

# ' RE - BUNKERISATION '

A Proposal for Re-Adaptive use of Communist Albanian  
Bunkers into Art Studios and Exhibitions Spaces

*What Can Art Do for A Space?*





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I dedicate this work to my family in Albania, especially my late mother who always encouraged myself and siblings to never forget our roots and heritage.



### ***RE-BUNKERISATION:***

***A Proposal for Re-Adaptive Use of Communist Albanian Bunkers into Art Studios and Exhibition Spaces***

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Dissertation Personal Tutor:

Katie Wilmot

Module Coordinator:

Elizabeth Tuson

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## POSITIONALITY STATEMENT

Transnational land acquisition, also known as “land grabbing”, (European Environment Agency, 2016) refers to foreign investments into countries often with poor economies but rich resources. The latest European victim of this exploitation is Albania.

It is my background of being ethnically Albanian, that has prompted my research topic for this dissertation. Although born and raised in London, UK, my childhood summers were spent in my grandma’s home (Fig.1) in the Albanian countryside - surrounded by fresh foods and farm animals, I always had refreshing stories to tell my classmates once September began. However, having not visited Albania in over 5 years, I visited in the summer of 2023 and I was greeted with a paradoxical Albania. The Albania that I had remembered smelt like jasmine and honey tea, the feeling of evening sun rays on my skin, with a gentle breeze of wind - a perfect balance (Appendix A). Whenever I thought of Albania, I pictured harmony, laughter, and comfort.

In the summer of 2023, my nostalgia for Albania began to fizz away. The Albania that I had once remembered tenderly had now turned into colossal construction sites: trucks, traffic, concrete, and locals tutting at tones of grey. Feeling disheartened about the changes that I experienced in Albania last summer; I have decided to make use of my platform as a designer to share the importance of preserving Albania’s cultural heritage. Therefore, the aim of this dissertation is not to criticise foreign investments in Albania but to propose ways Albania can protect its cultural heritage by creating meaningful spaces for the public using art.



Fig.1: 'My Grandma's Village in Burrel'

Author's own photography (2023)



**INTRODUCTION**

This dissertation confronts the lack of arts in Albania and proposes an artistic regeneration project idea to re-adapt existing bunkers in Albania, called “Re-Bunkerisation”.

Over the past few years, Albania has emerged as a sought-after destination for tourists. According to reports, the country welcomed 10.1 million visitors in 2023, a remarkable increase from the 3.4 million tourists in 2013 (Euro News Albania, 2023). Despite its turbulent history, Albania boasts attractive landscapes, highlighting the importance of preserving its heritage. In light of this, the dissertation proposes a project that seeks to re-adapt some of the 750,000 bunkers in Albania to create a satellite network of national art studios and exhibition spaces. This endeavour would not only celebrate the creativity of local communities but also contribute to the preservation of Albania’s rich cultural legacy.

Art is often undervalued in Albania for seve-

al reasons. Firstly, it is viewed as a luxury due to the high cost of art materials. Secondly, there is a stigma attached to creating art, possibly because people fail to recognise the potential benefits that art can have on mental health and well-being. According to the World Health Organization, “arts and crafts have been shown to improve general self-perceived health and aspects of mental health and well-being” (pg.82, 2019). This research underscores the significance of the arts in promoting artistic potential as well as overall health. Introducing a project that enables people to engage with the arts could be advantageous in encouraging socialisation and integration in a country with an 11.5% unemployment rate (Institute of Statistics, 2021). The project would provide a platform for the community to express themselves through art, without the need for words.

In recent years, designers have been using the term “adaptive re-use” fiercely to combat our increased greenhouse gas emissions and carbon footprint. According to Historic England,

(2020), the construction and building industry is responsible for 42% of the UK’s total greenhouse gas emissions. While there is limited information available about the overall carbon emissions for new construction in Albania, the country is gradually following in the UK’s footsteps through foreign investment projects. Therefore, this dissertation also seeks to discuss the importance of repairing and nurturing existing structures rather than creating new ones. Furthermore, the author intends to challenge the preconceived perception of buildings as ‘negative spaces’ and demonstrate their potential to become areas that foster community connections.

For this reason, the main objectives of this dissertation are to first contextualise Albania in terms of geography, society, and history. Secondly, to examine international literature reviews that have re-adapted post-war structures into art spaces. Finally, to propose ways in which designers can partner with investors to develop an art regeneration vision for the country.

