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An Exploration of Sense of Place: Tirana’s Historic Center

Daniel Garand Savukinas  
Worcester Polytechnic Institute

James S. Andon  
Worcester Polytechnic Institute

Kyle Heavey  
Worcester Polytechnic Institute

Paisley Haskell  
Worcester Polytechnic Institute

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An Exploration of Sense of Place:  
Tirana's Historic Center

WRITTEN BY:  
James Andon, Paisley Haskell  
Kyle Heavey, Dan Savukinas
An Exploration of Sense of Place: Tirana’s Historic Center

An Interactive Qualifying Project submitted to the Faculty of WORCESTER POLYTECHNIC INSTITUTE in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Bachelor of Science

James Andon,
Paisley Haskell,
Kyle Heavey,
Dan Savukinas

Advisors: Professors Robert Hersh and Leslie Dodson
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ABSTRACT

The National Theatre and Sarajet Villa in Tirana’s historic center are under threat of demolition due to the passage of a contentious new law. In collaboration with OTTOnomy and Cultural Heritage without Borders, we investigated how personal experience, collective memory and postmemory in response to the communist regime contribute to a sense of place. We did so by researching the evolution of the historic center, interviewing key informants, and collecting written stories in a Theatre Memory Box. We also produced a virtual reality experience. We found that people attach meaning to built space via storytelling, secular pilgrimage, and familial or historical connection to buildings, all of which are heightened by threat of demolition.
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From left to right: Dan Savukinas, Elisabeta Gramatiko, Fabio Toska, Lori Amy, Kyle Heavey, Paisley Haskell, Anisa Lloja, Leslie Dodson, Robert Hersh, James Andon (Leo Gonsalves, 2018)
AUTHORSHIP

The introduction of the paper was written collaboratively with all group members and was revised by Dan Savukinas. The acknowledgments, authorship page, and executive summary were written by Dan, Kyle Heavey, and James Andon, while Paisley Haskell designed the final report. Feedback was given by every group member. Much of the background chapter was rewritten during IQP in Albania. The overall framework of the background was determined collectively, and each member was given a section to outline and write. Paisley led the revisions of this chapter. The basis of the methods chapter was written during ID2050, but major revisions were required to adapt each objective to the new goal developed during IQP. Revisions to the methods were led by Paisley. For the findings chapter, James and Paisley outlined the sections, while James, Paisley and Kyle wrote the chapter. James led revisions on the findings. Dan wrote the conclusion, which was revised by Paisley.
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A “Special Law” introduced by Prime Minister Edi Rama in March of 2018 and passed on October 25, 2018, seeks to demolish the current National Theatre and replace it with a new one along with numerous high-rise commercial buildings. This law has been heavily contested. President Ilir Meta has vetoed the law twice, asserting that its circumvention of the municipality of Tirana’s right to manage its public land is unconstitutional (Meta, 2018). Despite this, the Socialist Party, which has an absolute majority in Parliament, overthrew the President’s second veto and passed the law.

Those championing the law argue that the current National Theatre (Fig. 1) is too dilapidated for successful or cost-effective reconstruction (Erebara, 2018). Instead, they believe that a new Theatre will help build a modern and urbanistic Tirana by creating a more useful space for public gathering.

The opponents of the law doubt the legitimacy of the motives behind it and believe the Special Law is one of many examples of government favoritism. Additionally, many people who are fighting to preserve the National Theatre believe that the history of the building is an important part of Albania’s history and cultural heritage.

Figure 1: The Albanian National Theatre

The History of the National Theatre and Sarajet Villa

The Albanian National Theatre was constructed in 1938 in the Italian rationalist style. It was meant to serve as a sports and culture center for a still-developing Tirana. The building was a symbol of the alliance between fascist Italy and King Zog. In 1945, after the communist partisans liberated the country from Nazi occupation, the building hosted show trials (trials where the outcome is preordained). These trials were essentially just a performance and were publicized to show the power of the communist party. They resulted in the execution of seventeen of Albania’s intellectuals for political crimes (Elsie, 2015). Under communism, the building served as the National Theatre. Today the building continues to serve as the country’s National Theatre and hosts the Experimental Theatre as well.

The Theatre is located in the historic center of Tirana. Less than a few hundred meters away stands
The Significance of a Building

an Ottoman era villa built in the 19th century. This villa, formerly known as the Toptani Villa and now called the Sarajet Villa (Fig. 2), is also under threat by the Special Law. Despite being declared a Category One Cultural Monument, the Villa is in an advanced state of deterioration. Non-governmental organizations (NGOs), like OTTONomy and Cultural Heritage without Borders (CHwB), are trying to restore the Villa but have been blocked by the Albanian government. There is concern that the Special Law has created a precedent where the Albanian government prioritizes land development in Tirana’s center over preservation of culturally significant buildings (Lori Amy, personal communication, October 24, 2018).

Evaluating the significance of historic buildings can help demonstrate their importance as it relates to the fate of the buildings. Cultural heritage, defined as the tangible and intangible ways of life developed by a community, plays a role in building significance (UNESCO, 2017). The significance of a building can be determined by its architectural, political, and personal importance. Architectural significance focuses on the distinct aspects of buildings that make them unique. Political significance consists of how buildings are used in the context of the government and political actions. Personal significance concerns itself with the relationships that individuals and communities have with the built environment. The architectural and political significance of both the National Theatre and Sarajet Villa are well documented and are already part of the discussion about the buildings’ “value” in the debate over their destruction. However, less prevalent is a discussion on the personal and communal significance that these buildings hold for many Albanians. Our research investigated those intangible, yet powerful, aspects of the threatened buildings in Tirana’s historic center.

