this thesis research were not as outspoken polarised as in this graph, or as in the situation that Mirian sketched. However, multiple respondents did reflect on the positive and negative sides of Communism in comparison to today. They mentioned that although terrible events have happened (all respondents acknowledged this), there were also some elements that were good. There was usually nuance in their answers. Kliton Gerxhani, for example, explained:

> *"During Communism people wanted to build the 'new socialist human', who couldn't think. A cloned socialist being. A bunkerised being. You couldn't complain if you could not buy any milk any more, or no cheese or no bread. […] But not everything was bad. Every system has good and bad sides, and best and worst times. […] The matter is, how long is the good period and how long is the bad period? […] [After the second world war,] we had […] nothing at all. […] So it was really a bad situation, also for the Communist government, to be honest. Everything was built from the ground. Electricity, schools, a healthcare system, just piece by piece something was built. And until the 70's, so for 30 years, it was a situation in development. We built the roads, the train stations, the harbours, so the economy was good. […] Much was done."*
> (interview Kliton Gerxhani (40-50), director 'Albania Holidays' (translated from Dutch)

Especially the older respondents who remembered the first decades of Hoxha's regime, or younger respondents who spoke of their parents (generation), mentioned that good developments were made also. After all, after the second world war, the country was left in a state of chaos. This was also illustrated by Kliton Gerxhani (40-50). He explained the position of his father, who had studied medicine under Hoxha's regime. *"So my father says: 'he built the university for us, to give that education. It is because of him. […] He has made many diseases disappear, […] he gave that opportunity."* Kliton said that he had discussions with his father about the balance of good and bad. His father did his best to make the country better, he said. *"But [he] should recognize that [Enver Hoxha] killed a lot of people, who could not speak freely, and that is really bad."* The balance for his

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father lies differently. *"For his generation, it was not all bad"*. Mirian from CHWB Albania also explained that he has a different view in comparison to his parents. *"I was raised and brought up for most in my life in a [...] free-er environment and context. Less brainwashed compared to them and they lived most of their lives in Communism under a heavy propaganda, under a very restricted [...] environment, from all different levels. So, I think I tend to have a broader view of the problem, compared to them. And I think this is the case for many families where people are kind of split when it comes to interpreting what has happened or are very divided when it comes to understanding and acting upon what has happened."*

Also a translator (70-80) of a newspaper told of this period of time. His family was close with Communists: his dad had been a partisan and a member of the party. He explained that at the time, people believed in the ideology because they saw many transformations happening: *"At the end they were not satisfied. But most people had belief".* He himself was satisfied with his life during that time: he had friends and relatives who he saw in the evenings. Now life is the same, he said. He has evenings with friends every Friday when they drink raki and sing songs. On Sunday he rests with his family and spends time with friends. He had a happy life then, and now.

The first few decades of the regime affected most people differently than later during the dictatorship, when the country became increasingly isolated, bunkerised and with increased paranoia. However, there were respondents that referred to specific elements during the Communist regime, that were better organised than they are today. They mentioned for example employment, pollution, healthcare and retirement wages. Democracy brought freedom, ownership and travel, but also jealousy and inequality. In an informal talk with a security guard of the national art gallery (50-60), he indicated that Communism was a really bad period of time, politically. However, regulations were better, for example for healthcare. Another respondent, Resmije Allmeta, did not like to speak of the past, *"thank God it's over"*, but did recognise a few advantages:

> *"People were puppets, bút, they would eat the same as everyone else. They would be so happy with bread and tomato, it was the best thing. There was equality, everyone was all together. Even Hoxha was the same, maybe a little more luxurious because he had money but still, very simple. And éveryone used to work. [...] Kids worked already from the age of 6/7: they would help to collect corn in the fields. [...] The children were happy: they were working and were just like their parents."* (interview Resmije Allmeta (20-30), hostel receptionist)

Edvin Parruca, stressed some other elements about contemporary society that he was deeply dissatisfied with:

> *"The retirement payment is ridiculous. It's ridiculous. People get 100 euro's a month, 200 euro's a month. What can you do? What do you pay for, the electricity bill? Or the medicines? Or the food? [...]You have to pray that your husband will not die because you will be left only with one retirement salary after that. You cannot survive. [...]. As always, people start to think that [...] it was not so bad before. Even before 20 years, ah maybe it was not so bad. During Communism, ah during Communism, at least they didn't let you die of hunger."* (Interview Edvin Parruca (43), television presenter and hostel employee)

The disapproval and frustration with the contemporary situation and poor facilities make people reflect on how it was before. By some respondents, these reflections were referred to as Nostalgia. However, it rather seemed to be disappointment with the present. After thirty years of democracy, people had expected a different life. This was also argued by Eduard Kurtezi, who said with a chuckle:

> "I belong to the generation who would have some nostalgia.[...] But in the reality, I am of the opinion that there is not a nostalgia for the past as a system. [...] Here and there, [you] can hear [...]: it was better before. [...] Albanians use this for specific phenomena of their life. [...] They say 'it was better' because they have a problem, they do not like what is happening [...]. So, what they say [...] it means not the system itself, because the people were fed up by political oppression [and the] political situation of the country at that time." (interview Eduard Kurtezi (70-80), retired English teacher and interpreter for BBC)

The subject of nostalgia did return a few times. It was mentioned by a few respondents between the age of 20 and 30, who spoke of the generation of their parents. They have lived in different systems, and had their hopes rise and faint.

> "[The] generation of my parents [...] is seeing how politics is being done, seeing and hearing that we're in this 'transitional stage' for like what, 30 years now? So they're fed up, and they're saying 'hm, these are no better than the guys that left.' And for us its different because we're thinking ok, things are going to pick up, corruption is everywhere, [...] at least we have some upsides now, yeah." (interview Sidonja Manushi (20-30), journalist Tirana Times)

These feelings are possibly related to the post-revolution in the 1990s, described by Iacono (2018). People strongly reacted on the fall of the regime, which has influenced the way the past is remembered and heritage is shaped (Iacono 2018). It created space for new beliefs and hopes for a better future. Lowenthal (1998, 68) writes that "the legacies of victors are protean", but this also accounts for legacies in general. With the meandering of the present the reflection of the past alters in a parallel way. Disappointment of the present and the unknown of the future creates retrospective on the past, which can be made more sentimental than it in reality was. This is also what Lowenthal (1998) describes as the battle between heritage and history: heritage extracts from history what it needs. Such a change in perspective and reflection on history is described by Remije Allmeta, who speaks about her father:

> "[My father] would sometimes say: 'Ah, Enver Hoxha, where are you'. [...] Lots of parents are nostalgic. Democracy came, gates were open, and finally people saw the world. [...] For my parent's generation it was a scary feeling. My dad was so excited, he could not wait for the future to come and was so enthusiastic about democracy. With two fingers (on each hand) in the air, we would sing: 'Sali Berisha', 'Sali Berisha', (the name of the first democratic president in 1992) with me and my brother. Because many people were so hopeful and really thought great things were going to come for the country. [...] But they got disappointed. And my dad used to go back in Hoxha's time and think about what was better then. [...] It was little things. In democracy, you can see the differences between people over time. But in

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Communism, it was all simple. [...] There was no poor versus rich. There were no beggars in the streets. My father was very upset about this, beggars.” (interview Resmije Allmeta (20-30), hostel receptionist)

Despite this sentiment of nostalgia, or rather disappointment with the present, most respondents said that life is better now.

“Of course it is [better now], [..] it was a system of fear. […] My father's uncle was killed by the Communists[…]. [He] was opposing [them]. Many people were killed at that time. [My] uncle went to medical school, and he could never have done it without my cousin, who was a Communist. They decided who was allowed to go to school and what level. If your family was opposing the Communist regime, or your uncle or parents were in jail, you would never would be allowed to go to school, because no one would approve you. Because you were an enemy of the state.” (interview Onelda Perndreca (30-40), unemployed)

The main factors mentioned that contributed to life being better now were freedom, ownership and travel. This was also indicated in an interview by Fatos Ayazi (69), a retired military man with a large property with bunkers. He said that life is definitely better now, because he lives in a democracy and has the liberty to do different things. His daughter and son live abroad and have freedom, instead of during the time that the gates were closed. *“Yes, there are more bad things like thieves, criminals and corruption, but also in that time it was hard, because if you would do something wrong, they would just* (claques tongue) *cut your head”.* He laughed. *“In that time, we didn't have anything to put aside”.* When Resmije, the translator, argued: *“yes, but you were equal with everyone. No one had something more than you.”,* Fatos replied: *“yes but we still didn't have anything. And now I have this property, I can build a business on my own”* (translated from Albanian by Resmije Allmeta). This freedom was also experienced by the mother of Hadar Kuçi, a farm owner in Marikaj. She was 85 or 86 years old. When she understood that the translator, my friend and I came from different countries, she said: *“see, now people are closer together because before we were not allowed to travel, we were isolated. We didn't have this possibility. […] Now we have the airplane and the bus.”* (informal interview Kuçi family, translated from Albanian by Onelda Perndreca). She meant this in very positive way.

When speaking of the future, there were respondents that saw a dark time ahead, and respondents that were very optimistic, *“no doubt about that!”* (interview Eduard Kurtezi (70-80), retired English teacher and interpreter for BBC)

5.3 Silencing the past in families and schools

As explained previously, discussions about the communist past are slowly getting started. On an individual level, respondents spoke of it freely. However, it was indicated by Mirian from CHWB Albania that there are still many families who do not speak of the subject. He added that the media never really tackled the issue of dealing with the past either. Finally, schools teach the subject poorly. This was indicated by multiple respondents. The subject is thus in many cases ignored, as it is politically. As described, foreigners and the new generation contribute to opening the debate by asking questions. Academic research on the topic is also slowly growing, mostly among foreign

researchers, but also some Albanians. There are also a few Albanian institutions focusing on the processing of memory. The debate however is in its infancy.

Silence in families

Among the respondents of this research, some argued that their parents talked to them about communism, or that they talked about it with their children, and others did not. Mirian from CHWB Albania explained that it is very common for Albanian families to not speak of the communist past:

> *"This is a very small country. Three million inhabitants, where everyone knows everyone, with very strong family ties. [...] In the same large family, you might have people that were perpetrators and again people that were executed or being treated as enemies of the state. [...] [Families decided] not to talk about what happened in the past anymore as a mechanism of self-defence: [...] they were trying to avoid problems and further conflicts within families or within neighbours. So it was a very 'strict' code of silence, in a way, that little by little has been broken now, but yeah. [...]"* (expert interview Mirian (30-40) from CHWB Albania)

One respondent argued the opposite and found it very important to speak of the past:

> *"I was 20 years old when Communism fell. […] I cannot say that I don't talk about my twenty years. I have had good and bad things. Like my father, it is my life. I cannot tell my son that 'no, no, I don't talk about this, that is bad. You should not know about this.' No that is not good. It is a lesson learnt. We must learn what was bad ánd good."* (Interview Kliton Gerxhani, translated from Dutch).

Silences about the past within families have also to do with their economic situations. Most of the of the respondents under 40 worried about other issues than the Communist legacy. Big social problems in the country, reflected in the current mass protests in Tirana, are more on the minds of the people. Figure 8 shows the main current topics of concern in the country: the Communist legacy is of a lower concern than education, healthcare, corruption, impunity, the economy and environmental pollution (OSCE 2015).

> *"When you struggle for survival, and that's the case for many Albanians still nowadays, the interpretation of history, and whatever has happened in the past tends to be considered as a secondary issue"* (expert interview Mirian (30-40) from CHWB Albania).
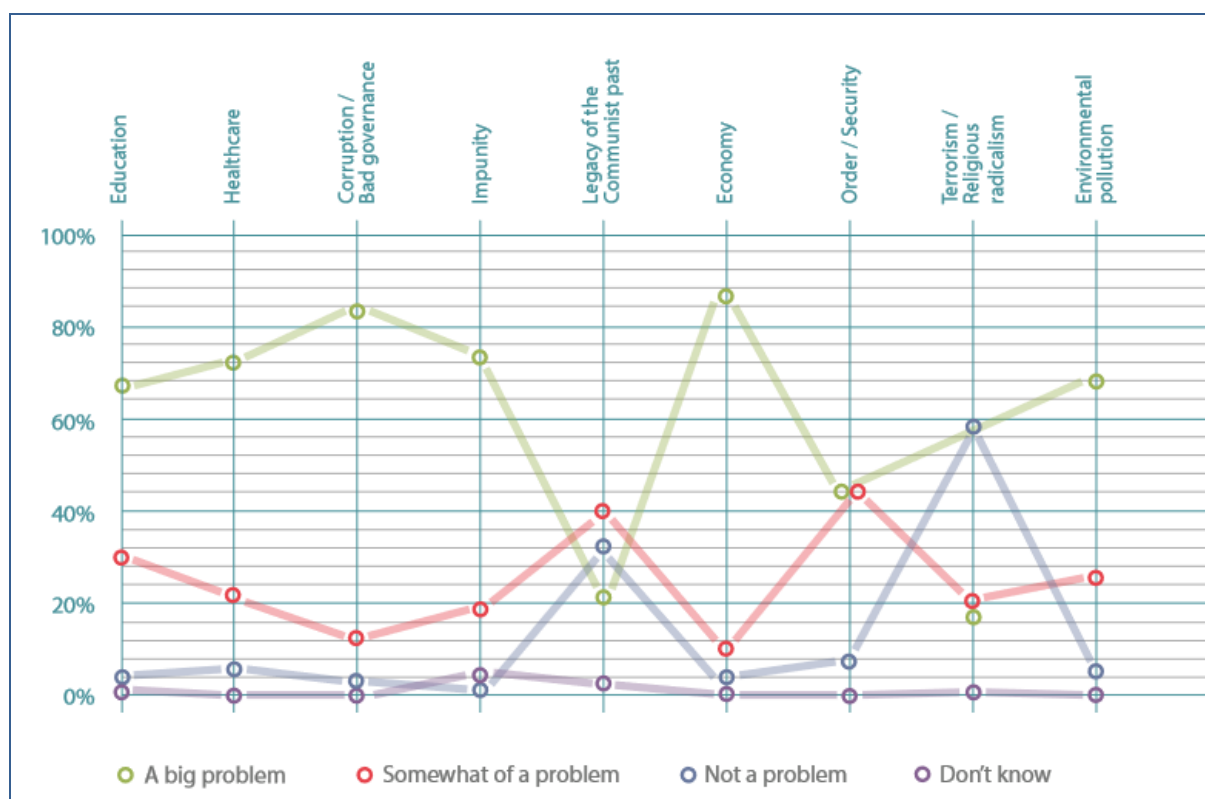
Figure 8: Main topics of concern in Albania (Source: OSCE 2015).

Those who do speak of the past with their children can experience difficulty in transferring their stories or *knowledge*. The fundamental different way of life is not always understood by children or youth. A translator (70-80) of a newspaper indicated that he did not speak about Communism to his children because *"they don't understand".* He told a story: in 2002, when his son was twelve years old, they climbed the Gramosi mountain together to collect some *çaj* (mountain tea). He explained his child that during Communism there was a belt of soft earth around all the country borders of six meters wide, all along the foot of the mountain. At the time, when someone would cross the belt, he explained, he or she would leave traces in the soft earth and the soldiers would know that someone had tried to fled the country. This was a severe crime, and part of the oppression during the regime. His son did not understand the story, of how you could not be free.

Finally, some people do not speak of it because it is painful, or scary. Not talking about it can be a way to not having to think about it. A tourguide (40-50) of Tirana said that when he was a child life was simple, unless you got into trouble. It happened in his neighbourhood: the father of a neighbour child was arrested. He could not play with the boy anymore. *"It is the past. I talk about these things because it is my work, but it is not common [...]".*

Resmije Allmeta (20-30, hostel receptionist) was born after the Communist regime fell. Her parents talked with her about the past, and when they spoke of it, they would transmit a bit of that feeling. Her dad would tell her stories, mostly of how he was a young superhero, helping everyone that needed him. But now, she said: *"I don't like to speak or know about negative times. Thank god it's over, but I don't want to speak about that."*

Silence in schools

Since views on the Communist regime vary and no national narrative has taken shape yet, the subject is poorly included in school curriculae. Cultural Heritage Without Borders Albania aims to address this problem, by creating dialogues on contested Communist sites (for example the former prison of Spaç) with varied groups of people.

> *"We had [dialogues] with history teachers, very important, because there is nothing [in] the textbooks, nothing on the national curricula, and teachers are always more younger and themselves they do not feel equipped, or [...] don't feel comfortable in teaching that history without having a personal connection [to it]. [...]The general opinion is that [the subject of Communism is] not treated well, or it's downsized, or sometimes other less important elements are kind of magnified.."* (Interview Mirian (30-40) from CHWB Albania).

Young respondents between 20 to 30 years old were asked what they remembered learning in school about the Communist regime. They explained:

> *"I was always really interested in history, and I remember that in school I didn't' really learn anything about Communism, because my teacher didn't like the way it was put in the book. So we skipped it largely. Because it was so shortly after the regime, that there was no way to tell the history yet. There was not enough time."* (interview Onelda Perndreca (30-40), unemployed)

> **"***we didn't learn detailed things. We didn't really learn about modern history. We didn't learn about democracy, but a bit more about Communism. We learned that there was a dictator, that there was spying on everyone, and that people got punishments for every little thing that was done against Hoxha's system."* (interview Resmije Allmeta (20-30), hostel receptionist)

> *"In high school there was a small chapter on Communism. It was about the love and hate relationships with Russia, China and Yugoslavia. Enver Hoxha was mentioned. It was perhaps the shortest topic of the high school year."* (Interview Eljana Zeqiraj (21), student)

In addition, there is also a lack of interest on the subject. Eljana Zeqiraj, an archaeology student, argued: "*Young people hate history: they want to do subjects like business, law school and medicine. They find history not useful and boring.*" She explained that her younger brother is not interested in history. She said that parents do share their stories about the past, but that kids are not always interested. Teens/kids lack communication with their parents and grandparents. "*They talk to their phones and tablets, as everywhere.*"

This lack of teaching about communism, combined with a certain level of disinterest, are two factors in a phenomenon that will be elaborated on in the next section: the historical disconnection of youth.