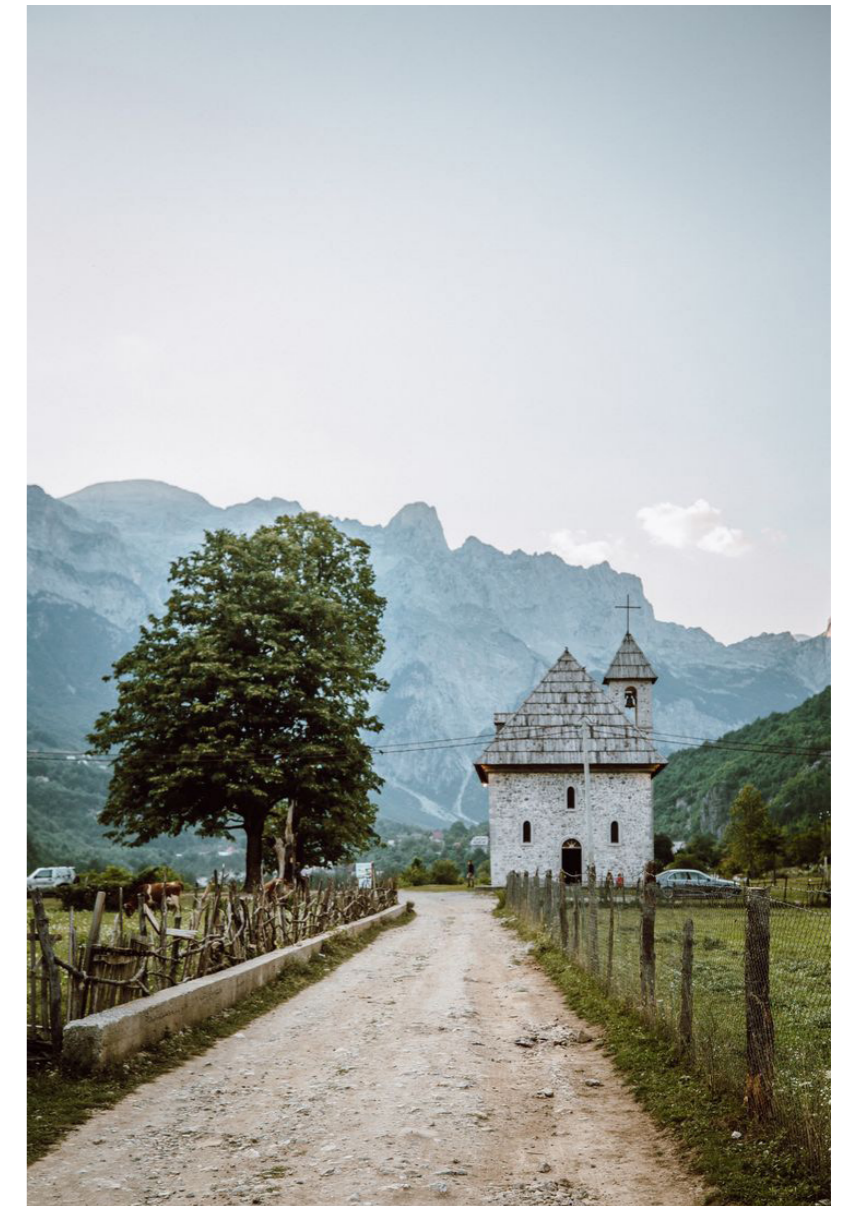


Fig.1.1: Albania Road Trip, Theth Church Albanian Alp, Ginger Wanderlust, 2021



## GEOGRAPHICAL CONTEXT

Albania is situated in the Balkan Peninsula, which is in South-East Europe (Fig.1.2). With a population of around 2.8 million people, the country covers an area of approximately 28,748 sq km. Like many other Mediterranean nations, Albania experiences warm and dry summers, followed by wet winters. The country boasts a diverse landscape, which includes mountains, beaches, plains, and forests.

### The New Croatia?

Albania has become a popular destination for young people due to its favourable prices and emerging festival scenes. In the last five years, there has been an increasing demand for beach front festivals in Albania. One such festival is the 'Kala Festival', (Fig.1.3) which was established in 2017 in Vlorë, Dhërmi. Kala Festival has been named "one of Europe's most lusted-after electronic festival locations" (Mixmag, 2023) and Vogue Australia (2019) states "Albania is the new Croatia".

### FOREIGN INVESTMENTS

Capitalising on Albania's geographical location is 'Eagle Hills Real Estate Development', a UAE-based company who have recently invested 2 billion Euros in the Durrës Marina Project (Fig1.4).



Fig.1.2: Author's own work, 2023

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The project aims to provide world-class communities by collaborating with talented designers and architects to improve the lifestyle and quality of people. The project is expected to provide over 12,000 residential units including entertainment and restaurant units, "connecting Durrës with the glittering splendour of the Adriatic Sea and beyond", according to the Eagle Hills website (2022).

The project has been under scrutiny and there are mixed sentiments about it (Appendix A). Eagle Hills describes the project on their website as "unmatched luxury meets the riches of the Adriatic" and an "extravagant celebration" (Eagle Hills, 2021). However, the use of contradictory language such as "luxury" and "riches" in contrast to "communities" implies an attempt to hide the fact that this project may primarily benefit the wealthy while leaving locals living in poverty.

As seen, the demand for tourism in Albania is increasing, leading to more hotels and complexes being built. Therefore, there must be strict legislations regarding sustainable and conscious design for new structures, otherwise this could contribute to an increase in greenhouse gas emissions if not properly managed.



Fig1.3: Kala Festival, by Megan Townsend, 2023



Fig1.4: Durrës Marina Proposal, by Eagle Hills Real Estate, 2022

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## SOCIAL CONTEXT

According to Forbes Magazine (2022), they state that Albanians form the third largest diaspora in the world, with a total of 1.2 million emigrants. The country faces countless issues including poor infrastructure, rules of law, and organised crime. After the collapse of communism in the early 90s, Albania opened its borders to the public for the first time in 50 years.

According to Forbes, “30% of those born in the country are now living outside its borders”. This means that Albania has more citizens living abroad than within the country. One of the reasons for this mass exodus is the low wages, with the average monthly salary being 71,486 Albanian Lek, which is equivalent to 587.61 pounds sterling, (Trading Economics, 2023).

Considering all these factors, it is not surprising that a growing number of young people are leaving Albania in search of better opportunities. In 2021, a law was passed to prevent medical students from seeking employment abroad (Appendix A). Those who fail to comply with

this law will be fined for five years after graduation. With more young people leaving the country, it raises several questions, such as “Will Albania have to rely on foreign investments to meet the increasing demands of tourism?”, “Is Albania selling its country to investors?”, and “Will Albania have anything left to preserve if all of its people are leaving?”