The personal and communal significance attached to a building can be understood through theories of sense of place. Place, space, meaning and memory are complex themes, particularly in countries such as Albania that are slowly coming to terms with their brutal past. Place can be defined as the product of people experiencing emotion and creating an emotional attachment to an environment (Najafi, 2011). Buildings, cities, and even continents are considered places when they have accumulated meaning. Sense of place can be described as the feeling that a person attributes to a place (Najafi, 2011). It is formed by interactions, experiences, history, and mindset (Najafi, 2011). Sense of place is largely formed by place attachments, the emotional bonds a person forms based on assigned “concepts and meanings of a place” (Najafi, 2011). Altman and Low define six factors that are important for forming place

Figure 2: The Sarajet Villa
attachment: genealogical bonding, linkage through loss or destruction, economic bonding, cosmological bonding, linkage through religious and secular pilgrimage, and narrative ties (Najafi, 2011; Altman, 1992). We have found the four factors of genealogical bonding, linkage through loss, linkage through secular pilgrimage, and narrative ties to be most relevant to our work. Genealogical bonding is the relationship a person, family, or community has with a place through its history and typically occurs in a location with deep, rich history (Najafi, 2011; Altman, 1992). This genealogical bonding links “people and land through the historical identification of place and family or community” (Altman, 1992; Najafi, 2011). When that genealogic relationship crumbles or breaks down, linkage through loss or destruction forms in its place. (Najafi, 2011; Altman, 1992). Linkage through secular pilgrimage is the desire to visit and the experience of visiting a place and the participation in cultural events such theatre, parades or festivals. This form of place attachment is most focused on the physical experience of a place. (Najafi, 2011; Altman, 1992).

Altman and Low define “narrative ties through storytelling and place naming” as a process that links people to a place through the stories they tell about the place they are attached to; these narratives may include myths, family stories, or political commentary (Altman, 1992; Najafi, 2011). Narrative ties also bond people and place through “the telling of stories, ...family histories, and political accounts” (Najafi, 2011; Altman, 1992). We used these four factors to investigate place attachment in the context of the National Theatre and the Sarajet Villa.

Postmemory hinges on the idea that a person can internalize emotions from an experience without ever actually living it (Hirsch, 2012). Postmemory is often used in the context of trauma and how a traumatic event can ripple through generations. These memories and postmemories can be recalled through the connections made in the places where the memories were built. Physical environments are important to the recollection of these memories and contribute to sense of place.

Our Project

The goal of our research was to document and explore sense of place and the personal aspects contributing to the significance of buildings in the context of evolving public and private space in Tirana’s historic center. To realize this goal, we collaborated with Cultural Heritage without Borders and OTTONomy to identify three objectives: document the evolution of the historic center, and explore key informants' perspectives, sense of place, postmemory, and cultural heritage of the historic center.
To document and explore the sense of place related to the buildings in the historic center, we used three main methods. First, we analyzed the evolution of the center by collecting technical surveys and pictures from archives and by photographing the current state of the buildings. Next, we conducted key informant interviews, which included people directly related to the theatre, its destruction, or to the Sarajet Villa. Finally, we assessed sense of place through virtual reality (VR) experiences and a Theatre Memory Box exercise. Protesters at the National Theatre vigils were asked to write down their memories of the Theatre, which were collected in our Memory Box shaped like the National Theatre to symbolize the importance of the memories inside the building. In addition to the demonstrations, we collected stories and memories about the National Theatre from urban design students at the Polytechnic University of Tirana. There, we conducted a VR experience with students to stimulate a discussion of the theatre and preservation of historic buildings in Tirana.

From our research, we found that Altman and Low’s concepts of place attachment through narrative, genealogy, loss, and pilgrimage are relevant to understanding how memory and experience adhere to the built environment. The act of storytelling was a powerful experience for many of the protesters at the National Theatre vigils. Many of the people at those nightly vigils are in their 50s and 60s and had been attending performances at the Theatre for decades. Many who participated in our Theatre Memory Box exercise expressed deep gratitude that their stories about the Theatre were being heard. Their stories create a tapestry of connections that show how an eighty year old building such as the National Theatre is intertwined in a community.

Linkage through secular pilgrimage is the creation of a person-place bond through participation in cultural events. This method of forming place attachment is prevalent at the National Theatre. Many participants in our Theatre Memory Box exercises described the importance of going to the Theatre with their family, watching or acting in plays, or participating in the vigils nightly. These experiences are rooted in physical interactions with place and people in it. This is different from genealogical connections which can exist without ever coming into contact with a place. The cultural symbolism of a place is part of what makes experiences there important, as the theatre is seen as an important part of Albanian and European culture. While narrative ties focus on stories, pilgrimage connections are important to an individual or community because they actively participate in a cultural event that is larger than just the individual.

Similar to narrative ties, we also collected examples of place attachment through genealogy. Genealogical bonding is based on a person’s identification with the history that occurred at a certain place. We saw examples of both community- and family-based genealogical bonding in Tirana’s historic center. During our demonstration at the Polytechnic University of Tirana, students
explored the idea of how the Theatre and its story are part of the Albanian identity. Even students who were not from Tirana and had not been to the Theatre had some degree of place attachment to the building simply because of its historical significance to Albania.

Since memory is an important factor that contributes to place attachment, postmemory should be considered when assessing sense of place. Elvis Kazazi, whose family is a majority shareholder of the Sarajet Villa, has a complex history with the Villa that is augmented by the traumatic postmemories he formed in his youth. These memories were caused by the communist regime’s persecution of political opponents and his family’s inability to tell him why his family was being punished for owning the Sarajet Villa. Postmemory heightens the genealogical bond by having the building not only represent history but also lived experiences that are a result of that history.