5.4 Historical disconnection of youth: A gap between generations

As mentioned in the methodological chapter, age is an important factor in this research. Different associations with the communist past both within and among generations (as explained in chapter 5.2). Naturally, everyone under the age of 28 has not experienced living under a Communist regime and thus only knows it from stories of their family, from schools, books, or media sources. Many young people however, do not know about it at all. There seems to be a large gap between youth that grew up in the current democratic climate, and people around 35 and older who grew up during (and remember) the Communist regime. We can therefore speak for a certain historical disconnection of youth. The majority of the youth is not informed, nor interested about the Communist legacy. This was explained by a few respondents:

> *"The young generation is not informed [...]. They are disconnected: they have no clue about the period before 1990. They don't even know what Communism is."* (interview Ols Lafe (40-50), director and Eljana Zeqiraj (21), student assistant)

> *"There are many young people that do not care at all about [Communism] and consider this as pure science fiction, because of the disconnection they have between the places where these atrocities happened and the people that committed them. [...]"* (Interview Mirian (30-40) from CHWB Albania)

In figure 9, three graphs from OSCE (2015) show the level of knowledge and interest in Communist history in Albania. They indicates that 70% of the people between the age of 16 and 35 is mostly uninformed. During this research, youth under 20 years old was not included, but the phenomenon became clear due to the input of respondents.
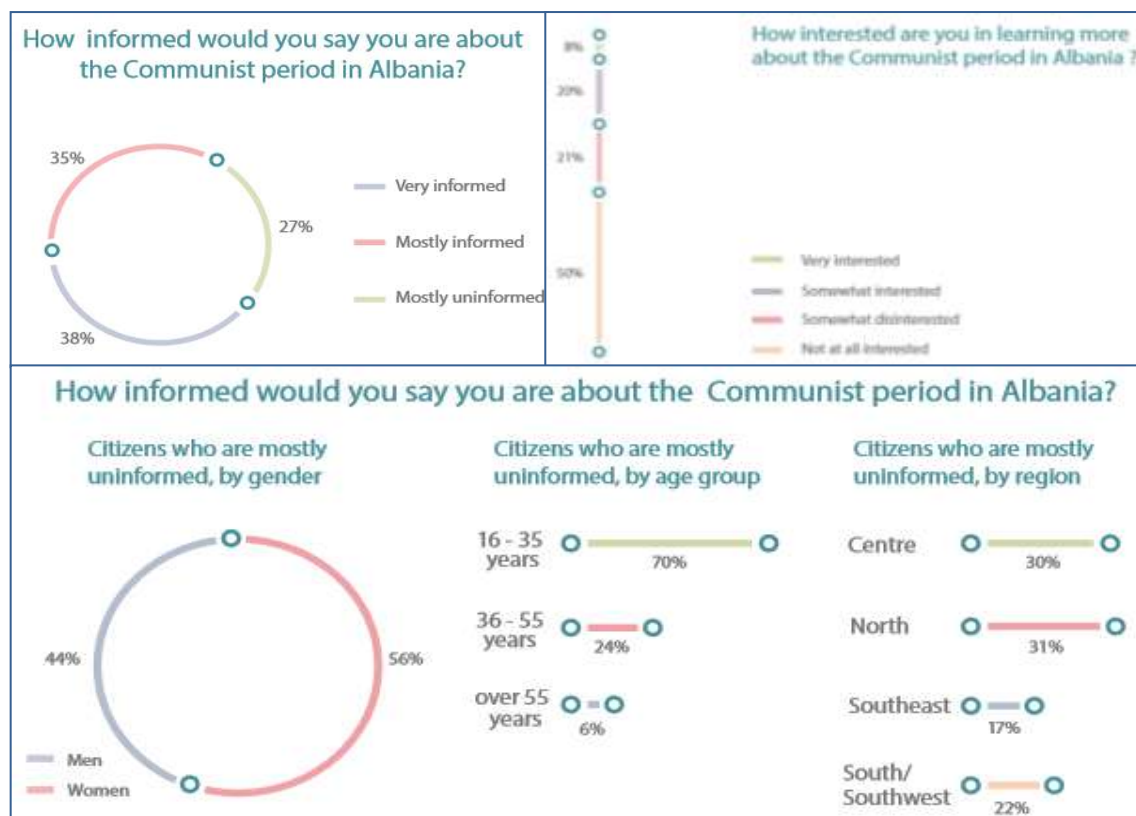
Figure 9: three graphs on Albanian interest in Communism (Source: OSCE 2015)

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This historical disconnection is influenced by the factors explained in the sections above. The subject is emotional, there are many different views upon it and there is silencing in families in schools. This all together contributes to a poor narration of history, so the youth is not well-educated on this topic. This lack of knowledge transfer might seem harmless in the eyes of some, but harmful in the eyes of others. As Mondale (1994, 15) describes: "O*ur pasts have consequences: if we celebrate a meretricious* (deceptive) *past, we cheapen ourselves."* This enlarges the gap between history and heritage (Lowenthal 1998): history is then shaped into a certain truth that does not always co-align with the complex processes that in reality happened. Lowenthal (1998, xvi) writes that heritage can be a 'menacing minefield' or a 'nourishing marvel'. However, when only parts of the communist past are remembered, sometimes in a nostalgic manner, the first is more likely. *"Heritage by its very nature excites partisan extremes"* (Lowenthal 1998, xiv), and the changed memory of the past can become oppressive, defeatist and decadent (Lowenthal 1998). By reminiscing only positive aspects or changed memories of nostalgia, the politics of that time are neutralized (Bender 1992). Multiple respondents spoke of being concerned about this gap between generations. They indicated that the lack of knowledge and disinterest among youth problematic, or even dangerous.

> *"Albania is a young population. So you can say most of the population of Albania now has nothing to do with Communism. They don't know anything. I still hear sometimes debates among young people saying about what was good and what was bad during Communism, and I am like 'neh haha you don't know anything'. But they speak from what they've heard. [...] So I think more and more it's less an issue. The whole thing. Which is dangerous because it can be repeated when you forget about that."* (Interview Edvin Parruca (43), television presenter and hostel employee)

> *" There is not enough education about these topics. We tend to leave out a big part of our history in a very big sense. There is also another problem in Albania that* [certain young people] ar*e trying to idealise the dictatorship. How nice was then, everyone had a job, everywhere was clean, there was not uncontrolled construction, in the middle of nature, we were all equal. [...] So people don't think about [...] and it's a bit strange. [...] These younger generations don't understand it. Because they see these old photographs, with Albania and nostalgia, you know, ah how beautiful Tirana without cars, or without constructions."* (expert interview Saimir Kristo (31), Vice Dean faculty of Architecture at POLIS University, Tirana)

Lowenthal (1985) describes the power of forgetting, which can cause the changing of existing memories and invent new ones. This seems to be happening in Albania, when studying the results of the OSCE (2015) study. How the Communist regime was perceived on a national level in 2015 can be read in the statistics of figure 10. The division of opinions on the matter can be seen in this chart. In figure 6, it was also seen that a large group of Albanians consider Communism to be "*a good idea poorly implemented*" (OSCE 2015, 6). In figure 7 we saw that the majority of participants of the survey also gave a positive opinion on Enver Hoxha. Iacono (2018) explains this as follows: Hoxha was the objective of a personal cult when he was alive, and through time this has translated into an irrationally optimistic judgement about his ruling. This has been told through the familiar memory channel to new generations, without alternative elaboration (Iacono 2018). The memory of him is thus too narrow-sided. This was confirmed by Mirian from CHWB Albania, who explained that

memories and knowledge about the communist past are not passed on systematically to the younger generations:

> *"So, when you are facing silence in school, silence in families, silence in the media then you are, of course, you do not tend to have interest about something that no one else is speaking about."* (expert interview Mirian (30-40) from CHWB Albania)
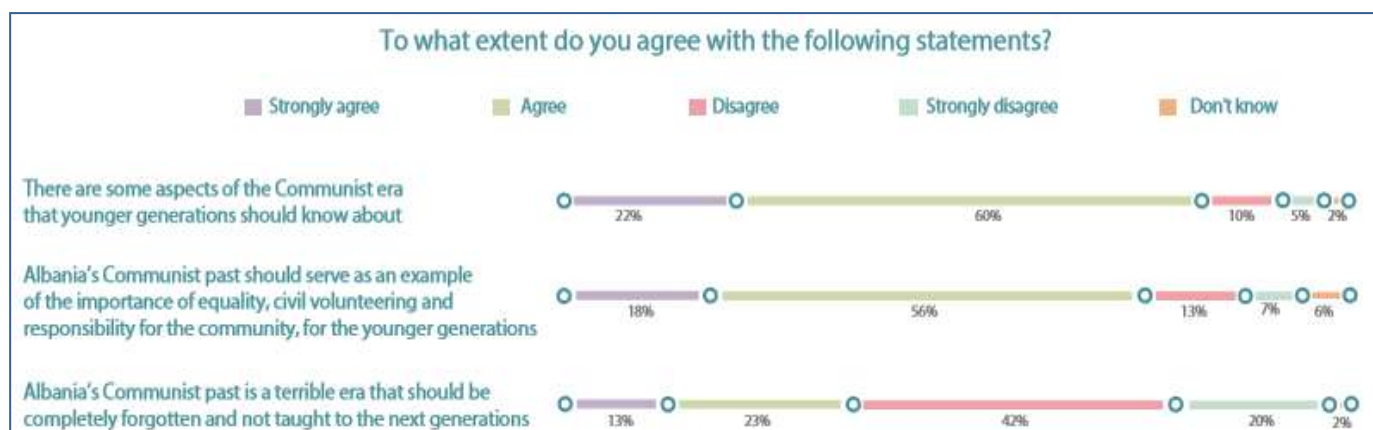
Figure 10: National opinions on communicating knowledge about Communism to future generations (Source: OSCE 2015)

This lack of knowledge transfer to youth is considered problematic in literature and among several respondents. As Mirian explained, it might be a way to peacefully deal with what happened in the past: since communist crimes were never dealt with as a nation, it is easier not to speak of it and focus on the future. It might be a way to cope with complex contradictions. As a result, the narratives that we can see being shaped among youth are black and white opposites: there is nostalgic reflection and anti-nostalgia (Velikonja 2009): the impression that it was all terrible and traumatic. Eduard Kurtezi problematised this, and stressed that there is a lot of grey between the black and white:

> *"[...] Those who are younger than 30 they know nothing about the Communist regime. I think that while dealing with the past, time and again we make some mistakes. Because we bring the picture only in white and black, you see. While in the reality there is some grey between. And the grey was the life of most of the people in Albania. [...] In order to understand, it is a main burden of the older generation to explain things as they were. But I'm not satisfied with the way it has been treated so far, because the past is very important. You have to explain totally the things, because sometime, this young generations go to the extreme left, without knowing things that they make the wrong interpretations of the situations."* (interview Eduard Kurtezi (70-80), retired English teacher and interpreter for BBC)

5.5 Silencing the past in the government

Finally, it is important to include that although the Communist regime has fallen in 1991, its effects are far from over. It is part of the reason that the studying of this history is important: it still influences the everyday lives of all Albanians. The transition from the Communist dictatorship to a

democracy has been far from smooth, and all respondents indicated that it is not over and very problematic.

In many Central and Eastern European countries, the memory of Communist terror could be linked to an external element, for example an intervention by the Soviet Union (Assmann 2013 in Iacono 2018). This happened for example in Poland and the Czech Republic, which enabled them to project themselves as victims of the Russian perpetrators (Applebaum 2012 in Iacono 2018). For Albania, this was not an option because it was largely an internal struggle, since Albania was isolated for a long time. "*In Albania, the memorial contraposition between victims and perpetrators has remained deadlocked in an internal confrontation which to this day continues to poison political debate with reciprocal accusations of past contiguity with the regime*" (Iacono 2018, 7). When democracy came, there was no 'clean break', but a politically and socially chaotic transfer. This transfer towards democracy is ongoing.

Many respondents argued that current politics are not that different from thirty years ago. There is corruption and there are many power plays within the government. Onelda Perndreca (30-40) argued that almost thirty years after the fall of the regime, the Albanian population is still oppressed. Processing the (for many Albanians) traumatic communist past in an inclusive manner does not seem to be a priority topic on the agenda of the current government. Up until now, communist crimes have still not been dealt with properly. No compensation or national apology was granted to the formerly persecuted. Files of Communist crimes are being destroyed (Eaton and Roshi 2014). These processes seem to be actions of silencing. Again, the power of forgetting by Lowenthal (1985) comes to mind. The changes that occur in politic seems to be more cosmetic than fundamental.

> "*After the regime no one has been persecuted and the leaders are still in power, so there is still oppression of the population. And the people that are in power now are the ones that did all the crimes back then. And they knew what they did, but the persecuted ones and the prisoners do not exactly know what was done by whom. But the records are now being removed, so it cannot be checked. […] And that is a problem. So nobody knows who is accountable, no one was responsible for what happened. And therefore these people are still part of the government.*" (interview Onelda Perndreca (30-40), unemployed).

> "*Especially with this government, I see some subtle things which reminds me very much of the state party. For example. The prime minister, because he wants to have a direct shortcut, [...] he created this idea of having a website, which is [shqiperiaqeduam.al] (albaniathatwewant.al, it's in Albanian) [...]. [It is a] co-governance platform. 'We'll govern with the common people.' You can write what's your problem and they resolve it immediately. [...] This sounds alarm bell in my head. [...] what does it mean we are co-governing with the people? [...] I don't like this. I think this is like making the same, the party making as the state. The party sounding as the state. [...] for me it's like nonononono. [...] for me it reminds something. For younger generations, maybe it looks like wow ok a revolutionary move to resolve things.*" (Interview Edvin Parruca (43), television presenter and hostel employee)

> *"Half of the people says: it has not really changed, you know? [...] On TV even now, this is something that my dad would say, or anyone else: 'but this guy he used to be a commi, back in the day'.[...] Albania is a very small country you know, [...] people know each other. [...] There was not a bottom down revolt of the system, but it was internal [...] so it was like this change of system that was a little bit fake."*
> (interview Sidonja Manushi (20-30), journalist Tirana Times)

One respondent (40-50) argued that we cannot speak of democracy in parliament, only of some democratic values. Openness about the past, the hearing of individual narratives, a national apology to the formerly persecuted and dialogues seem to be threatening to current politicians, and they are thus ignored and constantly delayed. That they might be guilty to some of the crimes during the communist past, is not something they want to bring to light. The fact that the youth is uninformed about this history, is in their favour.

Most respondents were very upset about the way contemporary politics include Communist practices and people. The current party in power is the socialist party, which used to be the Labour Party (PLA), but was simply renamed in 1991. This is another symptom of the 'cosmetic' political changes. The current prime minister is the son of a prominent Communist before 1990. More former Communist leaders are involved in today's government. Figure 11 shows a statistical graph that indicates the national thoughts on the fact that former Communist leaders are involved in contemporary politics. 73% of the population finds this inacceptable. (OSCE 2015).

> *"[The political parties] have longstanding leadership, they have people who have been for 30 years in Albanian politics, after 1990. Where is Lech Wałęsa in Poland? Gone. Where is Gorbachov? Gone. Where is Petre Roman of Romania? Gone. [...] While here we have these people still here. This is time to quit with that. Expel them from the Albanian politics. [Albania is] always delayed, my friend, always late. Always late. This is not good."* (interview Eduard Kurtezi (70-80), retired English teacher and interpreter for BBC)

For the opposition, which largely consists of the democratic party, the same can be said, according to many respondents. In one informal conversation (40-50) it was mentioned that 'the socialists are the communists, and the democrats are the friends of the communists'. The two parties have similar interests, only with slightly different perspectives. However, they are always fighting each other, therefore never building up anything constructive. True democracy is not seen.

> *"We have tried all of [the parties] several times now in the last 30 years. [...] We were never happy with none of them. When we have elections, the losing party always complains"* (Interview Edvin Parruca (43), television presenter and hostel employee)

It goes without saying that this 'fake' transfer into democracy is problematic. The lack of knowledge about communism in the new generation, combined with the governmental practices of shallow change, is dangerous. With people not realising to a full extent the dangers that Communism brought, the effect of crimes and problems in contemporary politics are also to a certain extent ignored and accepted. That the government is doing the same, is only noticed by those who remember the past.

To what extent do you agree with the following statement?

A considerable number of politicians in Albania today held important positions
during the Communist era and should not be allowed to be MPs, politicians
or officials of the public administration

6%
4%
17%
42%
31%

Don't know
Strongly disagree
Disagree
Agree
Strongly agree
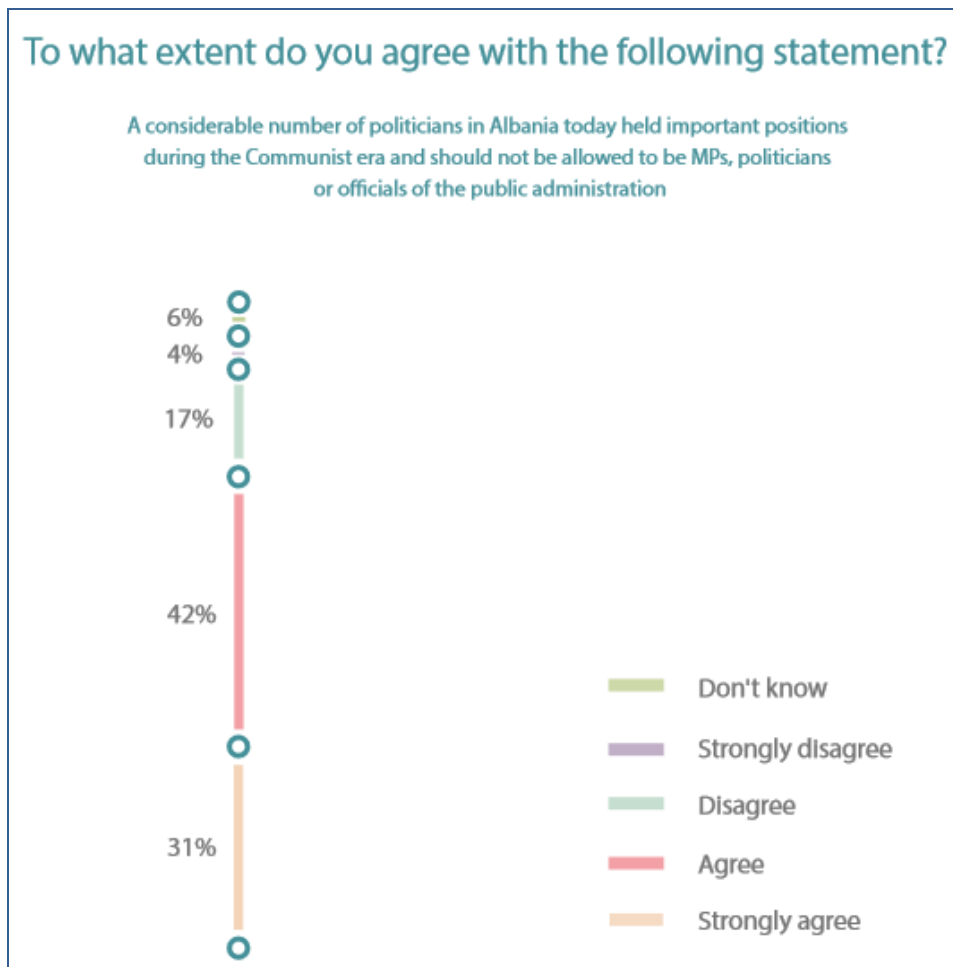
*Figure 11: opinions on the positions of former Communist leaders in
the current political administration (Source: OSCE 2015)*

5.6 Discussing the Communist memory

This chapter aimed to answer sub question one of this thesis: *How do contemporary Albanians relate to their Communist past?* The answer is that the relationship is both contested and troublesome. 28 years has not been enough time to process the difficult experience of fifty years of communist dictatorship. People have different or even opposing memories of that time and silencing occurs in families, schools, media and politics. These silences are rooted in the fact that there was no 'clean break' in 1991 with a democratic new government, prior crimes were not properly addressed and an apology to those who suffered has not been granted. There is a lot of dissatisfaction about this amongst Albanians, many people do not feel heard. Their peaceful way of processing this was just by not speaking about it. Teachers are often uncomfortable with the sensitive subject.

We can also see that the processing of the past is not a priority in contemporary society. This is partly caused by the poverty that haunts many Albanians and causes them to focus on contemporary issues. That these are rooted in the past however, is something that was seen in this chapter. Current politicians are advantaged by the oblivion of the communist difficult memories. The ignoring of what happened stimulates people to forget, and disables them from taking away its lessons. Dialogue and processing of the subject is thus not stimulated. The disconnection of the

Albanian youth to this particular history, works therefore in favour of the government. Velikonja's (2009) fourth type of remembering Communism, amnesia, was clearly seen. *"Here arise the familiar metaphors of the spring of nations, democratic awakening, or the new start."* (Velikonja 2009, 537). The fall of the regime in 1991 was sometimes called a 'revolution', 'when democracy came', or indeed, 'the fall of the regime'. This indicates a 'clean break', a new era, in which the past can be cast aside. As we have seen however, the opposite is true. The forgetting of this past amongst youth, and the changing of memories (Lowenthal 1985), possibly as a strategy of the current government, has been indicated as problematic and upsetting by many respondents. 'The power of forgetting' enables the government to not pursue more democratic values, but to keep the power and use it for its own interests. 'Forgetting' is also a form of steering of the past (Lowenthal 1985). This seems to be the collective process of dealing with the communist past.

As to personal relations with communist history, two more of Velikonja's (2009) reflections on communism were recognised. Anti-nostalgia, the blacking out of the time, was seen among many respondents, although many of them were nuanced in their answers and aware of the different opinions among generations. These were often between their own and those of their parents. Nostalgia was mentioned by multiple respondents, but it seemed that it was rather disappointment with the present that made people long for certain elements of the communist past, than that they were actually longing for returning to a similar system. Historical revisionism, the full reinterpretation of the past, was not clearly observed, except that many respondents related the isolation and bunkerisation to Hoxha's paranoia. However, it is likely that this paranoia went hand in hand with strategic and political decision making.