Fig1.5 A series of collage photos depicting Traditional Albanian Folk clothes

Note A, D: From Behance, Veshje tradicionale të Zadrimës, by Elsa Paja. 2021

Note C: Unknown author and unknown years

Note B: From Flickr, Albanian Folk Costumes, by Ferdinand Bjanku, 1995



## HISTORICAL CONTEXT

During World War II, Germany invaded Yugoslavia in 1941. Yugoslav communists assisted Enver Hoxha (Fig 1.6a) in establishing the Albanian Communist Party, which made him the first dictator of Albania. Once in power, Hoxha relied on propaganda and false ideologies to indoctrinate his followers, going so far as to rewrite history books to suit his narrative (BBC News, 2021). In 1962, he declared Albania as the world's first atheist state and banned all religions. Hoxha's dictatorship was notorious for its merciless and cruel nature, earning him the nickname "the lunatic who took over the asylum." (CSS ETH Zurich, 2016). Anyone who opposed his regime was considered a traitor and faced exile, imprisonment, or execution. (Blendi Fevziu, 2017, pg.67).

During his dictatorship, Enver Hoxha's paranoia of foreign invasion reached new heights, leaving his people in a constant state of fear. To prepare for such an event, he launched a fortification project known as "his brainchild" (BBC News, 2018). This project resulted in a network of 750,000 bunkers being built throughout the country. Hoxha also commissioned the construction of "Facility 0774," (Fig 1.6b) a top-secret under-

ground nuclear bunker tunnel with 104 rooms and enough food and water to last a year. Hoxha's rule was marked by widespread human rights abuses, including the execution of over 5,000 of his people (BBC News, 2021). After his death, Albania became the third-poorest country in the world, with a "weary and frightened population that had suffered decades of political terror and purges" (Payne, 2014). Although Albania is now free of communism, the country still experiences the shockwaves of his dictatorship; neighbours trust more, but not completely. Many citizens are apprehensive to speak of the communist period when asked (Appendix A). The people are still recovering from the economic stagnation and devastation caused by the period and are slowly healing from this traumatic time.

Bunkers, like many war structures, are associated with suffering, loss and destruction. Therefore, this dissertation aims to contradict the negative intent of the bunkers with a project that benefits the community by preserving the country's history through storytelling. As such, the introduction of re-adapting bunkers in Albania may enable citizens to express their sentiments towards this period in a safe and controlled manner.



Fig1.6: A series of collage photos depicting The Communist Period in Albania

Note A: From *Memorie AL*, Hoxha Loved Kids to Death, unknown author (1997)

Note B: From *BBC Future*, The nuclear bunker in 'Europe's North Korea' by Stephen Dowling (2017)

Note C: From *Alamy*, Children play on an Albanian mini bunker, by Sueddeutsche Zeitung Photo (1999)

Note D: From *BBC News*, Protesters hold up anti-Communist placards. by D. Deymov (1999)



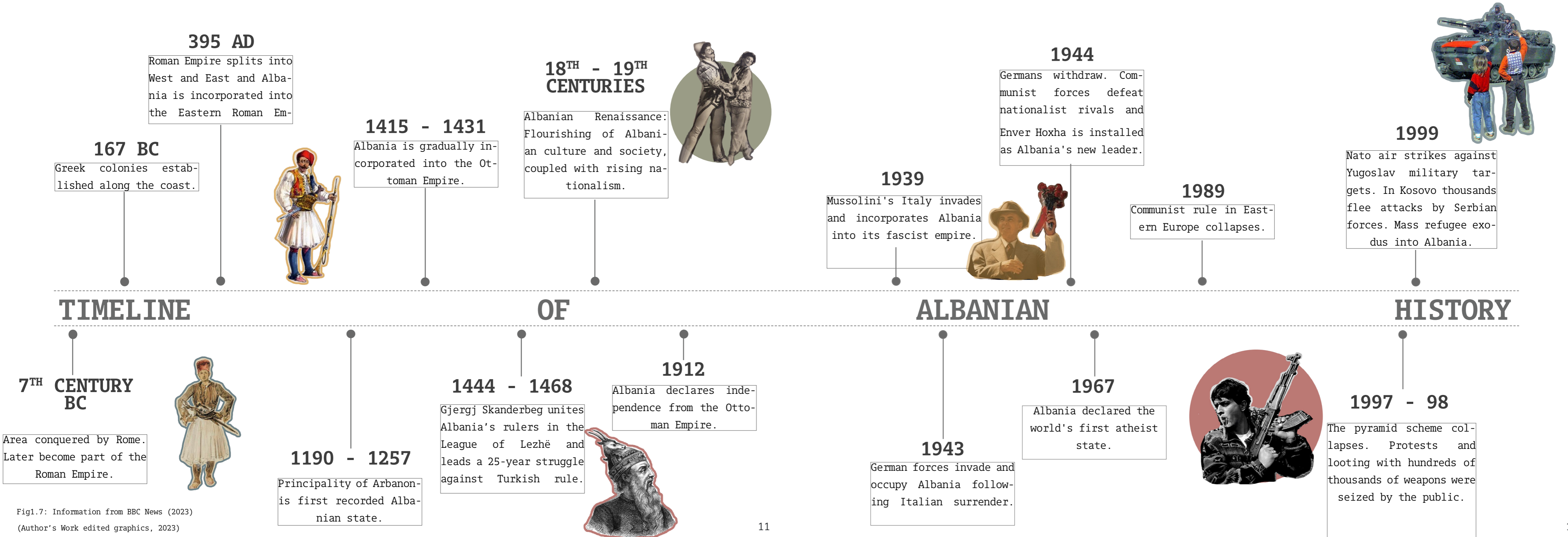


Fig1.7: Information from BBC News (2023)  
(Author's Work edited graphics, 2023)



## BUNKERS CONTEXTUALISED

Over the past decade, there has been an increased fascination and demand for re-adapting post-war structures in Albania. The term “Bunkerisation” is not a new concept, in fact there are over five organisations, universities, and investors who have shown interest in the re-adaptation of the bunkers. In 2012, students from Albanian and German universities collaborated on a project to benefit rural tourism by converting a bunker into a bed and breakfast called “Bed & Bunker” (Appendix A5). The project was a collaboration between the University of Applied Sciences in Germany and Universiteti POLIS in Albania.