Strong place attachment can occur with or without physical interaction to a site. Elvis Kazazi was living as a refugee in Italy when the Sarajet Villa was returned to his family. He began to learn about the building’s role in Albania’s history and his family’s history. Feeling a “responsibility” to his family and his country, even though he hadn’t lived in the Villa, Elvis returned to Albania in 2008 to try and preserve it. This “return” to a place that one had never inhabited reinforces Furman et al. and Nafaji’s position that place attachment can exist without physical interaction with a place. The strength of the genealogical bonds that can result from distant or psychological interactions with a place can be demonstrated through experiences like Elvis’.

Linkage through loss is another process of creating a connection to a building (Altman, 1992; Najafi, 2011). Linkage through loss tends to build upon an existing genealogical bond, such as Elvis Kazazi’s relationship to the Villa. Similarly, responses from the Theatre Memory Box indicated a strong place attachment through linkage through loss or destruction. In personal stories, informants and vigil protesters discussed what would be lost, both personally and for Tirana, if the theatre or Sarajet Villa were to be destroyed.
Conclusion

Using Shamai’s scale of sense of place, we discussed people with little or no place attachment to the Theatre, the Sarajet Villa, or the historic center. These people exhibited levels 0 or 1 on the scale as defined by Shamai, meaning they have knowledge of a place but no connection, or no connection to the place. Some in favor of the demolition experience first level sense of place because despite the acknowledgment of the Theatre’s historical importance, they still believe it should be torn down.

We found that four of Altman and Low’s six culturally-based processes of place attachment and sense of place were an applicable framework to understand a majority of the responses from the Theatre Memory Box and many statements from key informants. The four processes we chose are narrative ties, linkage through secular pilgrimage, genealogical bonding, and linkage through loss or destruction. We found that people become attached to buildings by the memories they hold in or around those place, and by how they express or share those memories. Through our Theatre Memory Box exercise at the National Theatre and the Polytechnic University, we found that many believe the Theatre is a key location of Albanian history and is considered a defining factor of the country’s identity. The Sarajet Villa also demonstrates the importance of familial and historic significance through Elvis Kazazi’s story; the history the Villa holds connects Elvis because of its role in his family’s history.
INTRODUCTION TO SENSE OF PLACE, ALBANIAN POLITICS, AND DEVELOPMENT IN TIRANA
Place, space, meaning and memory are complex themes, particularly in countries such as Albania that are slowly coming to terms with their brutal past. Place can be defined as the product of people experiencing emotion and creating an emotional attachment to an environment (Najafi, 2011). Buildings, cities, and even continents are considered places when they have accumulated meaning. Sense of place can be described as the feeling that a person attributes to a place (Najafi, 2011). When a person is in a place, they relate certain emotions to that location based on architecture, location, and experiences. Sense of place differs from person to person, as each has had different interactions with spaces. Nevertheless, a place can contain both individual and collective memory, and this sense of place can be an important reason to preserve buildings (Najafi, 2011). Memory is not solely influenced by the individual, but also has cultural and social elements (Hoskins, 2016). Since place attachment is heavily dependent on memory, this allows collective memory and postmemory, through which memories are passed down through generations, to influence sense of place (Hirsch, 2012).

The evolution of public and private space can put a sometimes fragile sense of place at risk. In Tirana, Albania, rapid urban development continues to threaten historic buildings. Under the guise of modernization, the Albanian Parliament has created new laws which put registered cultural monuments and other historic buildings, such as the National Theatre and the Sarajet Villa, in jeopardy.

Both the Sarajet Villa and the National Theatre are registered as cultural monuments by the Institute of Cultural Monuments (IMK). Cultural monuments are buildings that are considered by the IMK to be important to the country's history and cultural heritage. Cultural heritage is defined as the tangible and intangible ways of life developed by a community; cultural heritage includes valuable traditions, morals, architecture, and monuments (UNESCO, 2017).

The new law (Law no. 37/2018 “For the establishment of a special procedure in negotiating and enacting a contract with the object: Designing and implementing the
urban project and the new building of the National Theatre") which we refer to as the Special (or National Theatre) Law, originally passed on July 5th, 2018, allows the government to enter into a public-private partnership (PPP) to demolish the old National Theatre and replace it with a new, modern National Theatre (Meta, 2018). In addition to a new theatre, the plans also include the construction of new skyscrapers on adjacent parcels of land (van Gerven Oei, 2018). The Sarajet Villa, one of the last remaining Ottoman era houses in Tirana, is a privately-owned structure that is indirectly affected by this law. It stands next to small shops in the historic center that are slated for demolition and is in the path of construction of seven new towers behind the Theatre (van Gerven Oei, 2018). This proximity to such a large-scale construction project is likely to put the structural integrity of the Villa at risk.

Currently, the Socialist Party (PS) of Albania holds the majority in Parliament (74 seats). The opposition consists of a coalition between the Democratic Party (PD) (43 seats) and the Socialist Movement for Integration (LSI) (18 seats). Prime Minister Edi Rama is the leader of the Socialist Party. President Ilir Meta was formerly the leader of the Socialist Movement for Integration, but resigned from the LSI on April 30, 2017 after he was elected President of Albania. Meta’s wife, Monika Kryemadhi is the current leader of the LSI.

The Socialist party introduced the Special Law as a means to modernize the city. Several politicians and citizens, including President Meta have stated that the new law is corrupt and was passed in an unconstitutional manner (Meta, 2018). The historic and cultural significance of buildings in the historic district do not appear to be key consideration of those who support the National Theatre law and its subsequent demolition and redevelopment of the area (Meta, 2018). Nevertheless, a sense of identity and strong attachment to place has generated seven months of nightly vigils (Fig. 3) outside the National Theatre, where demonstrators contest the law. Many of them believe that “the history alone is enough reason to not destroy the buildings” (Anonymous National Theatre protester, personal communication, November 29, 2018).