Mondale (1994) wrote that the past has different meanings for different ages. This was clearly recognised, especially above the average age of 35 and below it. The new generation of Albanians seems to both be forgotten and idealised. One respondent argued that he saw young people looking at photographs and thinking how much cleaner and more neat it was, for example. People under the age of 35 often thought in black and white, and people who were older were often more nuanced about the different views on Communism. Especially among youth, we see that certain groups choose certain narratives to be true and others to be false. By doing so they are celebrating a deceptive past (Mondale 1994). This representation of history is not realistic, nor are the decisions based on this past. The forgetting of the traumatic communist history and its nuances changes existing memories and invents new ones, as explained by Lowenthal (1985). It was a difficult time for many people, with a variety of memories and individual legacies. Dealing with this past in a collective manner is therefore hard and complicated, and seems to be avoided. In the case of Albania, this seems to be in the advantage of the ruling political party. This is upsetting many Albanians.

In the next two chapters, this kneading of narratives will be studied through the lens of material heritage form communism. Chapter 6 studies the Communist monuments and museums of Tirana, in which efforts to creating a narrative of the past are studied.

6. Steering the Communist memory through heritage in Tirana

Having explained the collective process of forgetting, and the private processes of remembering of Communism in Albania, a specific focus will now be taken on the material heritage of Tirana, and how this is trying to shape narratives on Communism. The way it is treated and affiliated with is an important factor in the malleable past, because it possibly reflects the way people think about this time. This chapter answers the second sub question of this thesis: *How do contemporary Albanians relate to the contested cultural heritage from Communism?* The first section gives an overview of the communist architecture of Tirana and how it is addressed, the second what role museums play in the processing of Communist memory, the third concerns former prisons and places of suffering, the fourth how heritage is treated in the political agenda and the fifth section draws a link between Communist heritage and tourism.

6.1 Contested Communist architecture in Tirana

As explained in the previous chapter, there is a difficulty in the addressing of the communist past in Albanian society. Debates have slowly started but this is a recent trend, as mentioned. This also accounts for material culture that belongs to it, since it is physically part of the spoils of history that lie all around us (Lowenthal 1998). After the fall of the regime, a long silence fell in regard to the meaning of Communism and its corresponding architecture (Iacono 2018). When democracy was installed, the buildings and bunkers were framed in a sense of trauma and terror, similarly as was done in other countries in the former Easter Bloc (Iacono 2018). Understandably, showing the failings of the former regime implicitly reassured citizens that the Albanian population has better prospects in the new (democratic) way of living (Iacono 2018). This is consistent with that what Vilikonja (2009) describes as historical revisionism: a new period of time had arrived.

Currently, in the media cyclical debates occur about the conversion, transformation and elimination of Communist architecture (Iacono and Këlliçi 2015). "*Though these sites have survived even as ruins until the present day, few are willing to confront their terrible significance*" (Eaton and Roshi 2014, 315). The material Communist heritage can thus be considered 'difficult heritage', or 'contested heritage', since it remembers a time that was for many people traumatic. Since the last few years, some initiatives started to bring the Communist period to the public and open the debate. Albania has a few museums about Communism and they have all been recently initiated. The first exhibition ever to be held on the terror of Communism was in 2012 by the National Historical Museum. Since, the 'house of leaves' (a museum of secret surveillance) and two bunker museums, Bunk'art 1 and Bunk'art 2, have been opened.

Iacono (2018, 6) describes an 'authorised heritage discourse' in Albania: "*In terms of general discourse adopted in post-socialist Albania, the regime experience was regularly framed in terms of trauma and terror, abiding to a general trend occurring over much of the former Eastern Bloc. This represented the authorised heritage discourse of socialism*". This discourse can be seen in the 'Communist crimes pavilion' at the National History museum, and in the way Bunk'art 1, but especially Bunk'art 2 provides information. This one-dimensional narrative has been criticized.

The architecture of Communism exists of factories, prisons, statues, apartment buildings (now painted in bright colours), museums, city structures the concrete defence system (which will be the subject of the next chapter) and more. Depending on the region, these structures have been destroyed, abandoned, reused or actively transformed into places of memory. These are museums, monuments, signs or active places of commemoration. This section will describe a few of these places in Tirana, since the research largely took place here. Naturally, what is described below is only a selection of the Communist heritage. In Tirana the architectural influence of Communism on the city layout is clearly visible. Many of the Communist structures are still in use, which have been built through forced labour.

> "Here in Tirana you can see that still to a large extent our built environment dates from the Communist period. [...] The buildings that you see [of] five stories, six stories, were built by forced labour. And [...]the terminal at the airport where your airplane landed is also built by forced labour. Many many types of public works have been done through forced labour. [...] By forced labour, I mean, [by] the prisoners [and] [...] volunteering actions, people were forced to volunteer. Not all of them, there were people that were genuinely volunteering, you know, [...] to build [up] the country. Because that was also another aspect of propaganda, I think, that everyone's work contributes to building a stronger and you know, a healthier Albania, and a self-sustainable Albania [...]." (Interview Mirian (30-40) from CHWB Albania)

An up-and-coming neighbourhood in Tirana is 'Ish-Blloku', where stores, bars, cafés and nightlife are concentrated. Thirty years ago, this was the residence area of the Communist elite, including Enver Hoxha. His house (figure 12) is not accessible to the public but can be seen from the outside. The

garden is maintained but it is not decided what to do with the building. It is owned by the directory of state services, and on occasion there are meetings there for specific groups, political proposals or dinners, according to a respondent. There are no signs on the gate, but it is well-known and indicated on every map. All city tours pass it.

The Ish-Blloku area used to be closed for the population and was guarded by a 'checkpoint'. This has also become the name of an art installation that was created here in 2013 to commemorate life during the regime (figure 13). It is located in the 'Postbllok memorial park' and consists of an original bunker, from which the area was guarded, an piece of the Berlin wall, which was a gift from Germany, and a part of the foundation of the mines in Spaç, one of the former prison camps. In the park, two more small mushroom bunkers can be seen.

Figure 12 (top): the former residence of Enver Hoxha.
Figure 13 (bottom): the checkpoint art installation in
the postbllok memorial park (source: own photographs)

Further down the boulevard next to which the park is located stands the 'Piramida', a decaying, empty pyramid-shaped building that opened in 1988 as the 'Enver Hoxha Museum' (figure 14 and 15). During that time visits to the museum were mandatory for school classes. It is now empty, and popularly used to climb and slide down from by local youth and tourists. In march 2019 they closed the access to it with fences, because new plans for renovations were accepted. On the national 'summer day' holiday, however, the fence was broken open by locals and it was climbed all day by young and old people.

Figure 14 and 15: the Piramida in the centre of Tirana, climbed by young and old on Summer Day (Source: own photographs)

A little further up the boulevard stands the national art gallery. In here many Communist paintings are displayed. Few information panels are provided. Through a glass door in a modern exhibition space, one could see a dark room in which dozens of Communist statues were stored. Behind the museum stands a group of statues: two of Stalin, one of Lenin, and one of Hoxha (figure16). there were also two small statues of workers and a female soviet warrior. During Communism, such statues used to stand all over the country. While visiting this location I was in company of a Ukrainian man, who was shocked by the sight of them and felt very uncomfortable. He had never seen a statue of Stalin before, because they have all been destroyed in the Ukraine. That these statues were indeed controversial was indicated by their location. They stood in the backyard of the museum, not visible from the boulevard. From the museum, they could be seen from one large window. They had no central role in the museum, one had to know that they were there. They did not have any shelter and were receptive for all kinds of weather. Ten metres to the right was another property, where they were building a new structure and a pile driver was used (figure 17). The statues seem to be a sensitive topic, which is reflected in their location.

Figure 16 and 17: statues of Stalin, Lenin, Hoxha and Communist workers (Source: own photographs)

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The main square at the end of the Boulevard is called Skanderbeg Square. Skanderbeg (his real name was Gjergj Kastrioti) was a military commander and leader in a rebellion against the Ottoman empire in the 15th century. The rebellion unified Albanians. He is the most celebrated historical figure in Albania, perhaps aside from Mother Theresa. He is considered a national hero, many respondents confirmed this. The large statue of him on a horse is iconic and often seen on travel photographs to represent Tirana. Previously, on the same location stood a statue of Joseph Stalin. The square also used to show a statue of Enver Hoxha, which was removed in 1991 during the student demonstrations.

On the east side of the square stands the former opera building which built during Communism and is now largely empty. On the north side of the square stands the national history museum. Here, history is told from the Illirians to modern history, although the chronology ended with an exhibition on independence (which included the second world war and the fight of the partisans). Communist influences were shown, but not greatly elaborated on. However, they did have a special pavilion on 'crimes of terror'. There were only few translations on this floor, but the message was clear: terrible crimes have happened during Communism. Photographs, objects and torture tools were displayed. A noticeable object was a piece of the rope that was used to pull down the statue of Enver Hoxha in Gjirokastër, his birth town (figure 18). This was a symbolic act in 1991 when the regime had fallen. When visiting Gjirokastër, it was noticed that the former location of this statue was indicated on the (tourist) map[10]. The indication on the map and the platform on which the statue used to stand can be seen in figure 19 and 20. Figure 21 shows the building in front of the platform, on the other side of the road. The word 'Enver' with Communist stars has been painted in graffiti.

Figure 18 (upper left): Part of the cable used to pull down Enver Hoxha's statue in Gjirokastër, 1991, with sub caption. Figure 19 (upper right): the indication of the former statue on a Vector tourist map. Figure 20 (bottom left): the platform where the statue of Enver Hoxha was pulled down as an iconic act. After 30 years, it is still there. Figure 21 (bottom right): Two Communist stars and the word 'Enver' are painted in graffiti on the house across the platform (Source: own photographs)

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[10] This map had no date written on it, but was made by the brand Vector.

6.2 Museums

In Albania there are a five (well-known) museums that focus only on Communism. There are many more museums in the country, some of which have elements about Communism or briefly mention it. The five main ones however are the 'Site of witness and memory' in Shkodër, which is the former security and interrogations office), the 'cold war tunnel' in Gjirokastër (a tunnel complex under the city castle), and Bunk'art 1, Bunk'art 2 and the House of Leaves in Tirana. Bunk'art 1 and 2 are underground tunnel complexes that have been transformed into museums by a private initiative. They will be elaborated on in the next section together with the House of Leaves. The latter is the museum of secret surveillance, where the sigurimi used to have their headquarters to spy on the population. This museum is a state initiative. One of the respondents, Elton Caushi, also had a 'Memorabilia collection' of Communist objects. He welcomes people to see it. It holds the middle between a museum and a private collection, containing Communist objects, books, magazines, clothing, furniture, and much more.

Respondents had varying opinions about the museums. Some younger respondents (20-30) thought there was a lot of attention for the communist past because of the museums on the topic. Others were dissatisfied with the way that the communist history was presented. Others just didn't care. Museums are interesting to study because it tells something about the narrative the creator (the state or a private owner) wants to tell. This was also explained by Mirian from Cultural Heritage without Borders Albania:

> *"Museums are always very interesting to kind of tackle new subjects. As they are tricky, because [...] the narrative that you choose to display in a museum might be very problematic sometimes, [as well as] the way you come up to that narrative. How do you involve people that were actors of what has happened [in] the histories that [you] are telling you in museums? [...] The process of doing that is as important as the result that you have at the end [...]. And to Albania one of the challenges is [...] how do you memorialize spaces [...]. These are all very new 'sectors' of activities that require a skill set and knowledge that is also new for this country, so, this is an adjustment period as well for professionals like us here, or for others [...]. Of course, it's not easy and it's something that requires a lot of attention, a lot of patience, because these are typically subjects that are very very difficult to change, you know. It is very difficult to work with mindsets. [...] You start brick by brick [...] and then it's maybe a subject we will see in five, ten years time."* (expert interview Mirian (30-40) from CHWB Albania)

Upheaval around Bunk'art 1 and Bunk'art 2

Bunk'art 1 and Bunk'art 2 are tunnel bunkers under Tirana that have been transformed into museums on Communism (figure 22 and 23). Bunk'art 1 is located in the outskirts of the city, and is a popular tourist attraction being in the close vicinity of the cable car that leads up to Dajti mountain. It is often a combined daytrip. The bunker complex were built for Enver Hoxha and his administration to take shelter in case of a (nuclear) attack. It consists of more than one hundred rooms, for living, governing and military purposes. The museum that was built inside is dedicated to the history of the Communist army and the daily lives of Albanians during the Regime. Bunk'art 2 is a complex of tunnels under the city centre and is connected to several ministry buildings. The museum today is

dedicated to the ministry of internal affairs at the time, the working of the Sigurimi and of prisons, working camps and victims.

Figure 22 (left): Bunk'art 1. Figure 23 (right): Bunk'art 2

Most of the respondents considered Bunk'art good museums. However, they almost always recommended Bunk'art 1 over Bunk'art 2. "*Bunk'art 1 is the real one*", they said. Or: *"you can go to the cable car, but only if you go see Bunk'art 1".* After visiting both museums, most tourists considered the first one to be *"better", "more exciting"* or "*more interactive".* Bunk'art 2 on the other hand has many more information panels, which cannot all be read in one visit. This preference of Bunk'art 1 over Bunk'art 2 was often noticed. Tourists simply seemed to like the kind of experience better. Locals however often seemed to have a more political opinion about it, that it did not tell the story right, or they link it to the entrance, which is a 'fake' bunker: a new construction. Bunk'art 2 caused a lot of public reactions:

> "The Bunk'art 1 is actually the best museum you're gonna see about bunkers, this is the real one. The two is a fake one, of course. You know, the bunker in the front of the number 2 is built from the beginning, is not an old bunker. [...] Bunk'art [2] was built and it created a lot of reactions. Because people that were politically exiled, and they don't like that, and they see the bunker as a issue, as a symbol of isolation, as a symbol of dictatorship. Why to build a new one? We have so many already. Is a provocation, they're trying [to get] the old system back? They're trying to close [the country] again? You know, imagine how someone would see that. [...] I cannot go in the philosophy of these people. They have every right to do so. You know, they were the ones suffering 50 years of dictatorship." (expert interview Saimir Kristo (31), Vice Dean faculty of Architecture at POLIS University, Tirana)

Bunk'art 1 opened late 2014. It was realised by the socialist party that is currently in power, which rose protest at the beginning. *"The exhibition [...] reiterates the old connection between communism and the Revolution/Liberation. The fact that the government in power – and thus responsible for the realisation of Bunk'art – was a socialist one, as the Albanian socialist party has emerged from the*

ashes of the communist party in the 1990, has been criticised as, among other things, an attempt to appropriate the symbolism of the old regime" (Iacono 2018, 8). Nevertheless, the museum became successful and attracted a lot of people, both Albanians and foreigners. In the first two months the access was free, so that locals were able to see what had been hidden from them for so long.

Following on this success, it was decided to make a second museum in the city centre: Bunk'art 2. This museum was not as well-received and led to debate and controversy (Iacono 2018). It is criticized to be focused on tourism: the ticket price is not in balance with the average wage of the local population. This limits the potential of the museum to stimulate discussion amongst Albanians (Iacono 2018). The strongest element of controversy however, was the entrance that was made to access the underground tunnel system. It was a new mushroom-shaped bunker, as mentioned. It was meant to show tourists an example of the kind of bunkers that can be seen all over Albania. This provoked upheaval, so much so that a big protest was organised in December 2015. People tried to destroy it with hammers and set the bunker on fire (figure 24-27). It showed that for at least for some, bunkers are a loaded subject that remind of a dark past.

Figure 24-27 (top left, top right, bottom left, bottom right): images from the protest against the new bunker in the centre of Tirana in December 2015. (Sources: figure 24: https://balkaneu.com. Figure 25: www.aljazeera.com. Figure 26: https://balkaninsight.com. Figure 27: https://www.google.com/search?biw=1536)

A few different reasons were given for the demonstration against Bunk'art 2, in literature and interviews. For some, the museum was considered an attempt of disneyfication/ commodification (Prideaux 2003 and Waitt 2000 in Iacono 2018) of their communist memories. It was also criticised that the museum only represented the perspective of terror and trauma (the authorised heritage discourse) and no other visions (Iacono 2018). Ols Lafe (40-50, heritage director at the Aleksandër Moisiu University, called the subject of 'perceptions' when it comes to bunkers *"the million dollar question"*. He emphasized that it was only a fraction of the inhabitants of Tirana that protested against Bunk'art 2. Some of them were (relatives of) formerly prosecuted people. The protesters were backed by the opposition, because in a way it was a protest against the current government.

Ols stressed that it was a protest against the entrance of the museum, against the new bunker. The museum itself was not the target of the demonstration. A tourguide (40-50) of Tirana explained that people could not see what was being built, since the tunnel complex lies underground and there was a wooden fence around the construction site. People did not understand why a new bunker was being constructed and were afraid that the current government started building bunkers again. Mr. Kongoli (50-60) from the Albanian national tourism agency argued that it was because people had painful associations with bunkers:

> "There was a protest. They were former prisoners, and they did not want a bunker in the centre of Tirana, because it recalls a very hard time. A very hard time, for them and for their families."

Since the bunker was made of concrete, people could not set it on fire. However, the holes that were made in the top by hammers during the protest, are today covered in plastic, instead of being repaired with concrete (figure 28). This was to show the voices of the protesters. Now, during the current protests in Tirana, it is often seen that the police guards this area to prevent people from attacking the bunker again. The bunker symbolises the socialist government, which many people are dissatisfied with.

Figure 28: Plastic cover of gap in Bunk'art 2 (Source: own photograph)

One respondent, a tourguide of Tirana (40-50), was still suspicious about the Bunk'art initiative as a whole. He found it strange that Bunk'art is a private company, because the bunkers were built with state money. *"Now they lease it, manage it and make a profit without investing anything: they just manage it. It is not transparent. They make business with state property. Who got to run it and why?"* He was suspicious that corruption was involved, because officially it cannot be found who is the owner, he said. As a museum he preferred the House of Leaves, because it is more transparent and belongs to the state.

Fatos Lubonja (68), a heritage expert and a former prisoner during the regime did not approve of the Bunk'art 2 museum, but for a different reason. He argues that sites of suffering should be made into museums of suffering, and Bunk'art 2 was never such a place. It should

represent what it used to be. He would have preferred to see the prison of Spaç being the museum that is now Bunk'art 2 (see the next section).

> *"I am not very glad. Because of the fact that they are made more for foreigners than for Albanians. And there is a sort of manipulation there. […] They link them with the persecution of prisoners. Especially the second one, I have not seen the first one. [It] is too theatrical and there is manipulation because Enver Hoxha has never been there. It was a bunker for nuclear attack. […] It was not a place of suffering, of torturing people, it was nothing like that. So in my, in my conception of history, they should have been kept like they were […], to be what it was instead of a torture museum which it was not. […] even to mix it with art, it's too much. […].I am very, very angry that they manipulate with those two bunkers, they lie for many things, and this house of leaves. And instead all places of suffering are destroyed [...]."* (Expert interview Fatos Lubonja (68), heritage specialist, journalist and former prisoner)

Most respondents however indicated that the museum has been more or less accepted by the majority of the population now. During the protests that were held in the fieldwork period, Bunk'art 2 was never a topic of debate.

Discussions about the House of Leaves
The House of Leaves, the former headquarters of the Sigurimi, is another museum that has raises discussion. The director, Etleva Demollari (40-50), explained that there were some prejudices with the opening of the museum since it was the former office of the Sigurimi. Some wondered: *"why commemorate the building where the authors of the crime worked?"* Prejudices came mainly from the persecuted people. They do not visit the museum, according to her, because the ones who have prejudices make also make political connections. Since the socialist party is ruling now, they connect it with Communism and they have prejudices. They wanted Spaç to become a museum instead of the House of Leaves. Etleva Demollari stressed however that this museum has the same purpose. It was made for those who suffered in the house and under the regime, so these prejudices faded somewhat away. Also, she argued, all society suffered, not only those who were persecuted. It was psychological terror for everyone: "*the walls had ears*" and you could not say what you were thinking all the time. *"But I only tell you the bad things, but it's not the [majority]".* There are also persecuted people that come to the museum every week to tell their stories to young people. The museum has many educational programmes for youth in which they are taught what happened in the past. After all, even during the regime itself people didn't know many of the crimes that happened. *"We knew about the listening and spying, because we could see someone getting arrested for having said something, but we didn't know about the prisons, the prisoners, the executions. We didn't even now then, let alone the people born after that time, they cannot even imagine. So we are showing the young people who don't know at all. This is the mission of the museum."* The educational programmes are for free and there are days with free museum entrance, so that not only tourists, but also Albanians can come and visit.