Previously known as Facility 0774, (pg.15) is now known as “Bunk’Art”, which was transformed into a historical museum and art gallery by Italian news reporter Carlo Bollino in 2014. Today, several rooms have been transformed into art installations, furnished with furniture, fixtures, and equipment that replicates the era of Hoxha. Senada Murati, the manager of Bunk’Art says the museum presents “the bright side and the dark side of communism, so people can decide”, suggesting that the museum remains politically neutral. Bollino struggled to convey that remembering communism does

not equate to “having nostalgia for communism” (Bunk’Art, 2015). Since its inception, Bunk’Art has garnered significant interest from visitors worldwide, and a prominent travel blog has ranked it as the top attraction in Albania (Nomadic Matt, 2023).

### ADAPTIVE RE-USE

Adaptive re-use is a major area of interest within the field of design, Jones (2022) defines adaptive re-use as the process of “repurposing buildings that have outlived their original purpose”. Jones states that primary objectives of this process are “preserving architectural and cultural heritage, transforming urban blight, and igniting social change”, therefore adaptive re-use is crucial for preserving historic architecture by maintaining cultural heritage.

In “The Importance of a Sustainable Future” (Roös, 2020), the author emphasises the need for action toward sustainability. The urgency to ‘act now’ is stressed, and the author suggests that “[...we need to shift our focus from mitigation to adaptation]”. It is crucial to take action now and utilise existing resources efficiently instead of just discussing sustainability strategies. Taking action is the key to



Fig1.8: From Metamorphism, by Robert Hackmann (2022)



making a significant impact on the environment and securing a better future for generations to come. Comparatively, emissions from the construction industry hit a record high in 2019, accounting for 38% of CO2 emissions globally (UN Environmental Programme). The importance of adaptive re-use is now more important than ever to combat our carbon footprint.

#### **RUIN LUST – A REFLECTION?**

Over the past decade, there has been an increased demand for re-adapting existing spaces. Santos (2016 p.12) states “Countless architectural firms worldwide are turning to adaptive reuse as a solution to some of the modern problems of the built environment”. The writer suggests that this is a regenerative paradigm that we should all be following. Despite the reduction in carbon footprint associated with repairing, rather than rebuilding, a question is posed to the reader: Why are we attracted to “ruined” buildings?

According to Brian Dillon (2012), society seems to be fascinated with decaying buildings. An explanation may be that ruins hold a special meaning for us as they represent the idea of impermanence and remind us of the nat-

ural cycle of life. In doing so, they emphasise the temporary nature of things, serving as a poetic reminder that we should learn to be content with what we have rather than constantly seeking out something new. One could argue that even though war is often associated with negative outcomes and loss, the structures built during wartime also serve as symbols of shelter and protection. These structures were put in place to prevent people from being harmed during a war, and thus, it is not fair to hold prejudice towards them. Instead, people should reserve their prejudice towards war itself, as it is the root cause of the destruction and loss.

In this chapter, the contextualisation asserts that Albania has the necessary infrastructure to re-adapt the post-communist bunkers into art studios and exhibition spaces, making it clear that implementing such a project would be highly beneficial for the country. The chapter that follows, moves on to consider the importance of the arts worldwide, advocating for a collective effort to engage more deeply with the arts.

*“MODERN ARCHITECTURE DOES NOT MEAN THE USE OF IMMATURE NEW MATERIALS; THE MAIN THING IS TO REFINE MATERIALS IN A MORE HUMAN DIRECTION.”*

ALVAR AALTO (1952)

**IMPORTANCE OF ARTS**

According to UNESCO (2018), art consumption accounted for 3.3% of the EU's GDP and 3% of its employment, demonstrating that not enough citizens are engaging in the arts. Participation in the arts enables people to unleash their inner voice and gain a deeper understanding of the world around them.

According to a study conducted by Evgenia Theodotou in 2022, the research findings indicate that "arts-based methodology is beneficial for children's social and personal development such as confidence, independence, relationships...". The study also revealed that there is not a particular art form that contributes to a child's development, suggesting that general participation in the arts is paramount for children's cognitive development. Similarly, findings from Fancourt and Finn's report (2019, p16) reveal that engaging in the arts can "prevent the onset of mental illness and age-related physical decline". Therefore, the arts are undeniably crucial for our collective growth and development.

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Fig2: From MyHomeLandWatanali, *Sparking Curiosity Through Arts*, unknown author (2023)



## LITERARY REVIEW 1 - HOTWALLS STUDIOS

“The Hotwalls Studios” (Fig.2.1), previously known as “Point Battery” and “Barracks”, is situated in Old Portsmouth, UK. It was once a military defence used to safeguard the port from sea attacks. However, it has now been converted into working artist studios that offer workshops and craft markets (Hotwalls, 2022). (Appendix B).

Originally built as a wooden structure in 1418, this coastal artillery was later reconstructed in 1847. By the end of the Second World War, local artists started selling their art from the arches, which soon became a tradition amongst the community. In the 1960s, Portsmouth Council bought the area, and after fifty years, a partnership between The Portsmouth City Council, the Coastal Communities Fund, and the Urban South Hampshire organised funding to adapt the existing structures into art studios (BBC News, 2016).