Figure 3: The National Theatre Demonstration
The goal of this project was to research sense of place in evolving public and private space in Tirana’s historic center. We documented the historic center to assess both the built space and the spirit of place. We researched the cultural heritage of the historic center through archival research, key informant interviews, and the collection of personal stories. We sought to understand the role of collective and personal memory, as well as post-memory on a sense of place.
BACKGROUND ON THE SIGNIFICANCE OF BUILDINGS AND THE EVOLUTION OF SPACE
The connection a community has with buildings and spaces, known as sense of place, is formed by individual and collective interactions, experiences, history, and mindset (Najafi, 2011). Other psychology and social science experts describe sense of place as a “bond with a meaningful space” or as “an umbrella concept that includes...attachment to place, national identity, and regional awareness” (Scannell, 2010; Shamai, 1991). An individual or collective sense of place as it relates to buildings, locations, or space is formed by two sets of contributing factors: “cognitive and perceptual factors and the physical characteristics of a physical setting” (Najafi, 2011). Sense of place can also be heavily affected by memory and postmemory.

Cognitive factors relating to sense of place refers to the attachments an individual has to “concepts and meanings of a place,” i.e., the individual realizes the concept of the place, building, etc. and then creates an “emotional bonding between [self] and place” (Najafi, 2011). This type of person-place bonding is also referred to as place attachment, which is a crucial element of sense of place.

Scannell et al. outline a set of organized factors that contribute to place attachment (Fig. 4). The three main factors are defined as “person, psychological process, and place dimensions” (Scannell, 2010). Person can be defined as either a group or individual, and refers to who is attached and the “extent the attachment is based on individually and collectively held meanings” (Scannell, 2010). Scannell argues that “places become meaningful from personally important experiences” like memories or milestones (Scannell, 2010). Process is split into affective, cognitive, and behavioral components. Affect is the emotional connection; cognition is the

![Diagram of Place Attachment](image-url)
 association a person has with affect and place; and behavior is the “desire to remain close to a place” (Scannell, 2010). Place is defined as the “object of the attachment” and the “physical and social attachment that influence the overall bond” (Scannell, 2010).

The psychological process as described by Scannell et al. can be further delineated by a series of six factors of place attachment defined by psychologists Altman and Low in their treatise Place Attachment: genealogical bonding, linkage through loss or destruction, economic bonding, cosmological bonding, linkage through religious and secular pilgrimage, and narrative ties (Najafi, 2011; Altman, 1992). For the purposes of this project, the focus will be on genealogical bonding, linkage through loss or destruction, linkage through secular pilgrimage, and narrative ties. Genealogical bonding is the relationship a person, family, or community has with a place through its history, and typically occurs in a location with deep, rich history (Najafi, 2011; Altman, 1992). When that genealogic relationship crumbles or breaks down, linkage through loss or destruction forms in its place; this form of place attachment is the bonding that develops through the threat of losing a place (Najafi, 2011; Altman, 1992). Linkage through secular pilgrimage forms from the “participation in celebratory cultural events,” a “pilgrimage to a place, [and the] desire to visit a place” (Najafi, 2011; Altman, 1992). Narrative ties also bond people and place through “the telling of stories,...family histories, and political accounts” (Najafi, 2011; Altman, 1992). As described, place attachment can be formed by many individual contributing factors, but ultimately has an “interdependence...influenced by the attributes and characteristics of the settings and the users” (Najafi, 2011). As mentioned, the characteristics of a physical environment “not only define the kind of a setting but also contribute to the perceived” sense of place (Najafi, 2011). Stedman argues that “the local environment sets bounds and gives form to [social] constructions” relating to sense of place and place attachment (Stedman, 2003). Each experience or behavior involved in the psychological process of place attachment, as described by Scannell et al., are attributed to the landscape in which they occur (Stedman, 2003; Scannell, 2010). The physical environment associated with an individual’s sense of place influences “a range of experiences that shape meanings” based on the environment’s characteristics (Stedman, 2003). Not only does the environment influence sense of place, but it also “underpins the symbolic meanings” of place attachment (Stedman, 2003).

Because sense of place is as affected and established by physical environment as it is by personal emotional connection, it can be easily impacted by any changes in the built environment. Maintaining sense of place through personal “place meanings may become increasingly challenging” as the physical environment changes, causing “the gap [to] widen between the meaning and the physical characteristics of the setting”
(Stedman, 2003; Fitchen, 1991). Stedman argues an environment affected by place attachment can “change to such a degree [that] preferred meanings become untenable” (Stedman, 2003). When buildings are greatly altered or demolished, they “convey no meanings anymore, [and] people suffer from a sense of placelessness” and feel little to no connection with the space (Najafi, 2011).
REMEMBRANCE: HOW COLLECTIVE AND POST MEMORY CONTRIBUTE TO SENSE OF PLACE

Memory contributes heavily to sense of place (Najafi, 2011). Without the ability to know and recall experiences and relationships with places we would have no reason to form connections with them. Memory is not simply an account of something we’ve witnessed, but instead is in communication with numerous other factors. Memory, as Andrew Hoskins argues, has social and cultural dimensions along with the more obvious individual dimensions (Hoskins, 2016).

Collective Memory

The term “collective memory” is a contested term. Many social scientists and humanists acknowledge that the phrase is overused and has taken on inconsistent definitions (Hoskins, 2016). Sociologist, Jeffrey Olick argues that there is a difference between collected and collective memory. Collected memory, Olick argues, is based on “the aggregated individual memories of a group” (Hoskins, 2016; Olick 1999). On the other hand, Olick asserts that collective memory exists beyond the individual. He states that, “symbols and their systems of relations have a degree of autonomy from the subjective perceptions of individuals” (Hoskins, 2016; Olick 1999). Hoskins sees collective memory as being “more than the sum of its (individual parts),” these parts being collected memory (Hoskins, 2016). Other scholars argue that the individual and collective are not separated, but are constantly in communication with each other (Hoskins, 2016). Merck et al. assert, “...memories are not stored in the head, encoded in some yet understood way in neurological tissue. Rather they grow out of the interactions between the internal and external” (Meck et al., 2016).