6.3 Former prison(er)s and places of suffering

A heated discussion exists on the former Communist prisons and what should be done with them. A large group of people (including many former prisoners) find it important that some of them become museums. One such initiative is being undertaken at the former prison of Spaç, by Cultural heritage without borders Albania. They aim to make use of the potential of Communist architecture in the Albanian landscape, which has a capacity of healing as it can re-signify Communist sites of memory for heritage of reconciliation (Eaton 2011). They want to turn Spaç into a museum, which they call a space for 'dialogue and action'.

> *"It offers the right conditions for people of different backgrounds and different opinions, to come together and visit, and discuss about the difficult past, and about individual and connective roles as well in the perpetration of massacres or you know, a perpetration of dictatorship like the one in Albania. As you know, this is a very, very hot subject if I may say, for Albanian society nowadays."* (expert interview Mirian (30-40) from CHWB Albania)

This is mainly in the interest of former prisoners, although more people agree in the creation of a museum in Spaç.

> *"We started with the former persecuted persons, which, again, is very interesting to see that half of them is very supportive of our action. The other half says 'I don't care if it's destroyed. Probably its better if its destroyed because my painful memory goes away with it'."* (expert interview Mirian (30-40) from CHWB Albania)

During an observation of a discussion during the 'Memorial Days conference'[11], where many former prisoners were present, it was mentioned that the abandonment of Communist heritage is problematic. Prisons should become museums, they said, and the opposite is happening. Only in Spaç some projects have been started, but also this site is in great decay. During this discussion, it seemed that some of the former prisoners often feel cheated by 'empty apologies' about what happened to them in the past. An empty promise of a 'general pardon' still has not come. They mentioned how crimes of the Communist regime have never been followed up on, and that even the streets still have the names of Communists. The debate got very heated and people stood up to speak passionately and there were many interruptions of the presenters. One man mentioned that his children have no idea of the existence of the prisons: that you forget a lot when the visual is no longer there. One former prisoner that was interviewed during fieldwork, Fatos Lubonja, also stressed the importance of managing and keeping the former prisons, to remember and to educate others:

> *[...] All places of suffering are destroyed [...]. Prime minister Edi Rama went to visit the Turkish Factory (a new mine that has opened in the same location as the former prison), and didn't even stop at Spaç (very upset). [...] They want to forget about it. It's a feeling of guiltiness of those who are in power. They have been all Communists.*

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[11] The conference lasted a week, and was in light of the 'Communism memorial days'. I attended a debate called "*Trashëgimia material e komunizmit në shqipëri*:* the material heritage of Communism in Albania.

[…] I have a long story with Spac, because I have been there, I have seen how it [was] destroyed, I have hundreds of pictures [of] how it was and how it became when I found people there taking the iron of buildings. […] They destroyed the terrace where people had made the raw coal, and [the inhabitants] took the iron. They took the barbed wires to surround their own gardens haha you know with barbed wires. It was fantastic, Spaç, to see with two barbed wires all around the mountain, with lights and watchtowers. To have it like it was, woah it was fantastic. In winter, all snow and this lights, and all this place. (expert interview Fatos Lubonja (68), heritage specialist, journalist and former prisoner)

[…] "I have [returned to Spaç] many times. I go there because it's my nostalgy of bitterness. […] Its very superficial as a nostalgy to be nostalgic[only] of good events […] Nostalgy of emotions, strong emotions that have formed you, that have been very important for you. That have learned you a lot of things. And this is my nostalgy. I mean nostalgy of the writer. Nostalgy of.. of war. If you are in war, if you are a soldier with your friends […] its bad feelings but at the same time nostalgy. Not to repeat it but to live it, to relive it. To re-, to, to live with it, as part of your life. Anyhow. And of course to transmit it to the others, you know to understand what happened. […] And people should go there. And not foreigners. But Albanians, young Albanians, to go the path of the persecuted, of the prisoners, to go to the mine. It was fantástic, Spac. To make it like it was. […] They have given to the Turks now. The Turks have build in the landscape of suffering, they have build a big, big factory there, which is bigger than the buildings of the prison, which was part the place of suffering. Like inside Auschwitz [one] could [never] build a fabric." (expert interview Fatos Lubonja (68), heritage specialist, journalist and former prisoner)

He explained that Turkey has been granted permission to build a big factory in the mines of Spaç, on the location where the former prison used to stand. The factory is of an economical nature and does not regard the historical elements of the region that Fatos describes as the 'places of suffering'. In the quantitative research of OSCE (2015), the situation of the mining company in the historical site of suffering was addressed and people were asked what they thought about it. As can be seen in figure 29, the economical value of the mine is prioritised, although a majority of the people does think that restrictions should be in place to protect the historical location.
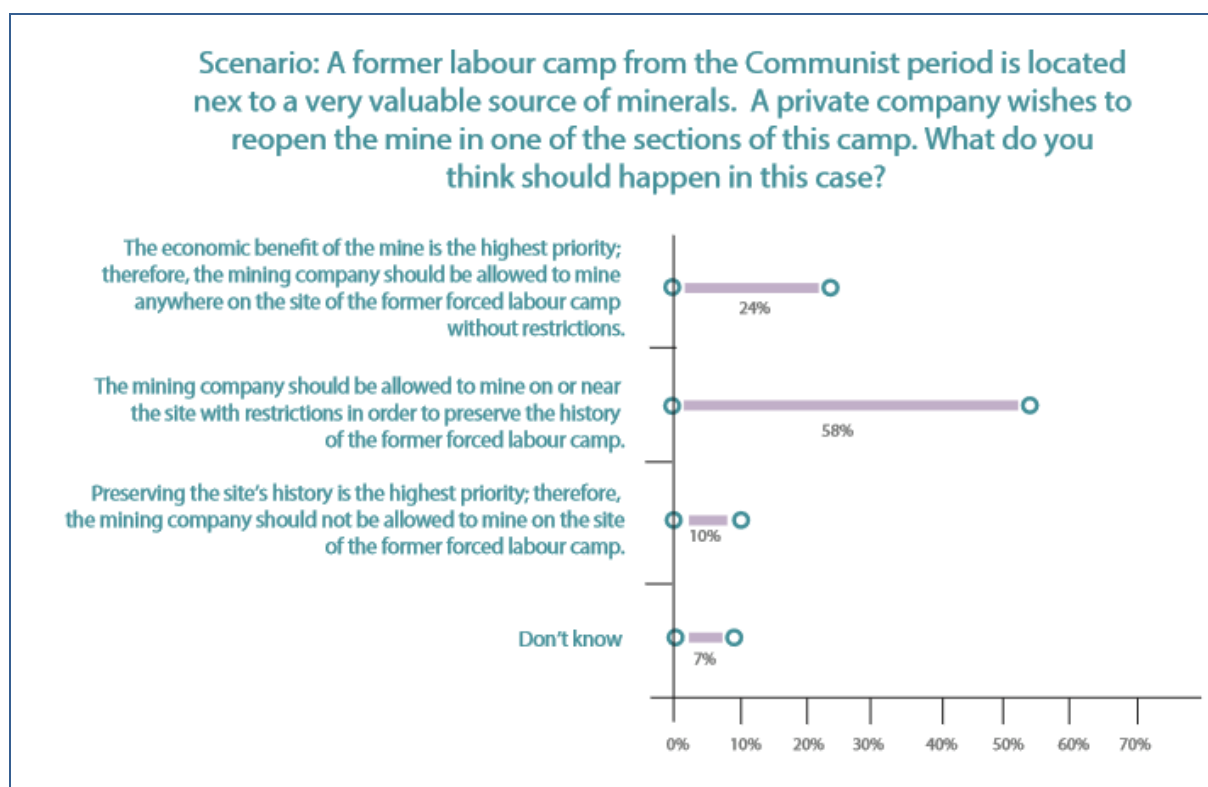
Figure 29: national opinions on the preservation of a former prison versus the interests of a mining company (Source: OSCE 2015)

6.4 Heritage and the political agenda: mass disinterest

"If architecture is a book of the history of Albanians, this book has always remained in the first chapter". (expert interview Fatos Lubonja (68), heritage specialist, journalist and former prisoner)

Many of the respondents found it important that attention is paid to monumental heritage in Tirana. Some rose deep discontent about the way this is currently treated in the city. This is because the current political agenda does not give priority to the preservation of historical architecture (Communist or prior), but to (personal) economical growth. This is leading to a few poignant situations. Saimir Kristo, the vice dean of the faculty of architecture design at POLIS university in Tirana explained these during an interview which included a short walk around the centre. On the square Saimir stood still to sketch a map of the city. He explained that the façade of Tirana has constantly transformed over time, but that nothing really changed except for the city's layout. Many people are unhappy about this. Fatos Lubonja, heritage expert and critic, explained:

"There is a tendency that those who come in power act through the principle that the history begins with me, with us. And […] instead of adding their creativity in architecture, they destroy the old ones, in order to build their own monuments, their own history. […] This is the concept of people who take the power and have no respect for history. […] And this is a sickness of infantilism somehow of society, or a

syndrome of young people. […] All young politicians think like that." (expert interview Fatos Lubonja (68), heritage specialist, journalist and former prisoner)

According to Saimir Kristo, the changing of the facades is another trend that new politicians seem to do. The Italians did it, then Hoxha did it by building new facades over old Ottoman houses and neighbourhoods (the Palace of culture was built over the old bazaar and ottoman villas). When the regime fell, it happened again when the Communist buildings were painted in bright colours (figure 30). He said that this was nice, but that there was no money left for more important matters. Today, prime minister Edi Rama is doing the same, he explained: painting buildings and buidling towers everywhere in the city centre. Most respondents agreed that these towers are used for the whitewashing of money. We were standing in front of the most recent example: next to the opera building on Skanderbeg Square lay the remains of a recently destroyed building. Boys between the age of 12 and 19 were happily walking away from it with pipes and metal frames from the former building in their arms. Saimir was shocked that the building was gone: "*I was drinking a coffee here last week!*" he found it extra ironic that a big Albanian flag was waving next to it, "*like it is a patriotic act for Albania*".

Figure 30: Communist apartment building, painted in bright colours (Source: photograph by Dayar van de Steeg)

Another example is the football stadium, which was built by an Italian architect during fascism. Overnight, Saimir explained, it was removed from the monument listing and destroyed. Now there is a new stadium, with a tower on top of it. The same tactic is feared for the city's theatre which was built in the same period of time as the old stadium. The complex exists of two theatres and next to each other, with a garden and open air pool in between. The government wants to destroy it to build one smaller theatre and six towers. There are protests happening every day by actors and other people involved with the theatre.

> *[...]They decided that 'we have this public land in the centre of the city, and we give this to someone to build six big blocks. And a theatre, come on'. How do you do this? How do you decide about this? It is a city land [...]! And because they didn't have the majority in the city council, who should have voted for this, they created a special law [which] they put in the parliament, where they have the majority to approve it. [...] Put some money and reconstruct it! Build a new theatre somewhere [else]. And don't use our public money for [it].* (Interview Edvin Parruca (43), television presenter and hostel employee)

These situations are influenced by the power of the government, but also because of the historical disconnection of the younger generations. As explained in the previous chapter, this concerns the 'remembering of Communism', but also standing up against these acts of destruction of the historical city centre. Saimir Kristo explained that this is influenced by the fact that people have no connection to public spaces and thus do not feel attached to it:

> *"The political system [and] the lack of power to the masses is not bringing enough sensitivity to protect history, or to keep the palimpsest of the city. [...] And here people don't care if they lose it because they are not really connected with their part of the city, you know? [...]. So I think the problem they have is that they don't really see the square as their space. [...]So if no one has this memory [of spending time in public places], as a kid, then how are you protecting it as you grow older?"* (expert interview Saimir Kristo (31), Vice Dean faculty of Architecture at POLIS University, Tirana)

Fatos Lubonja sees a pattern in the destruction of historical sites and prisons by those who are in power. He speaks of *"the manipulation of people with the idea to show the modern and the new time, and to destroy the old. […] This is the mentality where you find very much this spirit of capitalism, […], [of] neo-liberalism, just try to get rich as quick as possible. Which was taken [immediately] as an ideology of power after '91 […] and without any critical spirit. Without having instruments to resist to it. And so, that's why, to destroy old things, for my own interest, for my own money became the main trend here. So if you want see what's going on in Albania, you see Tirana, it's the image where people don't, don't respect the common space, the public space. But they just take care of themselves, of their interest, without considering that there are some things, that there are things which are much more important."* (expert interview Fatos Lubonja (68), heritage specialist, journalist and former prisoner)

6.5 (Dark) tourism and the commercialising of Communism

According to Mirian from Cultural heritage without Borders Albania, there is a rising segment of tourism in Albania that is specifically asking for bunkers and other Communist related heritage. Interest in the communist past is abundant among foreigners, and plays a small but growing role in the tourist industry of Albania (which is growing significantly in general). Many of the respondents were aware by the interest of tourists, which was in most cases bigger than their own interest in the subject. To some extent, the tourist industry is anticipating to this.

> *"I think the whole Communism thing is used to attract tourism. Well just the fact that three of your main museums in Tirana are Communist-related. The house of leaves, the two Bunk'arts, who are the most famous and popular ones, are all Communist related. [...] Tourist themselves, like, a lot of people I've talked to, [who] didn't really know a lot about Albania said 'oh, but I know it has bunkers', [or] they know about Communism. So that's what they know, pretty much. (*soft ironic laugh)*"* (interview Sidonja Manushi (20-30), journalist Tirana Times)

Some respondents called the tourism around Communist sites and buildings 'dark tourism'. This type of tourism addresses 'tourist products' that are associated with death, disaster and atrocity (Lennon and Foley, 2006). Mr. Kongoli (50-60) of the Albanian national tourism agency described it as *"people visiting places where people suffered'.* He and Kliton Gerxhani, head of a tour operators association, explained the benefits and drawbacks from this interest in 'dark tourism':

> *"[…] It is part of education: you have to know and understand the past. It was really a very harsh time, very harsh. It is good that there are these places where can be learned what happened."* (Mr. Kongoli (50-60) Albanian national tourism agency)

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"I am also head of the tour operators association. And this is our discussion; what do we have to improve to set a better standard in tourism? How should we develop tourism, in what direction? Mass-tourism or more experiences, that kind of thing. It is not an easy task. [….] It is good to make use of [our Communist heritage], [because you cannot ignore it, it was recent], but not to exaggerate. Because then we bring people back to that mentality that is called 'dark tourism'. And I am not so fond of 'dark tourism'. There should be a balance between [speaking of] what happened and not to erase it, and saying no, I do not want to speak of this system. But not: 'Are you coming? Because we had so much hardship during this system, and we want to show you this'. That is bad. […] Our history is not [only] the last fifty years. It is perhaps our worst history, but we are so old, so much has happened here." (interview Kliton Gerxhani (40-50), director 'Albania Holidays' (translated from Dutch)

Indeed, Albania offers more historical tourist locations such as Roman archaeological sites, ethnographical museums and medieval castles. However, the material heritage of the Communist regime seemed to interest many travellers that were informally spoken to in the Tirana backpackers hostel. This interest had several reasons. In conversations with different tourists and travellers, it became clear that many found it "*cool*", "*dodgy*", "odd and spectacular", they like "*exploring exciting grim places*" and "*this kind of [Communist] stuff*". Others found it interesting because of the story behind it, the historical process, their role in the landscape or as an object of photography. During the Communist era, some tourists from leftish movements (from the UK, Scandinavia, Holland) were allowed a visit to Albania. Eduard Kurtezi used to be a tour guide during that time. Some of these tourists have come back to see Albania how it is now.

"In the very beginning, before 1960, most of the tourist coming to Albania were from East European countries. Czechs, Poles, Russians, Hungarians. But after 1960, western tourists started to come. Mostly the people do not know, even in Albania sometimes they ask: was it possible to come? [...] But Dutch tourists, Austrian tourists, English tourists, Scandinavians, they were coming to Albania since 1960. [...] You know, these tendencies of the left movement, in late '60s and '70s, and they came to Albania, they were interested. [...] As long as my experience goes, first, I think they were people who were interested in the ecological and historic sites in Albania. [...] Second category were people who wanted to visit the country behind the iron curtain. So political interest. Thirdly the left movement in the late '60s. So, Marxist, Leninist groups, in the '70s, they came to visit Albania. And fourth category: journalists, [pretending to be] tourists (chuckle). *[...] Some people come back after many years. I've met a lot of people [that came back] and eh, they find great changes in the country. Great, great changes. It's not only infrastructure but it's quality of life, it's education level, people speak foreign languages here, it's not difficult to communicate."* (interview Eduard Kurtezi (70-80), retired English teacher and interpreter for BBC)

The development of Communist heritage for tourism is not without its difficulties, as mentioned in the previous section. It is in an early stage, and it is not easy to decide what to do with certain buildings. This is the case for the former residence of Enver Hoxha, but also for his birth house, which is an ottoman building located in Gjirokastër. It is now functioning as the city's ethnographic

museum. However, there was very little to no information about this except for the fact that it was his birth house, and signs above the doorposts that named the rooms (one wrote: LIVING ROOM – the birth room of Hoxha). Another observation in Gjirokastër was the 'Cold war tunnel', a tunnel complex under the castle which can be visited with a guide (figure 31). Since the fieldwork for this thesis took place in winter, very little tourists were present and the museum was not abundantly visited. It was also not easy to find outside the tourist season. When asking around in nearby shops, people did not know what was meant, did not know of a bunker tunnel nearby. Two men that were standing in front of it were convinced that it was open on a day that it was not. They also gave wrong directions about the entrance. Clearly, this museum is meant for tourists and not popular with locals. The guide of the tunnel tour explained that people are fed up with the topic of bunkers, they don't like to speak of it anymore. This will be further explained on in the next chapter, which focuses on bunkers alone.

Figure 31: Cold War Tunnel in Gjirokastër (Source: own photograph)

Commercialisation of Communism

Something that cannot go unnoticed when studying the relation of tourism and Communist heritage, are the souvenirs that can be bought in many different cities in Albania. During observations in Kruja, Berat, Tirana and Gjirokastër, it was shown that clothing, uniforms, household objects, furniture, historical photographs, coins, pins and even passports from the Communist era are being sold in markets (figure 32 and 33).

Figure 32 and 33: Communist objects sold on markets and tourist shops (Source: own photographs)

Next to this, a souvenir industry has picked up on the foreign interest in this period of time and created a range of Communist merchandise. The majority exists of bunker souvenirs, which will be explained in section 7.3.5. Furthermore, one can find books, busts and mugs of Hoxha (figure 34 and 35). In Bunk'art 1, t-shirts were sold of Hoxha saying: 'I was at this bunker before you' (figure 36). When asking some respondents about this phenomenon, they said:

"Here? You have seen t-shirts with Enver Hoxha? [...] I see, I see. [They are] just for tourism. The market in Kruja is totally, one hundred percent [for tourism]. [...] I've never seen a t-shirt with Enver Hoxha. Maybe [there are], but the context is important. There is a kind of industry for souvenirs and craft articles. [...] It's a speculation, they know that there is an interest and they make these small bunkers etcetera." (interview Eduard Kurtezi (70-80), retired English teacher and interpreter for BBC).

"There should be a balance between [the] markets [that] we want to target. Do we want to target the nostalgia of Communism and spread the t-shirts of Enver Hoxha and the bunkers and so on, or the western Europe where our house truly is? And [in] western Europe I think that there are really few people who are fond of Enver Hoxha and that period. And no one, I think, would buy a t-shirt of Enver Hoxha or a bunker. So there should be a balance. One cannot make it all white. Maybe some things [can be sold] here and there, [...] in a museum or a souvenir shop or a small shop specialized in Communism. [...] [But] we are só old, we have so much to tell, we are so rich in history, in heritage, in archaeology, it is so hard to put the piece of Communism in between. (interview Kliton Gerxhani (40-50), director 'Albania Holidays' (translated from Dutch)

Figure 34-36: souvenirs displaying Enver Hoxha (Source: own photographs)

6.6 Discussing Communist heritage

"The past itself is gone – all that survives are its material residues and the accounts of those who experienced it" (Lowenthal 1985, xxii).

In this chapter, it has been studied how the difficult relationship to the communist past in Albania is reflected in its material heritage. These concluding remarks answer the second sub question: *How do contemporary Albanians relate to the contested cultural heritage from Communism?* In the previous chapter we saw two simultaneous phenomena: that the communist past is a sensitive issue and that this history is being forgotten by a large group of Albanians, which is potentially a political steering strategy. Both were reflected in the communist heritage that was studied during this research.