According to the ‘Portsmouth Council Annual Report’ (2021), since its completion in 2016, Hotwalls Studios has contributed to the growth of local businesses by attracting around 130,000 visitors (p.12). In 2019, the studios were awarded ‘The Solent Quality Place Awards’, which recognises places that enhance urban design standards. The award was voted by the public and serves as a testament to the

popularity and appreciation of the studio spaces among visitors. According to Portsmouth Council, the Hotwalls Studios have exceeded their original ambitions, and have contributed to significant economic growth in the community by providing:

*15 permanent jobs including the initial construction staff on site.*

*25 individual artists had operated from the studios.*

*In excess of 45 businesses were supported through markets and events held throughout the year.*

Portsmouth Council (p.5)

In reference to the Hotwalls Studio project, Historic England (2017), has commented that “heritage assets provide a focal point in an area and contribute to creating a sense of place and regeneration” p.10). Thus, if the funding and maintenance of the Hotwalls Studios are ongoing, the art studios and exhibition spaces can be preserved for future generations. This will help to support the surrounding businesses and local economy, providing a dedicated artistic and cultural center while securing a sustainable future. The report also reveals that Hotwalls Studios artists have received international commissions from countries including Greece, Australia, the USA, and Canada.



Fig2.1: A series of collage photos depicting The Hotwalls Studios

Note A: From Alamy, Children play on an Albanian mini bunker, by Sueddeutsche Zeitung Photo (1999)

Note B: From Strong Island, Hotwalls Studios Opens to the Public by Paul Gonella (2016)

Note C: From BBC News, Portsmouth Hot Walls reopens after £1.75m art studio revamp, by Portsmouth City Council (2016)

Note D: From RIBA, SHORTLISTED in the RIBA South. by Steve Thearle (2017)

This highlights the international demand for arts and culture, not just in the UK.

The statistics from a recent report are undeniably striking, showcasing the widespread appreciation and popularity of the arts. Despite the challenges presented by the COVID-19 pandemic, there was an astounding 200% increase in sales of art supplies, as reported by Hobbycraft (The Guardian, 2020). Furthermore, the British Craft Council (2019) has revealed that an impressive 73% of UK adults purchased handcrafted items in 2019, indicating a growing passion for crafts. These findings are particularly noteworthy given the widespread availability of Computer Aided-Design (CAD) technology. People are increasingly drawn to creating handmade items, underscoring the immense value of art and creativity in our lives.

#### **CRITICISM OF THE CASE STUDY**

Although the statistics on the transformation of Hotwalls Studios are impressive, the report lacks information on the visitors' backgrounds regarding their socio-economic backgrounds, gender, age, etc. To make the report more interesting and credible, the Portsmouth Council should conduct studies to gauge public percep-

tion of the changes Hotwalls Studios might do to increase engagement. According to the Portsmouth Demography (JSNA, 2021), 22.3% of Portsmouth residents are from ethnic minority backgrounds, which accounts for 46,337 people in the Portsmouth population.

It would be interesting if the report targeted black, Asian, and minority ethnic (BAME) citizens to get their perspective on the regeneration of Hotwalls Studios. Albania is also considered an ethnic minority country, and as mentioned in the introduction, Albanian citizens predominantly have a negative view of the arts. Participation in the arts should be accessible to all, regardless of socio-economic barriers. Therefore, interviewing BAME citizens on The Hotwalls Studios project may offer alternative perspectives on future projects that Hotwalls Studio can contribute to integrate a more diverse audience and engage them more in the arts. The report concludes with a chapter on "Challenges Moving Forwards". It suggests the need for "move on spaces" to expand the Hotwalls Studio to keep up with the growing demand of artists interested in the area. The report's conclusion could therefore be interpreted as a plea for international artistic intervention.



## LITERARY REVIEW 2 - TIRPITZ MUSEUM

The Tirpitz Museum (Fig2.2) in Denmark is an establishment that has been built on a bunker constructed by the German forces during the Second World War. It was designed by the architecture firm BIG in 2016 and was expected to attract over 100,000 visitors annually, according to Condé Nast Traveller (2017).

The museum merges seamlessly with its natural surroundings by using subterranean levels. In the documentary, A As Architecture (2018), Bjarke Ingels, the architect and founding partner of BIG, described the bunker as a "concrete hermetic object rejecting the surroundings," while the museum is an open, airy, and welcoming meeting place. This phenomenological design approach suggests that incorporating art in certain spaces can strike a balance between negative perceptions associated with post-war structures and create harmonious spaces.

Helgesen, who donated her family's land to the museum after seeing the architectural proposal, describes the museum as a tribute to her father and a way to honour the past while looking toward the future. Bjarke states the museum resembles a baked potato and that one must "press it to open up which reveals the softness inside". This analogy highlights how people's perceptions can be changed once they

experience something firsthand. The project hence seems to challenge people's preconceived notions about the traditionally negative spaces of post-war structures and offer a unique experience.

### CRITICISM OF THE CASE STUDY

The Tirpitz project draws inspiration from the Oslo Opera House, (Snøhetta, 2007), due to their shared intention to seamlessly blend into their natural surroundings. Condé Nast has referred to Tirpitz as "invisible", as the design aims to merge the past and future to coexist harmoniously. However, some people may object to the project's invisibility strategy, arguing that history should be embraced instead of hidden. In an interview with BBC News (2020), Professor Richardson of Oxford University states, "We need to confront our past, we need to learn from it". Some may argue that BIG's decision to create a new museum next to an existing bunker may imply a level of secrecy, which could further isolate the idea of preserving history and reintroduce the idea of censorship, resulting in visitors not wanting to visit the space. Therefore, designers must discuss the relationship between the buildings and their environments meticulously before starting a project to achieve their design goals.