The evolution of collective memory amounts to a model of memory that is both deeply personal and yet also highly influenced by society. This means that individual recollections do not come purely from the self, but are influenced by how the collective remembers. Therefore, sense of place is affected by collective memory.
Postmemory

If collective memory can be thought of as memory transcending horizontally through a population, then postmemory can be thought of as memory transcending vertically across generations. Postmemory hinges on the idea that a person can internalize emotions from an experience without ever actually living it (Hirsch, 2012). Postmemory is often used in the context of trauma and how a traumatic event can ripple through generations. Professor of Cultural Studies and Writing at Georgia Southern University, Lori Amy, describes memory as “not simply a matter of recollection, but, rather, [as] a product of imaginative investment, projection, and creation” (Amy, n.d.). Therefore memories can be formed simply by family interaction. In terms of traumatic memories, this happens through “the ways that individuals and families reenact, daily, old pains, old wounds, the way they transmit anger, fear, distrust, guilt, betrayal, shame, [and] pain” (Amy, n.d.).

Postmemory relies on a paradoxical contradiction between types of memory transmission between generations. Under what Amy describes as “normal conditions,” subsequent generations learn about their family and community’s past through collective memory embodied in media, stories, and commemoration days among other things (Amy, n.d.). Sites of collective memory transmission may be any place of social gathering where people interact or communicate, such as “homes, churches, public spaces of celebration and commemoration, cultural forms of representation.” However, under non-normal, or abnormal, circumstances these lines of transmission are broken and contradictory, resulting in what Amy calls a “traumatic rupture” (Amy, n.d.). In a traumatic rupture, a generation that did not experience a trauma may feel the emotions stemming from it, but are not aware of the extent of that trauma because broken lines of transmission result
When an entire nation has had its memory distorted through intentionally deployed propaganda campaigns, when atrocities are hidden or denied, when show trials publicly display the power of the state and turn every notion of truth and justice into farce and absurdity, when people survive by virtue of silencing and censoring themselves, by pretending to agree with the forces of power so as not to become victims of that power – under these circumstances, the continuity between individual experience and memory and the social mediation through which collective memory may stabilize a story of self and nation is destroyed. (Amy, n.d.)

Collective and postmemories can be recalled through the connections made in the places where the memories were built. These memories directly contribute to a person’s sense of place due to the social and cultural dimensions of memories (Hoskins, 2016). Physical environments are important to the recollection of these memories and contribute to sense of place.
The built landscape in Tirana has evolved in terms of public versus private space, and can be viewed through the lens of over-managed and under-managed space (Pojani, 2015). Pojani et al. (2015) define over-managed space as space that was formerly public but has been privatized by corporate or commercial interest. Under-managed space is space that is physically neglected, abandoned, or abused (Pojani, 2015). During Albania’s long communist regime, from 1944 through 1991, all buildings and private space were expropriated and turned into public space. In the almost 30 years since the fall of communism, private space has been taking over public space for commercialization, where small businesses are losing space to box stores and its uses of public space is being more regulated (i.e. no loitering) (Pojani, 2015). Pojani et al. describe the plight of Tirana during the transition period after the fall of the communist regime as being “characterized by privatization, or rather usurpation, of public spaces” (Pojani, 2015). This change of private to public and back to private is part of the evolution of the area of Tirana known as the historic center.

The historic center of Tirana refers to the area southeast of Skanderbeg Square, near the center of Tirana, spanning from Rrugë Sermedin Said Toptani to the Toptani Shopping Center. This area (22 thousand square meters total) includes landmarks and historic buildings such as the Sarajet Villa, the National Theatre, and borders the Justinian castle. The National Theatre consists of two buildings: the National Theatre (Teatri Kombetar) and the Experimental Theatre. The Sarajet Villa is marked with a green arrow, the National Theatre with a blue arrow, and the Experimental Theatre with an orange arrow. The entire area that is referred to as the “historic center”

Figure 5: Development of an Urban Tirana
is delineated by the red line on the map. Two of the major features of the historic center that are the focus of our research are the Sarajet Villa (originally known as the Toptani Villa) and the National Theatre (referring to both the National and Experimental Theatres). The Sarajet Villa is an example of the evolution between public and private space during its 200 year history where it alternated between public and private ownership. The National Theatre has always been public space.
History of the Sarajet Villa

Tirana was founded as an Ottoman-era town in the early 17th century (Britannica, 2018). It became a center of trade due to its location at the crossroads of many cities in Albania. Before Tirana was the capital, one of the largest and richest families was the Toptani Clan. The family built a large villa near the city center in 1837, which would serve many purposes throughout its 200 year history. When Tirana became the capital in 1920, the Toptani Villa served as the first American Embassy in Albania (Lori Amy, personal communication, October 24, 2018). This marks the first transition of the Villa from private space (the Toptani family home) into public space. By 1925 the building became Albania’s first National Library (Elvis Kazazi, personal communication, October 24, 2018).

In 1941, the Toptani Villa was sold to two families, the Kazazi and Kosovu families, marking a transition back to private space (Elvis Kazazi, personal communication, October 24, 2018).