The difficulty of addressing communist history is strongly reflected in the protest against Bunk'art 2 and the discussion on what to do with former prisons. These however are held only by a fraction of the population. Most people do not feel as strongly about the material Communist heritage. Iacono and Këlliçi (2015, 114) write that *"the lesser attachment of young Albanians towards the material remains of their recent past, can perhaps also mirror the final incorporation of the country in western modernity and the related cultural amnesia towards its recent past"* (Iacono and Këlliçi 2015, 114). To a certain extent this might be the case, but among the respondents in this research there was also a group that showed interest and saw importance in the preserving of historical (Communist) monuments. It is likely that the influence of tourism will be beneficial to this preservation. Multiple respondents indicated that they liked the fact that the monuments can teach what happened in the past. However, some also mentioned that there should be a balance in how much focus there should be on Communism among tourists. Albania has a rich history, and it should be avoided that they take on a role of 'victim' in the world. *"Atrocities are invoked as heritage not only to forge internal unity but to enlist external sympathy"* (Lowenthal 1998, 75). This has not been observed during the fieldwork, but it has been mentioned as a notion to be aware of by multiple respondents.

During the fieldwork I concluded that the main interest in Communist heritage is largely coming from foreigners, (relations to the) formerly persecuted and experts. The power of decision making over it, however, is with the government. This is in line with what Lowenthal (1998, 90) writes about collective heritage: *"Heritage normally goes with privilege: elites usually own it, control access to it, and ordain its public image. That heritage still buttresses elite perquisites strikes some as monstrous."* (Lowenthal 1998, 90). This is recognised in the destruction of the stadium, and the plans for the destruction of the theatre. It also explains the frustrations about the decision making on which sites to turn into museums, and which to forget or destroy. This was exemplified at Bunk'art 2, where a tunnel complex that served for the logistics of an elite group, is now displaying the history of suffering in Albania. Simultaneously however, real places of suffering are destroyed. In Spaç for example, one of the former prisons where many people suffered, no attention is given to a memorial site. Economic benefits are prioritised and a mining company is active in the space where many traumatic memories lie. Again, as seen in the previous chapter, the government seems to want to forget about these 'real' sites of history. They have the power to shape it in another location instead.

On the other hand, with much of the Communist heritage of Tirana, public decision making on what to do with it seems to be avoided. The former house of Enver Hoxha is managed but not used for anything. Hesitance in the exposition of the statues Stalin, Lenin and Hoxha is seen at the national art gallery, since they are placed behind the museum. The Piramida in the centre of Tirana

has been empty for years, before the decision to restore it was finally taken. Also, at the ethnographic museum in Gjirokastër notion is made that it was Hoxha's birth house, but no further information or details are given. A clear narrative or trend on what to do with these buildings or monuments is not seen. The delaying on decision making could be a way to dim the attention on the communist past. After all, the material culture is owned by the state, the power over its decision making lies with the current government.

At the museums on Communism in Tirana, a trend can be seen within the exhibitions: they explain the darkness and crimes of the time. It follows the trend of anti-nostalgia (Velikonja 2009) and the authorised heritage discourse as described by Iacono (2018). As he writes, *"The emphasis on terror is of course entirely understandable [...]. The repression experience was so overwhelming that, as a matter of fact, it could not be otherwise"* (Iacono 2018, 7). However, as he mentioned in another article with Këlliçi (215), to focus only on trauma and terror within a heritage discourse, one fails to include the complexity of memory processes that the communist regime brought. This is the difference between history, the true course of the past, and heritage, the choosing of elements from this past to benefit contemporary purposes (Lowenthal 1985). This lack of a more inclusive way of memorising the difficult times of the past is protested by a group of Albanians. The authorised heritage discourse is a way to *"fossilize, to preclude ambivalence, to tolerate no doubts"* about the past (Lowenthal 1998, 88). At the House of Leaves however, and also with CHWB Albania, we see more dimensions being included and they have a more flexible attitude towards this discourse. They have educational programmes with room for discussion and dialogue. They start the discussion that is in so many regards not yet held in the rest of society. Also, they focus on the Albanian population rather than tourism. The house of leaves is cheaper than Bunk'art, organises school trips and offers free days of access throughout the year.

The authorised heritage discourse (Iacono 2018) contrasts with the diversity of opinions and nuanced stories that respondents have told. This is a clash between the public and private narrative. One of the reasons for this can be that Bunk'art is a private initiative and has thus less pressure to adapt to the multi-dimensional opinions of the masses. The national history museum largely skips the part of history of Communism, except for a pavilion on Communist crimes. Perhaps this is part of the 'power of forgetting', perhaps it is too recent a history and it is not (yet) included. According to Iacono (2018), the discourse also clashes with the phenomenon that many people think that *"that Communism was a good idea poorly implemented"* (OSCE 2015, 6). The neglect of Communist heritage is for some a crime, and for others perhaps a way to *forget or obliterate a malign or traumatic heritage"* (Lowenthal 1985, xx). For the youth, little interest in the preservation was shown, this was mainly with middle aged or older respondents. After all, *"the past means different things at different stages in life." (*Mondale 1994, 20). Especially middle aged and older respondents were appalled by the poor treatment of heritage in the city. This is because they had personal memories on these locations. Iacono and Këlliçi (2015) describe that this is also the case for Communist architecture, for which they give the Piramida as an example. *"Historical buildings [...] collect fragments of personal histories that cannot be pigeonholed into an all-encompassing category of traumatic memory."* (Iacono and Këlliçi 2015, 112). There can also be fond memories.

Communist heritage is also gaining new meanings. This was most clearly seen at Piramida, which was a popular place to climb by local youth, to hang out at the top and slide down from. These youth are developing fond memories on this space, where they had fun. This gives the building a new meaning.

These new, positive meanings that such buildings can get are also part of the power of heritage. Re-signification of material heritage can assist in confronting the past (Eaton and Roshi 2011). It can be used on purposed, as is aimed by CHWB Albania for example, but it also happens naturally. The Piramida for example is popular among youth (and tourists) to climb and overlook the city. For the youth of Albania that comes there, it seems to have lost its original meaning. During the 'summer day' celebration, the foundation of Spaç in the memorial park was used as a bench by a few tired women. This is a way of 'repurposing' of this heritage, which gives people an affiliation with these objects and makes them want to protect it. It is only seen on a small scale, but it is there.

"When we conserve a past, we make history. We make history because we must, to understand ourselves and our present circumstances." (Mondale 1994, 15). Among respondents it was considered important to educate the past by preserving Communist architecture. However, this is (or should be) built from constant negotiations with all stakeholders (Mondale 1994). This in Tirana is not happening at all. Different groups feel ignored, and not everyone agrees on the style of storytelling. The decision making process on what to do with historical monuments is top-down, and people's protests often have little results. The ignoring and destruction of the city's historical architecture has been described as a phenomenon that 'history starts with us' (Fatos Lubonja, 69), whereby the new is preferred over the old. Simultaneously, Communist crimes are not spoken of and records of it are being destroyed, as seen in the previous chapter. A general pattern of ignoring can be noticed. This goes along the 'authorised heritage discourse' that is created, or in the making. The subject seems to be sensitive to be finished. Individual narratives and initiatives counterspeak it. However, in the future this will likely be one of the collective narratives.

A phenomena that is happening next to the forgetting and the authorised heritage discourse, is the commercialisation of communism. In the tourist industry communist architecture is 'heritagised' and used for both commercial and educational purposes. It is a relatively new market in Albania's tourist sector. The effects of this industry is now small, but it is growing. It would be interesting to study this 'commercialisation of communism' during the tourist season in summer, when the souvenir market is on its peak.

7. Case study: the scattered bunkers of Albania

In this third empirical chapter, bunkers have been chosen as a symbol for dealing with the Albanian Communist heritage. The goal is to answer sub question three: *How do contemporary Albanians socially interact with and relate to the remaining bunkers?* This will be done by looking at four different elements: why bunkers are contested cultural heritage, the destruction of bunkers, their preservation and whether bunkers are an outdated subject.

In section 4.3 of the background chapter a historical explanation of the bunkerisation programme of Enver Hoxha was given. This chapter gives the contemporary story of the former military structures: why bunkers could be considered symbolic, what is being done with bunkers nowadays and what people think about them. Hereby it is studied what role the former Communist bunkers play in contemporary society and the memory of Communism.

This thesis focuses on the region of Tirana and some further locations, but all in the middle of the country (see figure 1 on page 24). It must be noted that it is likely that there is great regional variation in the way Albanians think about and relate to bunkers. This was confirmed by Saimir Kristo:

> *"I think the northern part is more timid, more closed, more irritated. Because during the dictatorship the north was highly prosecuted from the dictator, yes yes. [...] Also the north was very secluded and isolated and was left like that. And it's not the best feeling. So they have a lot of tension inside them. It was very very secluded. So in the south maybe they will make fun of [the bunkers], joke about them, but in the north they would be more, I think, [...] they would be more angry about it."* (expert interview Saimir Kristo (31), Vice Dean faculty of Architecture at POLIS University, Tirana)

The interviews and observations in this chapter are thus only applicable in the areas where they have been held, which is the larger region of Tirana.

7.1 Bunkers are contested cultural heritage

The bunkers have been chosen as a symbol of Albanian Communist heritage because they are present everywhere, and almost every Albanian has (had) something to do with them in some way or another, or in some period of time. Before going on fieldwork, I expected them to contested objects, because they are visual representations of a difficult past that scatter the landscape. Everyone knows they are there. For some, they are even objects of the daily life. As will become clear in this chapter, feelings about bunkers differ greatly. For some, bunkers are symbolic of Communism, for others, not at all.

> *" [Bunkers are] a symbol that for many many years, for 67 years, in Albania has been always the symbol of closure, the symbol of isolation."* (expert interview Saimir Kristo (31), Vice Dean faculty of Architecture at POLIS University, Tirana)

> *"Now, the bunker situation is different from what people feel about Communism. I think people are forgetting bunkers."* (Interview Edvin Parruca (43), television presenter and hostel employee)

During an informal interview, there was mentioning of a joke that is told about the bunkers. To test their quality after they were built, the prime minister told a group of soldiers to enter a bunker and just roll and smoke their tobacco. The soldiers were scared and asked whether it was safe, and the prime minister kept repeating: yes, there is nothing going on, just roll your tobacco. Then, they bombed the bunker to test it. Now, according to the respondent, the joke is sometimes made in stressful situations: "*just roll your tobacco, it will be fine*". Fatos Ayazi told a similar story:

> "*The ex prime minister Mehmed Shehu […] ordered for the [750.000 bunkers] to be built in that time. […]* (he laughed). *So after he put the most efficient engineers to build up the bunkers, and after the bunkers were build up, he said: 'enter inside now' and he started to attack the bunkers to see if the engineers did the work properly. It was like a proof, you should [construct] it thinking of your own life. It should have been the soldier inside, but no* (still amused), *to not get killed the soldier, they said, you do this good because we will test it with your life. Then we will put the innocent people to fight for our country. […] And this is why the architects they tried to do their best [performance] because they were scared, afraid for their [lives]. The prime minister didn't want them to do a weak job.*" (Interview Fatos Ayazi (69), retired military man (translated from Albanian by Resmije Allmeta)

7.1.1 Bunkers remind of a traumatic period of time

Most respondents did not care much about bunkers, but there was a minority with strong, negative feelings towards them. The bunkers reminded them of bad memories. Mr. Kongoli (50-60) of the Albanian national tourism agency said that for him, bunkers represent the Communist time, which he recalls quite well. They bring him back. He also said that this was the case for many people of his generation. He spoke of an incident that he remembered well. A football player, Arjan Hoxha, had entered a bunker with his girlfriend and was murdered there. The people of Tirana accused the Albanian Security Forces, he said. No one was found guilty of this crime, which rose commotion at the time in the form of a silent protest during his funeral.

Saimir Kristo (31) explained that during the regime, life was easier in Tirana than in the mountains, where many bunkers were built. Inside migration was not allowed, so people living in mountain villages were even more isolated than inhabitants of the city. And that, he explains, is why for some people the bunkers remind of this closure, still today.

Another respondent (age 30-40) did not seem to have difficulty speaking about bunkers during a coffee meeting in a café. However, on another occasion she joined me in visiting a farm in the village of Marikaj, a former military area where several bunker tunnels remain. Once she saw the tunnels, she started speaking of the hardship of the Communist era. She said that for practice, children were sent into the tunnels to learn that they had to take shelter there in case of war. For her, the tunnel triggered emotions and stories she was told. While she spoke of them, she made the transfer to talking of contemporary issues, as many other respondents did also.

> "*Tunnels were everywhere. People were really convinced, manipulated into believing this war that was going to be there. if you didn't work, didn't participate, you would get imprisoned, or your family, or so. it was really a terrible, horrible time. It was a bad time. And it still is, life is hard.*" (interview Onelda Perndreca (30-40), unemployed)

That bunkers are a sensitive issue and symbolic to a group of Albanians was also shown one day after arriving in Tirana. An artist had made an art installation of a bunker as a gift to Edi Rama, the prime minister. It was fully demolished during a protest by the opposition (www.albaniandailynews.com). The current governing party is the socialist party, that is often related to Communism. It seemed as if the destruction of this bunker artwork symbolised a protest against the current government, in a similar way as occurred at the protest against Bunk'art 2 (see section 6.2).

Ols lafe (40-50), director of a university centre of heritage, stressed what ideology can do to heritage. He spoke about Apollonia, a Greek archaeological site close to the city of Fier. During Communism, an anti-aircraft structure was built on top of the Acropolis. Now, he said, the aircraft tunnels are used as open air toilets, as many bunkers are. And larger bunkers are used for sexual encounters.

> *"Appollonia is one of the best examples where intrusion can occur, it is a bad scar on our memory. It is Communist ideology and propaganda. What would the world be with the Athenian acropolis being an anti-aircraft site? What the Communist government did (un)intentionally, was annihilate the cultural, peaceful and natural locations of the western coast. And it had no use! It was never used. If we wouldn't have that, we would have the best place for thousands of visitors."* (expert interview Ols Lafe (40-50), Heritage Director at Aleksandër Moisiu University)

For the majority of the respondents, bunkers were just objects. One respondent said the same, that they did not mean much to him. He was used to them, he said, because he has always seen them. But he didn't like them, he said. He only liked them to be able to explain to tourists what happened during Communism.

7.1.2 The bunkerisation programme: necessary fortification or a waste of money?

It is unclear how many bunkers were built in the '70s and '80s. 750.000 was the most common heard number throughout the fieldwork, but an information panel in Bunk'art 1 writes that *"207.000 bunkers were planned in all Albania but 168.000 were built"*. Respondents also greatly differed in their perceptions of how many bunkers were once built, although most of them mention 700.000 or 750.000.

> *"There are so many bunkers in Albania, there are many different studies. Some exaggerating, they say 750.000, some say 100 million. I think it is an amount. Of course if you have 750.000 bunkers it's a very nice story to sell. You know, you put three Albanians in every bunker and you don't need houses. All of these are pointless. I think there are around, there were around 175.000, something like that. Not more than 200.000."* (expert interview Saimir Kristo (31), Vice Dean faculty of Architecture at POLIS University, Tirana)

Despite the unknown quantity, it can be said with certainty that there were many and that they could be seen everywhere one turned. The most heard response about the bunkers was that their building was a waste of money and a sign of the dictator's paranoia. For others however, the threats from foreign countries felt very real, and they were scared. The bunkers were therefore justified, as they protected the country. Naturally, some of these respondents consider it a waste of money in hindsight, because the threats were largely imagined as the country was never attacked. However, at

the time they truly believed that they were in danger of war.

Fatos Ayazi used to work in a military area in the village of Ndroq, that has now become his personal property. Four large mushroom bunkers still stand here. He explained that the bunkers were meant from protection, and were made from very strong and thick iron. In that time he started to value these bunkers for providing safety. Upon asking whether people genuinely feared the necessity of using these bunkers, he replied: *"[People] were very scared, yes. And it was a very big pressure, America, English people. We were surrounded [by] enemies, because the dictator was making sure to put these thoughts in people."* (Interview Fatos Ayazi (69), retired military man (translated from Albanian by Resmije Allmeta). In hindsight however, Fatos argued that it was an expense, that was a bit exaggerated. He also said that the government did it to protect themselves instead of the population. *"While the people were suffering, they were living a comfortable life. An old generation was totally lost for nothing"*.

Onelda Perndreca (30-40) said that because the country was isolated for such a long time, it really influenced people's mindset. According to her:

> *"You were manipulated, you thought that the country was really protected with all these bunkers. You were manipulated into believing in protecting the country and fighting for it, against the world powers. And of course it is ridiculous, but you were manipulated in your mind. And that mindset is still a bit there, they are still influenced and oppressed."* (interview Onelda Perndreca (30-40), unemployed).

Fatos Lubonja on the other hand, argued that also at the time, people were aware that the threats from outside came from Paranoia, and Kliton Gerxhani explained that the bunkerisation programme was not only a phobia, but also a tactic to make people afraid.

> *"For me it was clear paranoia. Yeah, everybody understood."* (expert interview Fatos Lubonja (68), heritage specialist, journalist and former prisoner).

> *"It was perhaps twofold, it was also because he was a sort of paranoid, and also perhaps it was a strategy of his, that no one should complain now, because we had economical problems, much bigger economical problems, so no one should complain because we are in a war situation. And that is why he built so many bunkers that were never used."* (Interview Kliton Gerxhani (translated from Dutch))

What appears most in literature, travel guides and informal conversations, is that the majority of the people regard the building of bunkers as a waste of money. This was also explained by the following respondents:

> *"When the topic comes [up] [...] people are generally sorry for all the waste of money and energy and years that we spent by being so paranoid and isolated. And the bunkers are some sort of an illustration of all the paranoia. I mean now it is hard to say, but I'm telling you, not more than fifteen years ago, which I remember very well, [...] there was really, literally, there was no place in Albania, even in the cities, where you turn your head, and there would be no bunker on the side in a fifty or a hundred metres. So [...] we were absolutely used to them being around."* (Interview Elton Caushi (42), owner of 'Albanian Trip' and memorabilia collector)

> *"Many people had no apartment. Or two or three families had one small apartment. […] So there was a lot more need to do this investment in apartments, than these 700.000 bunkers that were defending against America by Enver Hoxha."* (interview Kliton Gerxhani (40-50), director 'Albania Holidays' (translated from Dutch)

> *"How useless was it at the time with the military, how much money was wasted there. People were hungry. Yes, waste of money. I don't have information, but Albania was producing kalashnikovs and arms and guns, and they spent a lot of money. And people didn't know where the money went. […] it is stupid, you don't have to be a military expert to see that, you were so poor, you were so weak, how were you going to protect yourself against any type of superpower. Even the people who were doing it knew it was stupid, but it was just used to hypnotise people and manipulate them. And this is where you see that the majority of the population was not educated, it was already part of the tactics by the regime. The country was closed, they never went abroad so it was completely isolated. "Because when people are in a survival mode, you have power over them."* (interview Onelda Perndreca (30-40), unemployed)

Mr. Kongoli (50-60) of the Albanian national tourism agency also stated that the bunkers *"really served for nothing, also at the time"*. He felt strongly about this. He said that people used them for lovemaking and toilets. *"They were useless and costed lots of money."* In a previous e-mail, he had written: "*the history of bunkers was a big stupid thing into Albanian history".*

7.2 The destruction of bunkers

As explained in the background chapter, bunkers were destroyed in high pace in the 1990s and it is still happening today. The main reason for their destruction at that time was to sell the good-quality iron that was inside. Saimir Kristo estimated that one could earn 3000 euro's for the pure metal of one bunker. The scrap metal industry was very big. This still happens, but on a smaller scale.