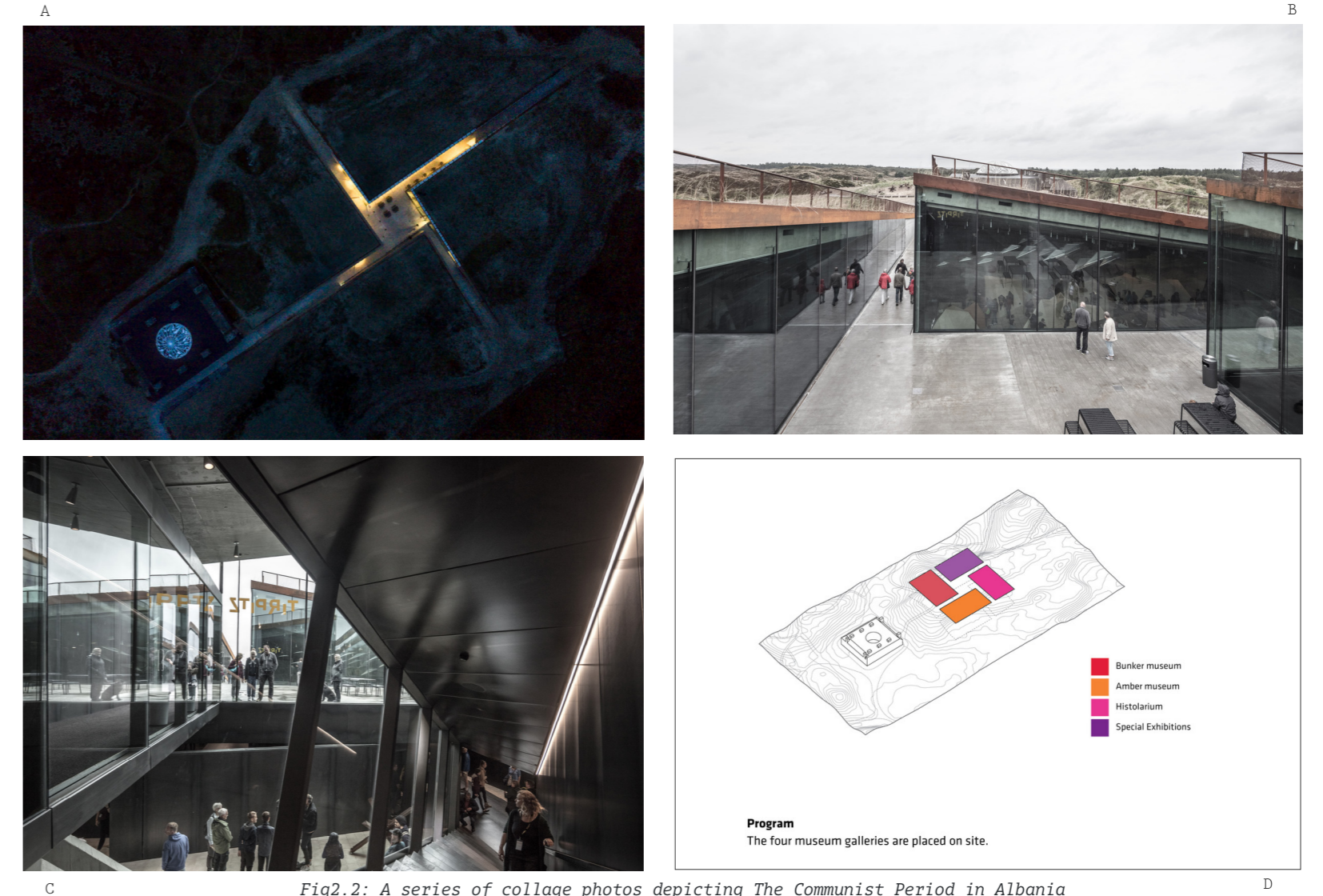


Fig2.2: A series of collage photos depicting The Communist Period in Albania

Note A: From ArchDaily, TIRPITZ / BIG, by Laurian Ghinitoiu (2017)

Note B & C: From ArchDaily, TIRPITZ / BIG, by Rasmus Hjortshøj (2017)

Note D: From ArchDaily, TIRPITZ, by BIG (2017)

After reflecting on the Tirpitz Museum, the overall message of re-adapting a space to teach visitors about history is admirable. This case study is an evident example of positive adaptive re-use in post-war structures. However, the museum's design suggests that instead of creating new structures beside post-war structures, re-adapting existing spaces can create a more authentic visitor experience, while adding more artistic flair. It could be argued that war structures symbolise shelter and protection, despite being associated with negativity and loss, therefore, prejudice should be reserved towards war, not the structures that protect people in times of need.

## **PRESERVING CULTURAL HERITAGE**

As discussed in the first chapter, Albania has a complex history with many gaps and uncertainties. However, the proposal to revitalize post-war structures into a network of art studios and exhibition spaces would be a powerful statement that they are aware of their past and want to honour it by using art to share their history with the rest of the world. Jokilehto believes that the primary reason for the importance of preserving heritage buildings is the attachment to their identity and

values (p.22, 2018b). Thus, re-adapting the bunkers into a space to be used by the community pays homage to the country's roots. The act of preserving cultural heritage has been identified as a vital component in promoting a sense of communal well-being. As noted by Taçon and Baker, the safeguarding of our collective history, traditions, and values is "essential in fostering a deep sense of belonging and shared identity within our communities" (p.6, 2019). Thus, it is crucial to understand and recognize the significance of heritage buildings when considering their adaptive re-use.