Figure 7: Architectural Survey of the Sarajet Villa, 1967 (IMK, 1967)
During communism everything private was expropriated, and became public space. Due to this, the Toptani Villa shifted back into public space, and became the main offices of the Institute of Culture and Monuments (IMK) (Arben Theodhosi, personal communication, November 23, 2018). Despite the communists destroying churches and other religions buildings in an attempt to make an atheist state, restoration and preservation of other historic buildings was being enforced (Emin Riza, personal communication, November 11, 2018). Because of this, technical surveys were conducted of the Toptani Villa, which document how the Villa looked in 1960s and estimated how the house was originally built (Fig. 7). The Villa would serve as the offices of the expropriation. Many changes were made to the interior: walls were removed, flooring was replaced, and other drastic changes were made. Currently, the Villa suffers from issues common to under-managed public space, including neglect and decay from lack of consistent care needed for an old building. This is despite being recently returned to private space upon the closing of the restaurant, and is currently under the care of Elvis Kazazi (Elvis Kazazi, personal communication, October 24, 2018). OTTOonomy and Cultural Heritage without Borders, NGOs that emphasize preservation of cultural heritage, are trying to restore the Sarajet Villa and turn it into a Cultural Center.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Event</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1837</td>
<td>The Villa is built by the Toptani Clan, the richest family in Albania</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1920</td>
<td>Tirana becomes the capital of Albania</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1920</td>
<td>The Villa becomes the first U.S. Embassy in Albania</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1925</td>
<td>The Villa becomes the first National Library</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1928</td>
<td>King Zog begins his reign of Albania, and employs Italian architects to design the center of the city</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1938</td>
<td>The National Theatre is built by Italian architects, serves as a sports and culture center</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1939</td>
<td>Albania is occupied by the Axis Powers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1941</td>
<td>The Toptani Villa is sold to the Kazazi and Kosova families to pay off Toptani debt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1942</td>
<td>The Villa serves as the main offices Ministry of Culture until 1991</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1945</td>
<td>Albania is liberated by the communism Partisans. The communist reign begins</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1945</td>
<td>Show trials are held at the National Theatre</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1947</td>
<td>The National Theatre converts from a sports and culture center to a theatre</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1967</td>
<td>Architects conduct a technical survey of the Toptani Villa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>The communist regime in Albania falls</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2018</td>
<td>Plans for the new National Theatre are introduced</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Figure 8: History Timeline of the National Theatre and Sarajet Villa*
History of the National Theatre

The National Theatre represents an outgrowth of Albania’s relationship with Italy. In 1925, Ahmed Zogu proclaimed himself the first and only King of Albania. He began to form relations between Albania and Italy (Tase, 2012). One of the indirect outcomes of the aid Italy provided Albania was the dispatch of Italian architects to Albania to help design many public and private buildings in the city center.

One of the buildings designed with Italian rationalist influence was the National Theatre. Built in 1938, the building originally served as the sports and culture center for the city (Mali, 2018).

At the beginning of the Communist regime in Albania in 1945, show trials were held in the building. Show trials are trials where the outcome is predetermined. These trials were essentially just a performance, and were publicized to show the power of the communist party. As a result of the two months of trials, seventeen Albanians were executed after being accused of being enemies of the people and found guilty of “war crimes” (Elsie, 2015).

The building became the country’s national theatre in 1947 (Mali, 2018). During the 50 years of communist reign, the Theatre served as a performance space for approved plays as well to output propaganda plays to the party’s benefit (Elsie, 2007). When the regime fell in 1991, the National Theatre continued to host performances but slowly transitioned away from propaganda (Robert Budina, personal communication, November 19, 2018). The National Theatre constitutes what Pojani calls “over-managed space” (Pojani, 2015).
In March 2018, Albania’s Prime Minister, Edi Rama presented plans for a new National Theatre to be built where the current one stands (Fig. 9 and 10). In July 2018, the Albanian Parliament passed a “Special Law” (Law no. 37/2018) that would give the land that the Theatre currently occupies to the construction company Fusha Ltd. in an expedited process (Meta, 2018). This Public-Private Partnership would construct a new Theatre along with several towers on the footprint of the current National Theatre (van Gerven Oei, 2018).

The Special Law has been heavily debated by the two leading political parties in Albania: the Socialist Party, which holds a majority in Parliament, has championed the Law; the Democratic Party who oppose the law and are the minority. Thus far, the Law has been twice vetoed by President Ilir Meta, however the Parliamentary majority overthrew the President’s decision in late October 2018, opening the way for the potential demolition of the National Theatre and buildings in the surrounding development zone.

One of the biggest controversies arising around a new theatre is the constitutionality of the Law. In his first veto of the Special Law, President Meta stated nine grievances. According to Meta, the law “is not in harmony with the basic constitutional principles of national identity and national heritage;” it “seriously infringes the constitutional principles of ‘decentralization’ and ‘local autonomy’ of the organization and functioning of local government; and it is also in violation of the principle of ‘separation and balance of power’” (Meta, 2018). Additionally, the first version of the Special Law named Fusha Ltd. as the developer for the project. This violates Albanian law 123/2013 which requires a bidding process in Public-Private Partnerships (Pollo et al., 2018). Circumventing this bidding process infringes on the EU-Albania
Stabilisation Association Agreement (Pollo et al., 2018). The second version of the law, which was also vetoed by the President, addresses this issue by creating an Evaluation and Negotiation Commission to field bids for the project (van Gerven Oei, 2018). However, some assert that since the Mayor of Tirana, Erion Veliaj (PS) will be the one to address appeals to the procurement process, the updated law will still result in Fusha winning the bid (van Gerven Oei, 2018). Currently Albania's Constitutional Court is non-functional, leaving no legal process to challenge the constitutionality of the law.

Some critics of the law assert that the Special Law has illegitimate motives behind it. Some people believe that many construction projects in Albania are used to launder money (Burgen, 2018). In a memo, the Democratic Party has also alleged that the special law is “an obvious affair smelling of favoritism and corruption” (Democratic Party of Albania, 2018).

Proponents of the Special Law are promoting a vision of a modern Tirana. Bjarke Ingels Group (BIG), the Copenhagen and New York based architecture firm contracted by Fusha Ltd. to design the new Theatre, believe that it will make “Tirana’s public spaces more inviting and its public institutions...
more transparent” (Bjarke Ingels Group, 2018). BIG states that their plans align with the Municipality of Tirana’s goal of creating more urban gathering places in the city (Bjarke Ingels Group, 2018). BIG’s plan utilizes 2100 square meters of municipal land to build a Theatre with 9300 square meters of space, more than quadrupling the amount of public space (Fig. 11) (Meta, 2018; Bjarke Ingels Group, 2018).