> *"[…] you got a lot of people destroying bunkers to get the iron from them and sell it. So it's an artisanal bomb and they just (makes bomb noise) destroy it. I've been monitoring several bunkers nearby Tirana, […] I started in 2012, I finished in 2015, and half of the tunnels and bunkers that I have been monitoring were destroyed. […] Or reused, also. Some people put a gate in front and this is used [by] someone. But [destruction is] the situation in many places."* (expert interview Philippe Théou (30-40), zoologist and bat expert)

> *"There was a lot of illegal demolishing. They are stuffed with steel inside. And there is this metallurgical industry that we have in Elbasan and it's still functioning partly. And those guys are thirsty for any kind of metal which is available. From where all this interest in demolishing bunkers. [...] There were different methods of demolishing them. [...] In the illegal process, I never understood with what, but some chemicals, they would explode them. And actually the only way of getting rid of the concrete structure, was by exploding, and then going with big hammers and then taking the steel out. I'm talking about the small sized ones. [...] there are certain areas where*

they gather scrap metal, which means old cars, old washing machines, anything that is available, and bunkers were a very good source of metals in that sense. They say that [...] in a small bunker [...] you get metal for an equivalent of couple of thousand euro's, but I'm not a hundred percent sure [...]. And the big ones seem to have seven or eight thousand, which is a lot of good money." (Interview Elton Caushi (42), owner of 'Albanian Trip' and memorabilia collector)

Others destroy(ed) them because they were ugly, according to Fatos Lubonja (68). Resmije Allmeta (20-30) also mentioned that *"there were 17.000 bunkers in Albania. It is pointless to all be there"*. She said that if they are not maintained, there could be snakes or mice inside and polluting the atmosphere. She liked it when they were used for a good purpose, but found the small ones pointless. *"the small one in Tirana centre is just used for peeing. […] Imagine what they do with them in remote areas."* Many respondents indicated that there are simply too many, and that it is fine to 'do something' with the large ones, but that the small ones are not easy to use.

Today, their destruction mainly takes place to make room for large-scale urban development and construction projects. A clear example of this was the city of Dürres at the coast. Elton Caushi explained that after the Communist regime fell, one had to literally walk over many bunkers to reach the beach. After all, it was a strategic location for a possible attack. When I visited Dürres, I observed that they were all removed to make space for a modern boulevard. When asking travellers and locals who visited Dürres, none of them had seen any bunkers. Indeed few were left, except for a few small ones which lied abandoned and out of sight (figure 37 and 38). They could only be seen if one was searching for them. One formed a solid foundation for a staircase, one was visible at the top of the mountain and one was lying among the rocks below a parking space, surrounded by garbage. When I was photographing the latter, a young Albanian family with a small child were enjoying the view of

the sea. When they searched for the object of photography, the bunker, they did not seem to see it. This gave the impression that they did not even see bunkers as anything significant. The same observation was made for other by passers. The absence nor the presence of bunkers seemed to be noticed by anyone.

"Very few people think of them really [...]. They are used to them. We are so used to [them] that we don't even turn our eyes into them." (Interview Elton Caushi (42), owner of 'Albanian Trip' and memorabilia collector)

Figure 37 and 38: bunkers at the beachside of Dürres

Another reason for the destruction of bunkers is because they occupy farmland. This was explained by Elton Caushi:

> *In Gjirokastra for example, [bunkers were] occupying [...] a huge amount of surface which was farming land. And the peasants had interest in getting rid of it. So they were happy to see the big trucks [from the metallurgical industry] which came at some stage. [...] [Farmers themselves] used to stuff them with old tires, burn[ed] the tires, and then the concrete is easier to break with hammers. It was terrible, the pollution. I remember like seven or eight years ago when we were in hotels around the country at night, in certain locations you would hear like 'boumf', you know, explosions and eh, 'oh another bunker'. They also used to dig a hole next to them, and push them inside the hole and cover them, just to get rid of them, you know."*
> (Interview Elton Caushi (42), owner of 'Albanian Trip' and memorabilia collector)

This explanation gives an image of the frequency in which the bunkers were destroyed. Now this happens at a lower rate.

> *"The earlier government, which we had 8 years ago or so, they had kind of licensed the company which went with big hammers and demolished the big size bunkers as well as the small sized ones. I don't think it's still working, I think now the bunkers have become sort of public property and the government is not doing anything with them but if you do anything with them they will come and say 'no, don't do it'."*
> (Interview Elton Caushi (42), owner of 'Albanian Trip' and memorabilia collector)

Respondents were not unified on how many bunkers have disappeared. Some respondents say that there are only few left, others say that they are still everywhere:

> *"Bunkers when I was a kid were everywhere. In the neighbourhoods, everywhere. In the fields. Now there are less and less bunkers, you have new buildings everywhere. Like, Tirana is unrecognizable now, if you compare with 10 years, 20 years ago. So they disappeared. Now the most famous bunkers in Tirana are Bunk'art 1 and Bunk'art 2 which are museums, and you can go in remote areas you still see infantry bunkers spread in fields and in mountains, but not many, as most of them have disappeared now, so."* (Interview Edvin Parruca (43), television presenter and hostel employee)

> *"[Bunkers] are really everywhere, all over the country. Also in Dajti you have many, and behind the mountains also."* (interview employee (±30) tourist information office)

Although the iron is often sold for profit, some respondents also said that the destruction of (large) bunkers is very expensive. One of these respondents was Etleva Demollari, the director of the House of Leaves, who said that this expense is the reason that people have to live with them.

Respondents had differing feelings about the destruction of the bunkers. Some were appalled, some had mixed feelings and some did not care. Most people however agreed that nationally, they are a very low priority. A translator (70-80) for a newspaper laughed and said: *"if they are barriers for anything, they will be destroyed. If there is iron, they are destroyed."*

7.3 The preservation of bunkers

A group of respondents disagreed with the mass destruction of bunkers, and of heritage in general. There was a variety of reasons for this. Some mentioned that the bunkers are part of the Albanian history and thus identity, a zoologist explained that they are important for conservation of biodiversity and another respondent found them still valuable for protection of the country.

7.3.1 We have to remember

Some respondents found it important to keep the bunkers intact and to preserve them. Fatos Lubonja was against the mass destruction of bunkers:. *"Most bunkers have been taken out without any care. [...] we had to keep maybe not all of them, because there were 700.000. But we should keep those who are [...] in places where they could be part of our landscape. It is our memory, our history."*

(expert interview Fatos Lubonja (68), heritage specialist, journalist and former prisoner). Another respondent was Fatos Ayazi, who owned the former military property in Ndroq with tunnel bunkers and four large mushroom bunkers facing the sea at Durres (figure 39 and 40). He bought the property after the regime fell in an auction and decided to keep the bunkers and leave them untouched, instead of destroying them like many people did, he said. For him the bunkers were important because of their history. *"It is very important for us to transmit the history to the people after us, because this is our identity."* (translated by Resmije Allmeta). When many bunkers were destroyed in the 1900s for iron, he was upset and did not see the reason for their destruction. He stressed how good it was to remember history, and for other people, such as tourists, to learn about this history and this part of Albania.

Figure 39 and 40: the bunkers of Fatos Ayazi (Source: own photographs)

> *"There were people who came here who say 'hé we want to destroy the bunkers, and I said no you're not going to destroy these bunkers, I will keep it. And they [said] yes, but you can earn money destroying this and then selling for the iron and I said 'no, I don't want to destroy it. I really like it"* (Interview Fatos Ayazi (69), retired military man (translated from Albanian by Resmije Allmeta)

Saimir Kristo (31, Vice Dean faculty of Architecture at POLIS University, Tirana) was also strongly in favour of preservation, because *"it is part of our identity, it makes us unique and special."* He also

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called bunkers *"an incredible opportunity to market the country"*. Another respondent, Onelda Perndreca, said that she found it problematic that the traces of what happened during Communism are not preserved, but destroyed. *"They even destroyed the prisons, because they don't want to have people know that this happened."* She said that it is important to remember the traces of the past and to know what happened, but that people are denying it and destroying. *"It is like you [need to tell] people for the second time what happened. So I am for keeping the traces, not for destroying."* Something similar was stated by Philippe Théou, a French zoologist who has been living in Tirana for eight years, and Fatos Lubonja.

> *"I'm French, I'm from Brittany, […] where Nazis build these huge blokkos for the wall of Atlantic. I didn't see World War II in life, I was not there, I was not born. But the fact that this blokkos are still there, it's for me very important to understand how it could have been, you know, in this situation. I'm from Loréans, which was central part of the nazi u-boot scheme. So, [I was] very much impacted. And seeing all these blokkos around help to remember what it was. And you know, saying 'these things happened'. This is real, you know, and especially in the world now, [with] fake news and everything, [it's very important to see]. […] Keeping these bunkers is very important for Albanians, to remember. And for next generations because the Albanians now they [remember Communism], but what [is to] happen in 30 years? So, this is very important. What they have done with this Bunk'art is a first step but very interesting."* (expert interview Philippe Théou (30-40), zoologist and bat expert)

> *"I met bunkers when I was released, because bunkers have been built when I was in prison. […] So my contact with bunkers was after my release and [they were] strange creatures, somehow, there, but still I thought that they were important to be kept. So I have no emotions, like emotions of the stadium when I was a child, I was going with my father there and then, now they destroyed my, the stadium, the place of my memories, of many parts of Tirana. And this is not my link with bunkers like that. I don't think that even other people felt a sort of link because they were like tumours, grown up for a purpose, an ideological military purpose, stupid purpose, so people didn't like them in my view. Even before. But then you have them, and I think you need to keep them because of the history, and as a testimony. And then they becoming part of the landscape, they are part of your life. So in this way I think it. So if I see a bunker which is now taken off, I feel bad."* (expert interview Fatos Lubonja (68), heritage specialist, journalist and former prisoner)

7.3.2 Bunkers are gaining new meanings
Aside from a historical reasoning for preservation, new uses and meanings of bunkers are seen in the most unexpected places and creative ways. They are valuable in light of biodiversity conservation, they could still play a role in defending the country, they are functional and for some, even profitable.

7.3.2.1 Bunkers for biodiversity
Philippe Théou (30-40), a zoologist and bat expert, explained the functionality of bunkers when it comes to biodiversity conservation. They are used as micro-habitats by all kinds of species: snakes,

birds such as owls and swallows. Spiders and vertebrates use it a lot and Philippe also mentioned seeing badgers using them as a home, and once also a wolf or a big dog. However, big mushroom bunkers and tunnel bunkers in fact play an important role in the conservancy of bats, since the omnipresence of bunkers creates a network. They enable Philippe as a researcher to monitor different places and see how they are used throughout the year by bats. Moreover, in Western Albania, the bunkers form an alternative shelter instead of caves where there is a lack of karstik, a geological formation in which many caves can be found. This lack of caves in the west of the country is compromised by bunkers: *"the bunkers there, they are very useful for this species because they allow them to have the same kind of habitat [as] a cave."* There are also rare species of bats inside, he explained, which can be found in bunkers in for example Durres, the harbour city. He laughed and said that they are thus useful in scientific terms, but also for the idea of 'communication', as he called it: *"these places were used to make the war, prepare the war, [...] and now it's used for biodiversity, it's a very hippy sentence that is reality, you know. No gun, and more birds, basically."*

> *"If I was a snake, I would love to have a bunker. Because they're humid and they're cool, and they have the same temperature, actually. So it's nice to sit outside. A reptile loves the sun, warm up, and then go inside if it's too hot outside which they don't always like. You go inside and it's great. You know, same for tortoises and you know, other reptiles, as well."* (Interview Elton Caushi (42), owner of 'Albanian Trip' and memorabilia collector)

According to Philippe, now bunkers are considered habitats for protected species, which are legally protected. This is both for maternal colonies and for migration stock, he said. One day one can find not even one bat in a bunker, the next day there are three hundred. Because it is a migration stop, part of a greater network. Unfortunately however, he explained, this protection by law is only on paper and no one is going to check whether it is maintained. In practice, these bunker habitations are subjected to many threats. According to Philippe, local inhabitants are aware that bunkers are full of bats, also the younger generation, some of who use the bunker for privacy: "*you see the stories on internet, [...] saying [...] 'I went with this girl, we went in the bunker, and we [chased] the bats away and we stay alone the night'. And I see the visible (haha) bits of trash from these places. Condoms everywhere in the tunnels. Because that is also a use of bunkers, especially nearby Tirana. In terms of sociology.*"

Another danger in this phenomenon that he mentioned is that bunkers are very often used as dumpsites. When they are full, people burn the waste. This is an enormous threat for 'bunker bats', together with the destruction of bunkers and a lack of maintenance. When they get overgrown, bats cannot enter anymore.

7.3.2.2 They could still protect

During the war between Serbia and Kosovo, most Kosovars came to Albania, where they were housed by many Albanians, where they had space. Fatos Ayazi and his wife Resmije did the same. Here, as in more cases, Kosovars found accommodation in the bunkers. According to Fatos, 1800 Kosovars have been staying there over time (with sleeping bags and tents). *"Bunkers were very important in Albania, they really served a purpose. [They] were used for protection and attack in case of war. [...] even when we didn't have any war, it really was a helping thing for people and there was no need for people to destroy them"* (translated by Resmije Allmeta). He stressed that even now,

bunkers are a good protection and should be kept. His background in the military made him see the value of this protection: *"[whether] you need it or not, it is good to have it"* (translated by Resmije Allmeta). Now, he continued, people mostly go to see bunkers out of curiosity and stay there for camping, for example. He called this historical tourism. Currently, he is making the bunkers into a tourist attraction. He said that many people from the ministry of culture come here, people from Kosovo and tourists. People come here to do camping. They turn the bunkers into rooms for sleeping.

7.3.2.3 Gaining new meanings: bunkers are useful

Bunkers seem to be of practical use to many Albanians, especially on the countryside. During observations and site visits, many different uses for them have been seen. It seemed that although the majority of bunkers lies abandoned in the landscape, they are also socially integrated in many places and ways. A distinction could be made between small mushroom bunkers and large mushrooms/tunnel bunkers. The latter were easier to find purposes for, simply because they are more spacious, but also uses for smaller bunkers have been recognised.

A clear example of practical use of a bunker was observed on Hajdar Kuçi's farm in Marikaj. On the property are five large tunnel bunkers. Some of them were used for storage of agricultural tools and as a wine cellar, and one was a goat shelter (figure 41 an 42). When speaking with the landlady (with a translator), she explained that the tunnel was very convenient for the goats, because in the winter it keeps them warm and in the summertime it is cool inside. Also for the wine it is efficient because it needs a fixed temperature. In summer, they also use it for catering because they organize dinners for all kind of groups. She was very aware of the history of the property. There were multiple other respondents have indicated that in the countryside, bunkers are very often used for storage of potatoes or tools or are shelters for sheep, chicken or cows. A few respondents have also indicated that bunkers are used to grow mushrooms inside, because of the dark and humid conditions.

Figure 41 and 42: bunker tunnels used for goats and storage at Hajdar Kuçi's farm in Marikaj (Source: own photographs)

In Tale, a small beach village north of Tirana, a row of four large mushroom bunkers on a platform lie alongside the main road to the village (figure 43 and 44). Two of them were filled with hay, and two with reed parasols for the summer. The bunkers were spectacular and simultaneously seemingly random. Next to them, below the platform on which the large ones stood, lied three small mushroom bunkers in the lagoon (figure 45). Their orientation was strange: one was faced towards

another one. It reflected something that was mentioned by a tourguide of Tirana (40-50): that there were so many that at a certain point soldiers did not know where to put them anymore. According to him, they cared little about it: *"we pretend to work, you pretend to pay".* The nearby beach and its restaurants were clearly more popular than the enormous bunkers, despite their impressive presence just alongside the road. There was no sign, it was not considered 'heritage' or an attraction in any kind of way. They were just there, used for storage.

Figure 43 (left): the bunkers of Tale. Figure 44 (bottom): the location of the bunkers. Figure 45 (top): Small bunkers in the lagoon (Source: own photographs).

The large cemetery of Sharres in the south of Tirana had a large mushroom bunker right at the entrance (figure 46). A few smaller bunkers that were lying among the graves were completely ignored and integrated by the landscape. Next to the bunker there were many little stands where they sold (primarily plastic) flowers. The bunker itself was attached to a small platform where a group of men was sitting and talking (perhaps employees taking a pause). Since there was no translator present, it was not possible to interview anyone. However, from observations it seemed that no one had eye for the bunker at all. Some materials were leaning against it however, a ladder and some metal fences. The entrance was inaccessible, and the inside was likely filled with plants and/or bats. The bunker seemed to be purely functional. It was socially integrated in the landscape, without its former Communist significance. Philippe Théou did a similar observation with local farmers, who he encounters a lot. *"We are talking about useful now. I don't think there is this historical part from farmers, I mean, at least the ones that I met."* On a closer look, more small mushroom bunkers were included in the cemetery (figure 47 and 48). One was used as part of the steps of the path.

Further down the road of Sharres cemetery, on the opposite side, stood a similar bunker in a private garden (figure 49). It reminded of the odd division of land less than thirty years ago: how people ended up with properties with bunkers on them. It was secluded by a large gate but seemed to be used for private storage. There was a wooden constellation with wine ranks growing over it, which gave the impression that it was only visible because it was winter. Likely, in summer, the concrete is hidden.

Figure 46-49: large and small bunker at Sharres cemetery. Figure 50: large mushroom bunker in private garden)
(Source: own photographs)

Resmije Allmeta remembered that there were two small bunkers in the village where she grew up, not far from Tirana. She did not care about bunkers at all, she said, but remembered that as a child she found them scary and weird, and would never enter in one that was not close to home. "*You never know what's inside*". However, her neighbours had a bunker which they cleaned, painted white and decorated with a little table inside, so that the children could play in it. The other bunker lied upside down and was always filled with water, she said. She and her brother would play and swim in it. Her sister, who was a few years older, once met a boy in a bunker to kiss. These bunkers are now destroyed, but it gives a child's perspective of the uses of bunkers.

Many other uses of bunkers were mentioned. Elton Caushi explained that in Durres, there are two bunkers that are now used as the kitchen of a restaurant. In Lin, a small village on the border of lake Ohrid, a special use was found for a small mushroom bunker. When climbing up the hill, and walking to the very edge, a small eroded bunker is visible. One only sees it when searching for it. Inside has been made a little chapel, that seemed to be used still. (figure 50 and 51). In the village of Marikaj, a small mushroom bunker stood within a fenced garden and was used as doghouse (figure 52). Elton Caushi indicated that near Gjirokastra, where there used to be a factory where the bunkers were built, some surrounding inhabitants have water deposits in the shape of bunkers turned upside down. Two respondents argued that in larger bunkers in certain places in Albania, homeless or disadvantaged people live inside them.

Figure 50 and 51: the bunker chapel in Lin. Figure 52: small private mushroom bunker, functioning as doghouse
(Sources: own photographs)

In certain ways, bunkers have become socially integrated. It is a remarkable phenomenon in which the difficult heritage receives new meanings, sometimes even with positive affiliations. They invite biodiversity, they are useful and they attract foreigners and economic opportunities (as will be explained in the next section. In a documentary Elian Stefa and Gyler Mydyti called 'concrete mushrooms', the authors speak of 'coexistence' when using the buildings for new purposes. Eaton and roshi (2014) speak of 'Resignification'.

Aside from this variety of (new) purposes, we also see that the majority of bunkers is abandoned and ignored. One can see them alongside roads and creeks, in spaces for entertainment, near beaches and in fields and gardens (figure 53-59). Many small bunkers are paved into the street

or pavement or dug into the ground in parks or fields. The entrances are often covered. They have been integrated with the landscape. In most cases, bunkers were observed (and referred to) as 'just objects', which do not mean much (anymore). People are used to them and have always seen them.

Figure 53-59: mushroom bunkers, lying abandoned in different locations in Albania (sources: own photographs)

Nevertheless, even these bunkers seem to have particular purposes. Many bunkers (that can be entered) are used as toilets. Others are covered in graffiti or painted on purpose to make them look nice. Larger bunkers and tunnels, as mentioned, are often used for lovemaking by youth with little privacy at home. Many respondents said this happened a lot during Communism, when people had a lack of living space. However, it is still common. Philippe Théou (30-40, zoologist) explained that many bunkers nearby villages are used for waste deposits. *"When it's full, [they] just burn [the waste]. […] the bunker itself resists. But they burn the waste that they are putting there. so they burn and everything is dark and after they put again, without talking about the air pollution and everything."*

In one observed case a bunker tunnel was used for a common cause. It is a tunnel under the castle of Gjirokastër (figure 60 and 61). Being built as a bunker tunnel, it is now a common passageway to reach the other side of the city.