## **HISTORY REPEATING ITSELF?**

The Arts & Crafts Movement (1890 – 1920) emerged as a response to the poor quality of design that arose during the Industrial Revolution. Its followers were critical of the use of factory production machines, which they believed had removed the novelty of using traditional skills (Victoria & Albert Museum, 2023). John Ruskin, in his 1870 work 'The Cestus of Aglaia,

the Queen of the Air', stated that "*Fine art is that in which the hand, the head, and the heart of man go together.*" His statement indicates that traditional art is inherent to humans and cannot be replaced by advancements in technology.

In the 21st century, the Arts & Crafts Movement remains largely relevant as technological advancements have enabled the creation of Artificial Intelligence (AI) art with ease. However, according to Ploin (2022), "*Human agency in the creative process is never going away.*" The author suggests that while AI can be useful in automating certain aspects of the creative process, it is important to note that the decision-making involved in producing original artwork cannot be replicated by current AI technology.

Moreira describes 'Placemaking' as

*creating places and focusing on transforming public spaces to strengthen the connections between people and these places.*

(pg,2 2021)

The author suggests that to create meaningful spaces, projects should focus on the needs, aspirations, and visions of people. Thus, the vision of the adaptive re-use of post-communist war bunkers in Albania is an innovative and promising approach to enhancing the connection between people and their land. This initiative has the potential to significantly boost the engagement of young people in the arts and encourage them to stay in Albania.

The Project for Public Spaces (PPS, 2019) is an organisation that promotes placemaking initiatives globally. The organisation fosters community practices and provides guidelines for developing great public spaces and improving urban living. PPS has created 'The Place Diagram', a tool to assist people in evaluating a good place. The organisation suggests that a "good place" incorporates "sociability, uses-activities, access & linkages and comfort & image". This proposal therefore displays that it would conform into a "good place", as the factors of The Place Diagram have been carefully considered.



## THE PROPOSAL

The project proposal consists of creating a network of art spaces and exhibition studios in Albania, consisting of ten art spaces and five exhibition spaces. The goal of this initiative is to celebrate the community's work and provide designers with a platform, enabling participants to share their stories, which would help to preserve Albania's cultural heritage.

The art studios and exhibition locations have been selected in densely populated areas to encourage more people to engage with the arts. The project would rely mainly on volunteers and Albanian artists specialising in the art they create, who would be compensated for conducting workshops. There would be a range of art themes offered, changing every eight months, enabling people to try different mediums of art, including sewing, knitting, painting, drawing and ceramics. The interior design of each bunker would be unique and tailored to the community's specific needs. Reflecting from Tirpitz Museum, research studies on the public's perception of the bunkers will be conducted and implemented into the design.

Therefore, the design style of each art studio would not only be visually appealing but also evoke a sense of wonder and inspiration from its local communities (Appendix C).

The Re-Bunkerisation proposal would align with PPS's initiatives of creating a "good place" by fostering spaces that promote socialisation, diverse activities and are located in commutable areas.

### THERAPEUTIC POWER OF ART

The power of art to transform lives is showcased in 'Watanili', which means 'My Homeland' in Arabic. Founded in 2014, this non-profit organisation is dedicated to supporting displaced Syrians through art therapy, education and community projects. The founder, Yara Tlass, believes that art has the ability to "nourish the soul and believe in its therapeutic power to alleviate stress". Through the use of art, Watanili offers hope and healing to those affected by the war, proving that even in the darkest of times, beauty can still be created (Fig.3).

Similarly, through the Re-Bunkerisation proposal, we can inspire a philanthropic spirit to empower Albanians to heal from the scars of Communism through the therapeutic power of art and giving them a medium to express themselves.

### ART BEYOND BORDERS

Throughout history, wars have been a constant, and unfortunately, in 2024, conflicts remain, leading to suffering and the loss of countless lives. *Alketa Xhafa Mripa*, an artist from Kosovo, believes that art has the power to bring people together, inspire each other and create new perspectives that encourage inclusivity. The artist states:

*Once you make people feel welcome and safe to any country, they give more than they take (2020).*

Therefore, the vision for the Re-Bunkerisation project goes beyond the borders of Albania. The ultimate ambition would be to create an international artistic satellite uniting like-minded individuals to work together towards an artistic regeneration vision for the world.



Fig.3: from Instagram, *The Sun is Out*, by Bassent Badawy (2023)

## CONCLUSION

Art is facing a serious decline on a global scale. In the UK, the Heritage Crafts Association (HCA) publishes a biannual list of crafts that are critically endangered. The HCA emphasises that we are at risk of “losing crucial global heritage, culture, and wisdom” (2017).

This report impacts the discussion of the adaptive re-use of post-war structures for creating engaging art spaces. A closer investigation of The Hotwalls Studios reveals that designers can indeed achieve re-adapting post-war structures into art studios and exhibition spaces. This study demonstrates that people are interested in the history that is in the walls of the studios. Comparatively, despite being a celebrated project, The Tirpitz Museum suggests that designers must study public perception before re-adapting post-war spaces to avoid controversy from visitors.

The act of re-adapting post-war structures may be met with criticism, however, it is a worthwhile endeavour. Not only to reduce our carbon footprint but also contribute significantly to society. By repurposing these structures, we can breathe new life into them and create functional spaces that are both sustainable

and efficient. Moreover, re-adapting post-war structures can prove to be a cost-effective solution, as it eliminates the need for new construction and the accompanying expenses. It also helps preserve the historical significance of these structures whilst addressing the needs of modern times.