Additionally, many advocates of redevelopment cite the National Theatre’s structural integrity as a reason for its demolition and replacement. During his March 2018 presentation, Prime Minister Rama argued that renovation of the Theatre is impossible. Rama and Veliaj claim that the buildings are far too degraded to be properly maintained and that the municipality cannot afford to renovate them (Erebara, 2018).

Although the Law does not explicitly threaten the Sarajet Villa, its language is vague enough that it does not specifically state where the expropriation of land will stop. This creates the possibility of the Villa being included in the expropriated land (van Gerven Oei, 2018). Even if the Sarajet Villa is not taken by this law, it could nonetheless create the precedent that the government could further expropriate property in the interest of development. Additionally, the construction of more towers around the Villa will likely diminish the building’s historical significance by burying the 19th century villa in the shadows of twenty-first century skyscrapers.

The Special Law has generated substantial opposition among actors, artists, citizens, opposition leaders, international activists and cultural...
heritage experts. Those who object to the New Theatre law argue that buildings there represent Albania’s history and should be preserved, no matter how aesthetically pleasing they may or may not be (Fig. 12). Protesters have peacefully demonstrated at the National Theatre nightly since May 2018. Some opponents of the Law are in favor of a new National Theatre, but don’t support the demolition of the current building, preferring, instead, that a new theatre be built in a different location. Many of them believe that the history of the Theatre is enough to warrant its preservation.

Further concern about the Special Law focuses on Albania’s increased use of Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs), which have alarmed many groups, including international financial organizations like the International Monetary Fund (IMF) (Atoyan, 2018). PPPs allow governments to take on expensive projects by offering incentives to private developers (Burgen, 2018). While PPPs do allow governments to undertake ventures they cannot afford, they do not reduce government spending, but instead merely delay expenditures by allowing them to pay private companies in installments. PPPs have inherent fiscal risk and can encourage lack of transparency in projects (Atoyan, 2018). The International Monetary Fund recently carried out a Public Investment Management Assessment and found that Western Balkans countries performed far worse while managing PPPs compared to the rest of Europe (Atoyan, 2018). Likewise, the IMF stated that in Albania “the currentPPP framework is poorly designed and lacks proper recording and risk analysis of investment projects” (Albania: 2018 First Post-Program Monitoring, 2018).
THE SIGNIFICANCE OF A BUILDING

Historical significance is not the only aspect that defines a building’s “value.” In addition to financial importance, the significance of a building can be attributed to a combination of many different individual and collective factors such as architectural, political, and personal significance.

Architectural Significance

The Sarajet Villa is one of the few Ottoman-era buildings in Tirana. It is classified as a Category One Cultural Monument, meaning that any modifications to the building must be authorized by the Institute of Cultural Monuments (IMK) (Emin Riza, personal communication, November 11, 2018). It is also an example of vernacular architecture, meaning the family did not have an architect design the house, but instead they designed it based on an expansion of example buildings from the area (Fig. 13) (Emin Riza, personal communication, November 11, 2018). The Villa is an example of Type Two vernacular architecture. Vernacular architecture types are loosely determined by what features of the building were most prevalent at the time it was built: Type One indicates an early 18th-century style; Type Two is an indication of a late 18th-century style (Emin Riza, personal communication, November 11, 2018). Note that type is not determined by when the

Figure 13: Original Floorplan of the Sarajet Villa (IMK, 1966)
building was built, but by the building's defining characteristics. Type Two vernacular buildings are known for their large central area and numerous smaller rooms surrounding the central room (Fig. 13). Professor Emin Riza, an expert of Albanian vernacular architecture, surveyed the Sarajet Villa and describes it as “one of the most advanced manifestations of the typography” in the area (Emin Riza, personal communication, November 11, 2018).

Albania’s National Theatre is also architecturally significant (Fig. 14). It was built by Italian architect Giuglio Bertè in 1938, and is one of few examples of rationalist Italian architecture outside of Italy (Anisa Lloja, personal communication, November 13, 2018). Rationalist architecture is defined by mathematical, symmetrical designs that are both functional and orderly (Muscato, n.d.). Other notable examples of rationalist architecture include Casa del Fascio and Palazzo della Civiltà Italiana (Poghosyan, 2018; Huggins, 2016). Both of these buildings are blocky and have repeating geometric patterns similar to the National Theatre (Fig. 15). The architectural design adds value to a building because it is representative of the influences of the time period in which the buildings were designed and constructed.

Figure 14: The National and Experimental Theatres in Tirana
Figure 15: On the left, Casa del Fascio, and on the right, Palazzo della Civiltà Italiana (Poghosyan, 2018; Huggins, 2016)
Throughout communist rule in Albania, the National Theatre was used as a tool to control the people in the forms of show trials and propaganda. In early 1945, a Special Court for War Criminals and Enemies of the People was established where political adversaries were tried, convicted, executed in the streets, and buried in mass graves in unspecified locations (Communism Legacy, n.d.). These mass graves (Fig. 16) were then dug up and the bodies reburied to hide the identities and locations of the deceased. Many relatives are still searching for their loved ones to this day (Investigation, 2010). In addition to being the venue for show trials, propagandist plays were performed at the Theatre; these biased plays were designed to both entertain and manipulate the people (Robert Budina, personal communication, November 19, 2018). Although the National Theatre’s dark communist history has passed, it continues to be a struggle in the lives of the survivors and their descendants.