Figure 60 and 61: bunker tunnel as a passageway in Gjirokastër Source: own photographs)

7.3.2.4 Gaining new meanings: bunkers are profitable

Bunkers in the Albanian landscape are becoming iconic. It has become one of the 'must sees' in visiting Albania, and considered part of the country's architecture. In the Tirana Backpackers hostel, photographs of Albanian scenery, landscapes and street life were hanging in frames on the wall to give an impression of the country. They included several bunkers. As explained in the previous chapter, there is a segment of tourism that is interested in 'dark history'. Bunkers are of great interest to foreign travellers. They like to visit them and several online articles and have been written on this topic, by journalists, the BBC, and travellers. Sidonja Manushi said that *"if you ask a foreigner [abroad] about Albania, all they know is the bunker story."* Near Saranda, a coastal city in the south of Albania, there is a 'bunker hiking tour' according to mr. Kongoli (50-60) of the Albanian national tourism agency, set up by British tourists. According to Elton Caushi, bunkers are also a popular topic amongst photographers and documentary makers. This interest of tourists was also observed while participating in the 'free walking tour' of Tirana, which passed all city highlights and several components of Albanian life. When we walked to the memorial park with the art installation, all tourists became strikingly interested in seeing the bunker. It was something most of them had heard about and they found it interesting and fun, some made pictures or had pictures made of themselves in the bunker. In an informal interview, one traveller said that when she was travelling in the south coast, she played a game with others of 'who sees another bunker'. Interest in bunkers was also shown through the fact that in certain areas people indicated them on maps.me, an open source map.

Elton Caushi from Albanian Trip organises a bunker tour, which is quite popular among tourists. *"[…] With the company for example we do something out of the bunkers, we run this bunkers and beaches tour, [...] and it's one of our best sellers*." (Interview Elton Caushi (42), owner of 'Albanian Trip' and memorabilia collector)

The souvenir market has responded to this foreign interest in bunkers. They seem to have been chosen as a marketing symbol since foreigners immediately recognise them and they are regarded as the "*Quintessential (and ubiquitous) symbol of Albanian Communism"* (Iacono 2018, 8). This goes hand in hand with the 'westernisation' of Albania, and the capitalist impact that has been exploding since the fall of Communism. Bunker souvenirs were seen in every touristic area that was visited during the fieldwork, including different markets and shops in Tirana, Berat and Gjirokastër. Souvenir

shops or stands sell bunker magnets, bunker postcards, bunker ashtrays and bunker penholders (figure 62-64). They are very popular.

Figure 62-64: bunker souvenirs (Source: own photographs)

A phenomenon that has become successful in the last few years, is of an economic nature. Bunkers are re-used for contemporary purposes, often for tourism. Initiative takers or land owners transform the concrete mushrooms into restaurants, cafés, hostels, shops and even a tattoo parlour. Iacono (2018) refers to this process as the *'heritagisation of Communism'*: the contested buildings have an economic potential. This process of 'heritagisation' is significant, since it took many years before national discussions on the 'heritage' of Communism could be held at all, as shown in the previous two chapters. It could be seen as a way to 'neutralise the past', by involving them in modern-day society.

Especially on beaches, there are multiple cases where large mushroom and tunnel bunkers have been transformed into restaurants. At Kepi I Rodonit for example, a small peninsula 30 km north of Tirana as the crow flies, the so-called 'bunker beach' has many small bunkers on and next to the sand (figure 65), but also a few small tunnel bunkers that lead into the hill. Some of them are used for storage, and one of them is a restaurant (figure 66). Respondents also confirmed this phenomenon at beaches down the coastline, in Qerret (below Durres), and at different places along the south coast. Many of the respondents enjoyed the reuse of bunkers. Some described it as 'nice', 'good', *" like the fact that they have somehow recycled the bunker"* (Interview Elton Caushi (42), owner of 'Albanian Trip' and memorabilia collector). One respondent did not like it, he wanted

Figure 65 (right, top): mushroom bunkers at 'bunker beach', Kepi I Rodonit.
Figure 66 (bottom): bunker restaurant on the same beach (Source: own photographs)

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communist heritage to stay the way it is, and make it a place where people can learn what happened there instead of commercializing it:

> "*I can use this for my purpose to make a personal profit'. So I build something, I make it a restaurant, like we make with castles. Castles are restaurants, you know. It's the same, this mentality. […] I don't know if someone uses bunkers for businesses. But maybe someone make[s] it a very interesting hotel. This I cannot agree.*" (expert interview Fatos Lubonja (68), heritage specialist, journalist and former prisoner)

There also have been several small initiatives to turn bunkers into hotels or bed and breakfasts. This is aimed on tourism who find this an enjoyable experience, but also to provide an economic opportunity for locals and to preserve the Communist monuments. These however are small scale initiatives, because bunkers often lie in remote areas and are thus logistically problematic (Mirian from CHWB Albania). One project was called 'Concrete Mushrooms' (Stefa and Mydyti 2009). It is a book that proposes a step by step guide to transform abandoned bunkers. Another project, which is probably the most well-known, was called the 'Bed & Bunker', which was an effort to transform and design one of the bunkers in Tale[12] into a bed and breakfast for tourists. It was a collaboration between students and professors from both the Polis University of Tirana and the Hochschule in Mainz (Germany). Unfortunately, it did not succeed. This was partly because of problems of ownership (explained in the next section), which was divided amongst the government and the land owner. Neither were interested to take the project further, Saimir explained. It is now converted into a barn to store hay, to his disappointment (figure 67). Despite the failure of the project, Saimir Kristo still sees much potential in bunkers:

> "*The structure is part of our identity, we have so many of them, and you can use them for so many reasons. You can theme, trademark the whole experience of staying in*

> *Albania with a, as a backpacker, use the bunker you know. and no one else can have this kind of experience. Not in this extent. Why not? I would love to go in, even in Albania, and live in bunkers. Because they are in amazing locations. That's guaranteed. They are perfect.*" (expert interview Saimir Kristo (31), Vice Dean faculty of Architecture at POLIS University, Tirana)

Figure 67: The former 'bed and bunker' project, now a storage for hay (Source: own photograph)

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[12] Tale is a village between Tirana and Shkoder in the North, at the beach. A spectacular row of four large mushroom bunkers is located here (see figure 44-46 on page 92).

He explained that his university is trying many different experiments with transforming them, to target and counteract the their destruction. One was the bed&bunker project, another was to

convert a large mushroom-shaped bunker into a religious sanctuary for all religions. He saw a symbolic connection between the religions in the shape of the bunker:

> *"When I think about mosques and I think about churches, the only common thing is a dome, and a bunker also has a dome. [...] And the Jews of course have the synagogues and the catacombs, the underground structures of the bunkers, so they have somehow link with that."* (expert interview Saimir Kristo (31), Vice Dean faculty of Architecture at POLIS University, Tirana)

They also wanted to convert a refuge bunker under the tennis court of the Rogner hotel into a 'cinema film club'. They hope that these initiatives will be inspiring and will spread.

7.3.3 Ownership issues

The subject of bunkers unavoidably lands upon the problematic topics of privatisation and land ownership. It is not always clear who legally owns the Albanian bunkers, whether they are private, public or military property. During the regime, all land was state-owned. After the '90s, land ownership became problematic. Saimir Kristo explained that original owners of land from before the 1940's wanted to go back to their land, but because of the closure of inside migration, people started to occupy other people's land in different places. After all, everyone moved from the rural areas to the urban areas. He explained that the government lost control of the process of who is building where and on what land. *"So there, the land, the properties, is a holy discussion you know. It's [a] very controversial discussion to talk about land ownership in Albania."* (expert interview Saimir Kristo (31), Vice Dean faculty of Architecture at POLIS University, Tirana). The bunkers, which were everywhere, were divided together with the properties. That is the reason that now, they can be seen in seemingly random locations: backyards, gardens, in graveyards, playgrounds and parks (their meaning and uses in these locations will be explained in the next section). When asked, most respondents argued that the bunkers officially still belong to the ministry of defence. However, there are many cases in which this has become a grey area. On private land for example, officially the bunker is owned by the ministry of defence, but the land belongs to the private owner. *"So you got bunkers with private owners"* (Saimir Kristo, 31). Fatos Ayazi (69), the owner of a property in Ndroq (a small village close to Tirana), has multiple large bunkers on his property. During the regime, it was a military area where he worked. When democracy came, he bought the property in an auction by the government. He was very sure: the bunkers are his now, because they are in the property that he bought. *"the government has no deal here."* (Interview Fatos Ayazi, translated by Remije Allmeta)

Saimir Kristo explained that in the case of the bed and bunker project, the owner of the bunker is the ministry of defence, but to use the bunker, the responsible is the ministry of culture, *"[because they are] part of our identity somehow now"*. This means that they had to negotiate between three parties to convert the bunker. This is very complicated.

The matter of ownership of bunkers on paper was unclear, and most respondents indicated not to be sure about this. On the ground however, it seemed that the owner of the ground has the right to use it, as also confirmed by Philippe Théou. *"Because the ministry will never go on the field and say 'by the way, this is ours.' That's too much work for them"* (expert interview Philippe Théou (30-40),

zoologist and bat expert). Something similar was explained by Mirian from Cultural Heritage without Borders (CHWB) Albania:

> "As soon as the system changed there were a series of laws that consisted in privatizing [land]. [...] But the way it was done, it ended up creating a myriad of small ownerships, [huge properties] divided into many smaller ownerships. [...] I don't think [the bunkers] were ever privatized because these are military strategic assets, and they should be belonging still to the ministry of defence. But then, why they do allow people to destroy them, that is another question, since they are public assets. **[...]** I think there are policies but they don't have any means to amend those policies. Law enforcement you know in Albania is [a] public problem. You have good quality laws, you have very contemporary legislation for [more or] less everything, but when it comes to enforcing the law, its difficult. Because of corruption, because of undermanned state institutions, you know, lack of capacity, and, yeah. Very different sets of problems, if I may say." (Interview Mirian (30-40) from CHWB Albania)

7.4 An outdated subject?

Despite the many different uses, efforts and phenomena described above, for the majority of the respondents the bunkers were not an important issue. Some people found them interesting, or liked them because they attract tourists. The majority however, regards them as a subject of the past that is no longer relevant. It related to the subject of the disconnection with heritage. Sidonja Manushi (20-30, journalist) argued that the subject of Communism is touched upon more frequently than its relation to heritage. She said that Communism still is a painful subject, but bunkers not anymore. For the majority, they are no longer seen as a reminder of a painful past (despite the exceptions that have been mentioned earlier). Perhaps because they are so obvious in the landscape, they have become used to their presence and no longer reflect a traumatic history. When speaking of bunkers with respondents, the subject often transferred to more present concerns, rather than communism or the meaning of the mushroom shaped structures.

> "The foreigners are still obsessed with the bunkers, they go everywhere to find [them]. For me it's like a past story. I don't know. we spend a lot of money on that, on the defence strategy during the cold war, but then, who didn't spend a lot of money in those years? People created atomic bombs, they stockpiled them somewhere and now don't know what to do with those things. We had the bunkers. Yeah but I mean. It's finished now. [...] It's not a topic anymore in Albania, no. No. The way how we will use the public money, which involves also the bunkers, is still a topic. Because in that time, after the change we said with the money for all these bunkers we could have improved the life of the people. But aren't we doing the same conversation now? The same thing." (Interview Edvin Parruca (43), television presenter and hostel employee)

While travelling to some rural and some urban places, the observation was made that there were two kinds of 'not caring' about bunkers. Some people were 'fed up' with it, and tired of the subject. Others just were so used to them that they don't even notice them anymore.

The first is illustrated by an informal interview in Gjirokastër with a guide of the cold war

tunnel. He was surprised by my interest in bunkers. He explained that people are 'fed up' with bunkers, that 'they want to move away from it' and 'don't like to talk about it too much anymore'. Most of the locals did not even visit the tunnel when it opened. The visitors almost exclusively exist of tourists, he said. For him bunkers were interesting because it is his job, but he understood why people did not want to speak of them anymore. Other reactions that were seen towards the subject of bunkers were an ironic smile, a sigh, or an similar gesture. After 1991, people became fed up with the past and it became an unpopular subject. In Tirana this reaction also happened, but was not as common as in Gjirokastër. According to Kliton Gerxhani:

> "When we became a democracy in 1990, everybody hated talking about bunkers, about Enver Hoxha, about Communism. […] we hated [it] because it was done by [one of our own]. And that is why everyone had a sort of allergy against him, even though the old generation still respects what he did. […] Now we are a bit cooler [and it is more common to speak of it]." (interview Kliton Gerxhani (40-50), director 'Albania Holidays' (translated from Dutch).

The second is illustrated by the interview with Onelda Perndreca. She argued that people are just used to the bunkers: it is so normal that they are around:

> "When foreigners come to Albania and are so interested about Communism and the bunkers, many people are a bit like 'why is that interesting', of course because they have never seen anything else". (interview Onelda Perndreca (30-40), unemployed)

> "I never met people just seeing the bunkers and say [they hate them]. But just, they do not care about it. […] It is normal for them. It's there. [The] people that do not like them, already destroyed [them]." (expert interview Philippe Théou (30-40), zoologist and bat expert)

An employee (± 30) of the tourist information office argued that the bunkers lie as a reminder of what happened. That they are painful to see for former prisoners, but for "*everyone else it is the same whether they are there or not*". This indicated that the bunkers have become normalised. According to him, there is no real discussion about what to do with them. People know about them, also about the underground tunnels, but it is "*not painful, but [people are] just not interested. They need to talk about money, politics and other problems. Those who were born after the 1990s have nothing with the buildings (bunkers and buildings). Just leave them there. We don't want them to be destroyed or to become something else. It is just buildings: they do not speak in favour of everything, they are empty.*" (Employee (±30) tourist information office). Indeed, in three informal conversations with youth under the age of twenty, the topic of bunkers did not seem to be of any interest. During an observation in a bus, after explaining the reason for photographing bunkers along the road, a girl of averagely 18 years old nodded politely with the subject but was not interested at all. She kept pointing at views, but when bunkers passed, she did not even seem to see them.

As described in the previous section, many people used to believe that they truly protected the country. A translator for a newspaper (70-80) added the perspective that now nobody worries about bunkers anymore because Albania is a member of NATO. If something happens, other countries will protect them now.

Many of the respondents added that they thought that there were too many bunkers. That some were good to be kept in particular locations, but that now, there are just too many, especially of the small ones, which are harder to find a purpose for.

7.5 Discussing the bunkers of Albania

This final empirical chapter discussed the role of the former Communist bunkers in contemporary society and the memory of Communism. The goal was to answer sub question three: *How do contemporary Albanians socially interact with and relate to the remaining bunkers?* The previous sections described the answer, by studying why bunkers are considered contested cultural heritage, why bunkers are destroyed and why they are preserved, what ownership issues exist and whether bunkers are an outdated subject. In the previous two chapters, it was seen that there is no common narrative about Communism that is systematically taught in schools. The few narratives that are there are often one-dimensional and in the case of some of the largest museums of Tirana, follow a particular 'authorised heritage discourse' (Iacono 2018) of framing the Communist memory in trauma and terror. This is a discourse that moves against the historic disconnection of youth. Simultaneously, an upcoming tourism trend in Albania is the visiting of 'dark' heritage of Communism. Bunkers play a large role in this, and in the souvenir industry that targets the communist past bunker merchandise is popular. Tourist experiences include bunker tours, the visit of Bunk'art or visiting bunkers for the 'dark tourism' experience.

No simple answer can be given as to what bunkers represent to Albanians. However, a variety of phenomena has become clear. The historical disconnection of youth that was seen in chapter 5 goes hand in hand with the destruction and neglect of bunkers, since for many people they are an item of the past, they are 'just an object', there are too many or they are simply not seen anymore, because people have always seen them around and are used to them. Simultaneously, there was also a group that did find them meaningful, both negatively and positively. Respondents indicated that the preservation of bunkers was important to them, because they are useful, because they are part of the Albanian identity, because they remind us of what has happened and it helps to explain it to others. They are also profitable: they turn into small businesses for reasons of profit, or projects for reconciliation or maintaining of collective heritage.

Interestingly, there was widespread disagreement on how many bunkers were built, but also on how many there are left. Some say they are still everywhere, others say they have mostly disappeared. Perhaps this is part of the power of forgetting (lowenthal 1985), which has now been recognised in all three empirical chapters. The narrative on the reason of the building of the bunkers however was rather clear: the paranoia (and for some also the strategy) of Hoxha. There was little disagreement about this. There was only some disagreement whether they were a waste of money or not, but most respondents thought the latter.

Overall, bunkers seem to be a topic of relatively low interest for many people. That many bunkers stand in Albania, also in the environment of Tirana, was something that was known to many respondents. However, the locations visited during this research were only known by a few. Nevertheless, they play a role in the malleable past and in the creation of narratives on the history of communism. Their destruction, neglect and preservation all tell a story about the perception of importance of the communist history, which has a low priority in light of contemporary

developments in the country. the 'normalisation' of bunkers are in line with the placing of the subject to the background. It is happening automatically since there is no prioritised attention for the subject of communism as a whole. The bunkers tell a story in the transition away from Communism: they have become a subject of the past (for the majority), and people want to move on. Those who do find them important, are aware of their role in educating about the past. Bunkers are the most clear evidence in Albania that "*The spoils of history lie all around us*" (Lowenthal 1998, xvi). Even though many respondents 'did not care' about them, they all knew they were there.

That protests rise when bunkers are built in the city (the art installation and Bunk'art 2) says something about the way people link bunkers to the current government, and indirectly also to Communism (people are aware of the transition of the Party of Labour of Albania into the current socialist party). Most respondents were very dissatisfied with the current politicians that were involved in the Communist regime thirty years ago, as was seen in the previous chapter. Originally, the bunkers were part of propaganda ideology. So they were used as part of 'nationalistic credos', as mentioned by Lowenthal (1998). Now, they still form a sort of propaganda by the current government in the eyes of some. The 'heritagisation' (Iacono 2018) of bunkers is for most people therefore a rather modern affiliation with the government.

For a smaller group the bunkers have a historical meaning, namely the formerly persecuted. The memory of traumatic events keeps the past in the present (Lowenthal 1985) and for some of them, this memory is triggered by the presence of bunkers in the (for some) everyday landscape. So on the one side they form or scar the landscape, on the other side people do not seem to see care about them. In the region of Tirana, the most common observation was that people find the bunkers normal and don't even always see them anymore. This 'normalisation' of the presence of bunkers in the landscape contributes to the phenomenon that communism is becoming less of an item, to the unhappiness of some.

Similarly to the Communist heritage in the previous chapter, a difference of age was seen in the opinions about bunkers. *"For youngsters, the past is what happened to other people. Adolescents are likely to rebel against an immediate past and perhaps idealize a past beyond their memories. Middle-aged people tend to put the past off to one side. The elderly- and there are more of us all the time- tend to sift through memories, increasingly as they age, often as a means of connecting a blurring present with increasingly vivid memories of a remote past."* (Mondale 1994, 20). This was recognised to some extent.

Regardless of the feelings and opinions about bunkers, they are used in many different ways. The majority of bunkers lies abandoned, but in many places they are also socially integrated. In public spaces they are used as dumpsites, toilets, private spaces for lovemaking and more. In the private sphere, all kinds of innovative and creative uses have been observed during site visits in the surroundings of Tirana. What was said about the Piramida by Iacono and Këlliçi, that *"historical buildings [...] collect fragments of personal histories that cannot be pigeonholed into an all-encompassing category of traumatic memory."* (Iacono and Këlliçi 2015, 112), has only been seen on a small scale about bunkers. Those who found the preservation important gave reasons such as: they are our history, they can protect us, they are our heritage, but did not have 'fond memories' as Iacono and Këlliçi saw at the Piramida. However, also with bunkers many contemporary uses are seen such as observed at the Piramida during this research. They are used for all kinds of

contemporary purposes and are thus re-signified (Eaton and Roshi 2014). On a small scale, this has happened through business and projects, and on a large scale through private use.

The destruction of bunkers might know many causes. However, one of the respondents mentioned that those who didn't like the bunkers, have already destroyed them. It is likely that the bunkers that are being destroyed now, 28 years later, are mainly destroyed because of practical reasons. Their destruction nowadays is thus not "to *forget or obliterate a malign or traumatic heritage"* (Lowenthal 1985, xx) of individuals*.* The lack of policy however about their management, destruction or protection however could be a strategy of forgetting.