In this report, Albania was firstly contextualised to demonstrate its potential to become a land of opportunities for investors who are interested in preserving cultural heritage. Secondly, the chosen vessels to represent art studio spaces were bunkers. The writer intended to challenge the traditionally negative perceptions of post-war structures: the objective was to propose a welcoming and meaningful space that may challenge the reader’s view on such spaces. The Re-Bunkerisation project is being launched at a critical time when Albania’s cultural heritage is under threat from foreign investors. This dissertation therefore targets the need for the country to make more efforts to preserve its cultural heritage.

In light of the pressing need to reduce our carbon footprint, re-adapting post-war structures provides a beacon of hope. It aligns with the principles of sustainability and offers multiple benefits that can positively impact our society and environment. This dissertation has therefore contributed to tackling these issues by undertaking a deliberate effort that could lead to establishing a global network of art spaces and studios.

## PERSONAL CONCLUSION

The inspiration for my dissertation came from my visit to Albania in the summer of 2023. During my visit, I noticed several abandoned bunker structures scattered across the country. I felt the urge to use my platform as a designer to bring attention to this issue by fostering a philanthropic approach.

In Chapter 1, I discussed how some organisations refer to Albania as “The new Croatia”. However, I believe that every country should have its own unique identity. I strongly believe that communities can celebrate their culture by creating and implementing meaning-

ful projects using art. Albania risks losing its cultural heritage to foreign investors if stronger policies are not implemented to work alongside designers to create meaningful spaces. Therefore, it is crucial to take action and work towards preserving the cultural heritage of Albania by creating meaningful spaces that reflect and celebrate the country’s unique identity. As a result, my dissertation concludes with a new name for my “Re-Bunkerisation” proposal, which I can now name, “The New Albania.”.





*Fig.3.2: 'Summer in Albania'  
Author's own photography (2023)*

*“ART IS A FORM OF  
EXPRESSION AND WE  
SHOULD ALL HAVE A  
CANVAS TO EXPRESS  
OURSELVES.”*

AUTHOR'S WORDS, 2024

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## APPENDICES

Figure Appendix A1

Collage created by author to display how the author regards Albania.



Author's work (2023): Collage - "Home away from Home"

### Appendix A2

Although the Durrës Port Project generates 12,000 new jobs, the investment is met with criticism, Redaska Vox states that the deal "could turn into a launderer of dirty money" (Vox, 2022). In addition, "the Albanian state will be the holder of 33 percent of the shares, while the private party will hold 67 percent of it". Thus, some argue that the investment is a gradual invasion.

### Appendix A3

The obligatory law to work for 5 years in Albania post-graduation was strongly opposed by the students. In total, students held protests for 3 weeks. (Oculus News, 2022). In 2019, "765 Albanian doctors were working in Germany - a 21% increase from the year before". (Eu-rActiv, 2023). Albanian students are keen to

leave as there are programmes offered by Germany to recruit junior doctors to move and work there, the German health minister is "mulling funding training programs abroad" in order to manage its aging population (Zoran Arbutina, 2018)

### Appendix A4

The Center for Security Studies (ETH) describing Hoxha as a "strange, sociopathic and, frankly, completely mad dictator". (2016). The personal experience of asking my grandmother about the communist period is often difficult for her to speak about, like many people during the time.



**Figure Appendix A5**

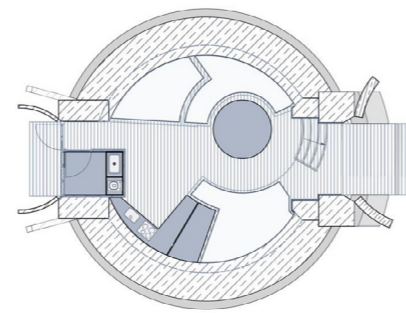
The project aimed to transform the bunker into a unique bed and breakfast hostel that catered to the specific needs of backpacker tourists. The conversion involved a careful analysis of the bunker's structural integrity, while also developing an innovative design that retained the original character of the building. The project initiative won the European Union Prize for Contemporary Architecture Mies Van Der Rohe in 2015. (EUMiesAward, 2015).



German and Albanian students working on the project



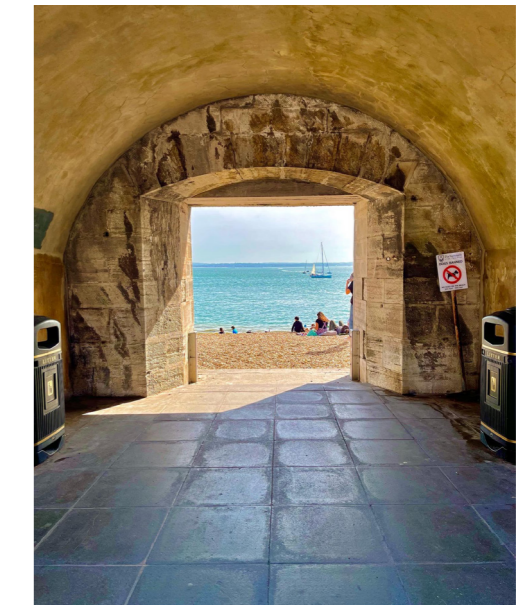
Final interior atyle of the adaptive re-use



Final floor plan of the Bed'n'Bunker

**Figure Appendix B1**

The author's own experience of the Hotwalls Creative Market displays how keen indeed the organisation is to encourage a diverse network of artists. The market had a diverse artist range and the staff facilitating the market were friendly. (Iliriana Lleshi, 2022).



Author's work & Images (2022): Hotwalls Creative Market Experience



**Figure Appendix C1**

The commanding bunkers of Hoxha boast a diameter of roughly 26 feet (8 meters) and are made up of prefabricated concrete sections. These slices weigh between 8 and 9 tons each and are adjoined to form an interlocking dome-shaped configuration (Christopher McFadden, 2020).