Nostalgia was seen in the first empirical chapter, of the memory of Communism in general, and a little bit in the second: Fatos Lubonja mentions his 'Nostalgia of Bitterness', and the subject of collective heritage and the affiliation of people towards it is discussed. This sentiment of nostalgia, in which people embrace imagined pasts (Lowenthal 1985), is not seen in relation to bunkers. it seems that when it comes to Communist memory, bunkers are a little bit more distanced from its historical significance. *"We remould the past for reasons that mirror the benefits"* (Lowenthal 1985, xxiii). The thought that is widely seen is that since there are so many, their abandonment or destruction is not of importance. Also, contemporary problems and concerns make them a low priority. At this moment, the forgetting of them seems to be the benefit.

8. Conclusion and Discussion

At the end of each empirical chapter, concluding remarks were given with a connection to the theory described in chapter 2. In this final chapter these will be brought together and the main research question will be answered. Below follows the conclusion, the discussion and a small section with some ideas for further research.

8.1 Conclusion

The Albanian landscape is filled with bunkers from a contested communist past. Forty years ago, Albania was collectively fortified against an enemy that never came. These bunkers are now lying in the landscape as contested, complicated objects. Many people consider them to have been a waste of money, because there was a large economic crisis after Albania broke with its last ally, China. People were suffering from starvation and insufficient housing opportunities. At the time however, many people believed it was a necessary precaution against the threatening war, something that the dictator, Enver Hoxha, inserted in their minds. This research was set up to study these bunkers in Albania and their role in contemporary society, in light of the relatively recent transition towards democracy. The main research question is the following: *Given the difficult relationship with their Communist past, how do contemporary Albanians relate to the remaining bunkers as part of the contested cultural heritage from this period?*

During the fieldwork, it became clear that when studying and discussing the topic of bunkers, it is unavoidable to land upon larger themes such as the communist memory in general, other communist heritage and contemporary problems in society. Therefore, these four topics have been brought together in this thesis. Since the interviews were of an unstructured/semi-structured nature, the respondents had the freedom to talk about that what they found important and could make free associations. Bunkers were never the sole topic of any interview. Conversation always landed on contemporary issues, which varied from the government's attitude towards heritage protection, the historical disconnection of youth, the inequality and poverty in Albania, the waste problem or other issues. Often it landed upon the topic of Communism, but not always. It seemed that bunkers are a little bit distanced from their historical significance. All respondents knew they were part of the bunkerisation programme of Enver Hoxha, and they were was built because of his paranoia or strategy. But what to do with them now, whether they are important or not, how many there are left and who legally owns them, were topics that varied greatly within people's responses. Also, the contemporary uses and meanings of bunkers varied. Most of the respondents did not find them important. Others indicated that they liked the fact that the monuments can teach others what happened in the past. For some, the neglect of Communist heritage was a crime, or a way for the current government to "*forget or obliterate a malign or traumatic heritage*" (Lowenthal 1985).

The bunkers of Albania are only a segment of the Communist heritage that is left, which also includes museum collections, statues, former prisons and many buildings in the city that are used for contemporary purposes (such as living). Since a few years, discussions on the meaning of Communism and its affiliated heritage are increasing, influenced by museum exhibitions on the subject. This is happening on a slow pace because the subject has never been nationally addressed. The scattered bunkers throughout the country are not a big item of discussion, despite their common presence in the everyday landscape of many Albanians. Officially, they are owned by the ministry of

defence, but in practice they are owned by the owners of the land they stand on or used as dumpsites, toilets or as a source of iron when they stand on public property. Generally, they are not being maintained or controlled and there is no active policy about them. Therefore, we see that many different kind of (individual) interactions have been developed with them over time. They have become restaurants, shops, goat shelters, storages, doghouses, museums, wine cellars, campsites, refugee shelters and much more. Although a majority of the population is not concerned with them, others find them interesting and part of their national identity.

For most Albanians, Communism was a very hard time. Throughout the fieldwork, many kinds of memories were heard, some were positive or spoke of a good childhood, others were traumatic or spoke of oppression and paranoia. In many regards, this period of time influences people's lives up to today. Albanians are still in the midst of the transition period from dictatorship to democracy. There was no 'clean break' in 1991, in which all leaders were replaced, those who had performed crimes were persecuted and democracy was installed. Despite the sound of 'the fall of the regime', as it is often referred to, the transition to today's society still contains many elements that have remained unchanged. This includes certain practices and people in the government. The study of this history is therefore complicated, because it is hard as a respondent to look back on a period of time that is still influencing so many facets of one's life. Participants therefore always referred to contemporary problems. Albanians are still feeling oppressed and communism is not a subject of the past but very much intertwined with today's society. The bunkers are not a reminder of what the past looked like, because this past is still influencing the society of today and a part of people's reality.

An interesting phenomenon that was noticed is that there is a large gap between generations. A considerable lack of historical knowledge was noted among youth, who never experienced living under the regime. According to multiple respondents, they do not even know what Communism is. Simultaneously, there are people that are drawing the conclusion that Communism was not so bad in comparison to today, or that Enver Hoxha was a good leader. Similar sentiments to certain aspects of the regime was also seen among older respondents, which indicates how hard life is today for many Albanians.

The theory that is used to support this thesis is that of David Lowenthal (1985 and 1998), who describes that the recollection of the past is shaped and steered, and changes over time. He also describes that heritage, the subject of this thesis, is the way history is being framed for contemporary purposes. It is made fixed and factual, to benefit the owners of the heritage (Lowenthal 1998). To a certain extent, bunkers reflect the way the subject of Communism is treated nationally at the moment: it is avoided. Lowenthal (1985) describes the power of forgetting, which can be a way of steering the Communist memory too. This is already seen in the selective amount of information that is passed on to the youth. As to bunkers, the lack of policy about their management and their general normalisation could be part of the 'strategy' of forgetting by the government.

Efforts on the maintenance or reuse of bunkers are usually individual, private initiatives. Destruction sometimes takes place on a larger scale, usually for construction projects. Generally, state initiatives on bunkers are uncommon. An exception is the Bunk'art initiative, which has risen much commotion on the way it presents the communist past. Together with other museums in Tirana, it follows an 'authorised heritage discourse' (Iacono 2018), which is still in development. They frame the communist past, understandably, in a history of trauma and terror alone. This rules out a complexity of memory.

On an individual level, the variety of narratives about Communism is as varied as the ways people consider bunkers to be useful, meaningful, meaningless, traumatic or inaesthetic. For many people they have been normalised: they are an item of the past, 'just an object', 'there are too many' and some people simply don't seem them anymore. They have always seen them around and are used to them. For a smaller group however, bunkers were meaningful. This was both meant in negative and positive ways. Respondents indicated that they valued their preservation for several reasons: because they are useful, because they are part of the Albanian identity, because they are a reminder of what has happened and because it is an educational tool to explain others what occurred in Albania up until thirty years ago. Private owners also seemed to like them for their historical rootedness in their properties. Finally, they can be profitable: larger (tunnel) bunkers turn into small businesses for reasons of profit, or projects for reconciliation or maintaining of collective heritage.

An important analysis that was made during this thesis, is that when people think of the communist past, they usually do not bring up the subject of bunkers. It seems that for most people it is an unrelated topic, at least within their personal memories. Bunkers however have become iconic among foreigners. As a result, It was often seen that people working in tourism liked them as well because it helped explaining the history of the regime. They have developed a different kind of relation to them. For foreigners, bunkers steer the narrative of the Albanian past because they are providing abundant visual evidence of the time period. This foreign perspective is an interesting contrast with the perspectives of most Albanians, who mostly do not relate the bunkers to their personal Communist memories. Those who do like them, mostly appreciate their educational purposes, which keeps the circle intact. Bunkers are thus certainly a storyteller within the creation of the narrative on Communist memory, despite their abandonment in the everyday landscape.

8.2 Discussion

This final section provides broader reflections on the communist bunkers in Albania. In the theoretical framework, the significance of material heritage was explained. Lowenthal (1985) writes that the way heritage is managed, accessed and labelled influences the way it is thereafter received. Even by solely recognising a historical site, the experience of history is affected, he writes.

The research in this thesis indicates that the contemporary government benefits from the underexposing of the communist (difficult) past. This past has influenced Albanians deeply, and there are many aspects to which they have to find a way to relate to. Creating such a narrative is not easy, and it is slowly starting to 'fossilise' (Lowenthal 1998) in different ways. This study took place during this long process of fossilisation. A variety of narratives has been heard and seen, some individual, some collective. The population is struggling with the processing of this past, but the government is not actively collaborating in this development. The heritage and bunkers in Albania are the material residues that co-create the past "that we want" (Lowenthal 1985). "We" in this case are those who are in power. The destruction and normalisation of bunkers contributes in the process of forgetting (Lowenthal 1985), which is in their benefit.

The power of forgetting

During the fieldwork, the power of forgetting (Lowenthal 1985) was first recognised in an already disconnected youth (after 28 years). The silencing in schools, families and the media contribute to this. It later became clear that the contemporary government has little interest in historical sentiment, and even benefits from its oblivion. This government has the power of decision making when it comes to collective heritage, from museums, monuments and markers to the scattered bunkers in the landscape. At first, it seemed that a policy on the bunkers was not enforced because it is a low priority and an 'an outdated subject' to the majority of the population. On a closer look however, it seemed to be part of a larger trend of giving little attention to subjects of possible significance (in the context of communist trauma). The normalisation of heritage, including bunkers, fits into this 'strategy'. The government still includes communist practices and people, and has a desire to stay in power. The oblivion of former crimes and communist trauma therefore benefits their reputation.

Multiple respondents were appalled by the poor treatment of heritage in the city, on which they have very little influence. Mondale (1994) wrote that the conserving of the past, to understand ourselves, should be done with constant negotiations of all stakeholders. At the moment in Albania, nor are negotiations happening, nor are stakeholders included. When it comes to memorialisation of spaces, different groups feel ignored and excluded from decision making on sites of memory or places of suffering. The decision making process on what to do with historical monuments is top-down and protests often have little results. The ignoring and destruction of the city's historical architecture has been described as a phenomenon that 'history starts with us' (Fatos Lubonja, 69), whereby the new is preferred over the old. It not only happens with architecture: records of former communist crimes by the sigurimi are being destroyed. A general pattern of ignoring can be noticed, despite the efforts of some initiatives. This can be considered steering the course of history, as described by Lowenthal (1985). We can see that history is framed for contemporary purposes. The destruction of Communist heritage can thus be considered an issue.

Collective roots and personal legacies can struggle in comparison to each other and the dominance of either can bring benefits and drawbacks (Lowenthal 1998). A danger can emerge when collective

narratives cancel out individual perspectives, but also when there is no communality and shared memories of a space (Lowenthal 1998). The 'forgetting' of communist history and its improper teaching will eventually lead to the forgetting of certain narratives, memories and nuances. This is remoulding the past (Lowenthal 1985), in a negative way. This ignoring of what happened makes people forget and disables them from taking away lessons on how a a country should (not) be ruled. It is already seen that certain groups choose certain narratives to be true and others to be false, thus shaping it in a way that benefits them (Lowenthal 1985). By doing so, they celebrate a deceptive past (Mondale 1994). They choose to see only the good sides of the regime, for example. It is not realistic, nor are the decisions based on this past. Lowenthal (1998) explains that when the benefits of the past are hyped, and its dangers are exaggerated, "*heritage by its very nature excites partisan extremes*" (Lowenthal 1998, xiv). This is recognised a bit in the black and white thinking that is emerging: groups that idealise Hoxha and groups that see only the horror that the time brought.

The authorised heritage discourse (Iacono 2018)
Material heritage has the power to direct the national narrative of the past, either in a multidimensional way or in a one-dimensional way. In Albania, such a multidimensional approach has been seen in some smaller initiatives of CHWB Albania and the House of Leaves, but the general trend within museums seems to be the following of an 'authorised heritage discourse' of trauma and terror (Iacono 2018), or the process of anti-nostalgia of Velikonja (2009). This leads to frustration among some respondents, especially on the decision making process on which sites to turn into museums, and what story is being told there. With much of the Communist heritage of the city, decision making on what to do with it seems to be avoided. A clear trend on what to do with them is not seen (except for their destruction and neglect). Theoretically, the focus on trauma and terror gives a voice to those who suffered during communism. However, one of the groups that suffered, the formerly persecuted, is highly discontent about the authorised heritage discourse. This upcoming discourse adds to the further forgetting of nuanced history. Museums on history generally have an educational role. By following the 'atuhorised heritage discoruse', youth and others are stimulated in black-and white thinking, by being tought by uncriticised sources. These one-dimensional perspectives are being criticised.

Albanians vary greatly in opinions about Enver Hoxha and the communist regime, as do their memories. Some idealise the former dictator, some are nuanced, some despise him. There is a great variety of individual stories about the communist way of life. Most of this variation in perspectives can be explained by generational differences. Mondale (1994) confirmed the importance of different stages in life when it comes to reflection on the past. In Albania, these stages in life are particularly relevant everyone above the age of 28 experienced life under a Communist regime, and everyone under that age did not. For the youth, little interest in the preservation of Communist heritage and bunkers was shown, but some middle aged and older respondents were appalled by the poor treatment of heritage in the city. All age categories however are stakeholders of storytelling: the past belongs to us all. Groups with opposing views however hardly speak to each other.

What to do with bunkers
It is fair to ask whether the preservation of bunkers is at all important, since a majority of the population does not take notice of Communism or its (bunker) heritage, and has other matters to be concerned about. The respondents that cared about bunker preservation stressed the role they can

have in the remembering and teaching of the past. They do not want to see this period of time being forgotten, nor do they want the past to repeat itself. This was agreed by many respondents, although some see the subjects of bunkers separated from that of Communism. It can thus be said that there is no one-on-one relation between the Communist memory and bunkers. However, the trend of destroying bunkers for construction projects is in line with the capitalisation and fast modernisation of society, that can also be recognised in the lack of interest or knowledge of youth with the Communist history. Indirectly, it is thus connected. The (indifferent) relations to bunkers in that way thus do represent the 'forgetting' of the communist past, and the embracement of modernisation. The bunkers tell a story in the transition away from Communism.

Theoretically, bunkers also play a role in the malleable past and in the creation of a narrative about history. Bunkers are the most clear evidence in Albania that "*The spoils of history lie all around us*" (Lowenthal 1998, xvi). Even though many respondents gave low priority to them, they all knew they were there. They have been largely normalised. The 'heritagisation' (Iacono 2018) of bunkers is for some affiliated with the current government, which was disliked by many respondents. For a smaller group, the bunkers reminded of a difficult time and their presence in the landscape 'kept the past in the present (Lowenthal 1985). So on the one side they form or scar the landscape, on the other side people do not even seem to see them. It seems that when it comes to Communist memory, bunkers are a little bit more distanced from its historical significance. The bunkers seem to stand separate from the notion of youth that idealises Communism. The thought that is widely seen is that since there are so many, their abandonment or destruction is not of importance. Also, contemporary problems and concerns make them a low priority. *"We remould the past for reasons that mirror the benefits"*, Lowenthal (1985, xxiii) writes. At this moment, for many Albanians the forgetting of them seems to be the benefit.

Bunkers are thus not very popular among many Albanians. The main interest in Communist heritage is largely coming from experts, (relations to the) formerly persecuted and foreigners. Most travellers and tourists that were included in informal interviews showed to be very interested in the Communist history of Albania. The material heritage of bunkers and museums played a main factor in their learning about it. Bunkers play an important role in the 'dark heritage' of Communism. A commercialisation of communism was seen on a small scale, for example in the popularity of bunker merchandise. Communist tourism experiences include bunker tours, the visit of Bunk'art or visiting bunkers for the 'dark tourism' experience. The offer of such 'Communist heritage' is only a small sector in the tourism industry, but this might grow over time. It is interesting to ask the question whether the upcoming[13] tourism will change the narrative of Communism to the Albanians themselves. Albanians are collectively moving away from their home country, which makes the influence of tourism even more significant. One respondent mentioned that the focus on Communism in tourist experiences needs to be balanced. It should be avoided that Albanians take on a role of 'victim' in the world, he said. This reminded of what Lowenthal (1998, 75) wrote: "*Atrocities are invoked as heritage not only to forge internal unity but to enlist external sympathy*". This phenomenon however has not been observed during the fieldwork, but it has been mentioned as a

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[13] According to statistics, the tourist arrivals in Albania passed the 3 million line in July 2018 (https://tradingeconomics.com), which is more than the current population. In December 2018, Albania had 2.9 million inhabitants (www.ceicdata.com).

notion to be aware of. Tourism is a major source of national income, when the demand for Communist narratives rise, it might be supplied. Whether this will be a 'heritage' that is frozen, and fixed, and getting distanced from the retrospective science of history (Lowenthal 1998), is something that can be studied a few years from now.

Regardless of the feelings and opinions about bunkers, bunkers have many different roles and uses when looking from a material perspective. The majority of bunkers lies abandoned, but in many places they are also socially integrated. They have gained a new purpose in many different ways, and are therefore part of people's lives and landscapes. Re-signification of material heritage could possibly even assist in confronting the past (Eaton and Roshi 2011). Especially on a private level, people have developed new forms of interaction with the structures. They have been given a new meaning. These new, positive meanings that such buildings can get are also part of the power of heritage. It can be used on purpose or it can happen naturally. Reuse of bunkers has been seen by people who already valued the bunker, but it was also seen that people started to like bunkers after their repurposing. It gave people an affiliation with these objects and makes them want to protect it. It is only seen on a private level, but it happens all over the country, in the most unexpected ways.

Ideas for future research:
In future research upon this thesis topic, it might be an interesting perspective to add the opinions and perspectives of children and adolescents about Communism and its heritage. This was not done in this thesis, but it might give more insight in the phenomenon on the historical disconnection of youth and their vision on bunkers in the landscape. Another contribution could be to study the impact of the Communist tourist industry and souvenirs during the touristic summer season. For practical reasons, the fieldwork of this research was held between February and April, in the low season. The summer season might give a different view on dark tourism. A third idea for future studies is to compare the Albanian Communist memory and how this is reflected in material heritage with other eastern European countries, notably those that were part of former Yugoslavia. It is an interesting comparison because although they lived through similar Communist phases, Albania had an internal dictator and former Yugoslavia was more influenced by outside forces. It is interesting to study if this changes people's perspectives on this kind of memory and the way they relate to its associated material culture.

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Appendix 1: Overview of respondents

Expert or Normal Interview	Respondent	Gender	Age	Description
1 Normal	Kliton Gherxhani	Male	40-50	Director touroperators association 'Albania Holidays' and tourism consultant.
2 Normal	Sidonja Manushi	Female	20-30	Journalist Tirana Times
3 Expert	Mirian from Cultural Heritage Without Borders (CHWB) Albania	Male	30-40	N/A
4 Normal	Employee of tourist information office	Male	±30	History graduate
5 Expert	Saimir Kristo	Male	31	Vice Dean Faculty of Architecture Design at POLIS University (Tirana)
6 Normal	Sokol Kongoli	Male	50-60	Employee of the Albanian national tourism agency. Took part in the student protests in 1990 when he was 21/22 years old.
7 Normal	Resmije Allmeta	Female	20-30	Hostel receptionist
8 Normal	Edvin Parruca	Male	43	Hostel employee and television presentor
9 Expert	Etleva Demollari	Female	40-50	Director House of Leaves
10 Normal	Elton Caushi	Male	42	Tourism organisation, hotel owner and memorabilia collector
11 Expert	Ols Lafe Eljana Zeqiraj	Male Female	40-50 21	Ols: Director of the Center for the Development of Ancient and Medieval Albanian Heritage at the University "Aleksandër Moisiu" Eljana: archaeology student, student assistant
12 Normal	Translator at newspaper	Male	70-80	N/A
13 Normal	Eduard Kurtezi	Male	70-80	Tourguide of foreigners during Communist period, English teacher, BBC interpreter (retired)
14	Tour Guide of Tirana	Male	40-50	Organises a city tour in Tirana

Normal				
15 Normal	Onelda Perndreca	Female	30-40	Previous fundraiser NGO World Vision (unemployed)
16 Expert	Philippe Théou	Male	30-40	Zoologist, bat expert
17 Normal	Fatos Ayazi	Male	69	Former military man, land owner, retired couple (with Resmije Ayazi).
18 Expert	Fatos Lubonja	Male	68	Former prisoner, society critic, heritage specialist and journalist. Editor of cultural magazine: 'Albanians and architecture'.