Figure 16: A grave found at an unspecified location (Communism Legacy, n.d.)
Personal Significance

The architectural and political significance of both buildings are well documented and are already part of the discussion about the building’s values in the debate over their destruction. However, there is a lack of discussion on the personal significance that these buildings hold for Albanians. Personal importance is synonymous to sense of place and is determined by the interactions, stories, family ties, and relations a person has with a building (Najafi, 2011). Even though an individual’s connection may not be enough reason to protect a building, when layered together, the collection of personal significance of a single building gives the building intangible value. Our research investigated the personal significance of the threatened buildings in Tirana’s historic center.

Figure 17: An Ottoman-era Villa like the Sarajet Villa that was declared a cultural monument (see sign), but has been abandoned
METHODS TO UNDERSTAND SENSE OF PLACE AND PLACE ATTACHMENT
Our goal was to document and explore sense of place and the personal aspects, including stories, that contribute to the significance of buildings in the context of evolving public and private space in Tirana’s historic center. To realize this goal, we identified three objectives: document the evolution of the historic center, explore key informants’ perspectives, and assess sense of place, cultural heritage, and memory as it relates to the historic center.

**DOCUMENT THE EVOLUTION OF THE HISTORIC CENTER**

Historic buildings are primary sources for others to learn about the past. Their physical elements, function, and evolution tell a story about the people who built and used them. In the face of possibly losing Tirana’s historic center, specifically Albania’s National Theatre, the Sarajet Villa, and the surrounding square, we deemed it important to document the area and buildings.

Our first step in documenting the evolution of the historic center was through archival research (Fig. 18 and 19). We explored old drawings, photographs, and surveys of the National Theatre and the Sarajet Villa from the Institute of Cultural Monuments (IMK). We gathered technical explanations of the structures from Anisa Lloja, an architect at our sponsor, Cultural Heritage without Borders. Additionally, we also toured the Sarajet Villa with Ms. Lloja to better understand the important historical features of the building. We also

Figure 18: Exterior Photo of the National Theatre, 1940 (Archivo Luce, 1940)

Figure 19: Interior Photo of the National Theatre, 1940 (Archivo Luce, 1940)
interviewed Professor Emin Riza, an expert on Albanian architecture and preservation. Professor Riza worked for the IMK during the communist regime, specifically on preserving vernacular architecture during the 1960s when the IMK was founded (Emin Riza, personal communication, November 7, 2018).

Along with collecting documentation of the buildings, we also photo-documented their current states (Fig. 20, 21, 22). We used conventional and 360° photography to capture the interior and exterior of the Sarajet Villa and the exterior of the National Theatre (our access to the interior of the Theatre was limited and we were unable to photograph its interior). We used standard photography to document architectural details and decorations on the buildings. The 360° photographs were used to capture the space inside and around the buildings to give a sense of what it would be like to stand in or around them through a virtual reality experience (Fig. 23). We also photographed the nightly protests at the National Theatre, which we attended in our role as observers.

Figure 20: A cabinet bookcase in the Sarajet Villa
Figure 21: An interior room of the Sarajet Villa

Figure 22: A view from the roof of the Sarajet Villa

Figure 23: A 360 degree image of the National Theatre
EXPLORE KEY INFORMANT PERSPECTIVES ON THE EVOLUTION OF THE HISTORIC CENTER

Documenting individual and community memories, and stories about the potential loss of the buildings in the historic center, was crucial to understanding people’s sense of place. Along with personal stories about the National Theatre and Sarajet Villa, we explored how key informants perceive the evolution of the historic center.

We pursued various key informant interviews to learn about their perspectives on the historic center (Fig, 24, 25, 26). We used a semi-structured interview model because it allows for conversational dialogue and flexibility (Keller, 2018). In our interviews, we aimed to learn about personal perspectives on rapid urban development in Tirana, and we enquired about what the informants thought would be lost with the demolition of the National Theatre and potentially the Sarajet Villa. We utilized a list of questions to start our interviews (see Appendix B), but allowed the interview to develop organically around each interviewee’s unique point-of-view on the historic center buildings. Interview candidates included people who attend the public protests at the National Theatre as well as architects, cultural heritage and history students, and key stakeholders.
With the consent of the interviewee, we established that we would share some of their statements, stories or quotations with Cultural Heritage without Borders (CHwB) to publish on their website and/or Facebook page. By making these stories accessible, we hope to contribute to a deeper understanding of the importance of the historic center, helping to demonstrate what could be lost in terms of cultural heritage through the demolition of this area. We also hope to provide support to the efforts to remember and heal from Albania’s traumatic past.

Figure 26: An interview with artist Arben Theodhosi in his studio
Theatre Memory Box Exercise

To assess the “sense of place” pertaining to the historic center, we gathered a collection of comments and stories that serve as testament to the connection between the historic center, the past and the present day. This collection of narratives provided us with qualitative and anecdotal evidence of the importance of the National Theatre in particular.

In order to pursue stories about sense of place, we created a memory box modeled after the National Theatre (Fig. 27). This small-scale model has a slot where people could place their written stories. To create the box, we scaled down an AutoCAD model of the Theatre and transferred it onto a paper-board. We cut out pieces of the façade and glued them together. The back section of the model, representing the theatre’s performance space, had a slot to insert written memories and was hinged for accessibility to remove them. The model was decorated with a paper sign, doors, and windows similar to the existing design of the National Theatre. The trim around the building was taped into place.

We designed two pamphlets to be used for the exercise. The first was an informational handout (Appendix C) explains our student project written in Albanian and English. We also provided our email alias on this sheet. The second paper we call “the memory form” (Appendix D). On it, we printed two prompts:

1) Describe a memory you have of the Theatre

2) What would you miss about the theatre if it were to be demolished?

On the inside of the form, there was a large area to write and spaces to fill optional demographic information including age, gender, place of origin, and years lived in Tirana. We asked that participants not provide their names so that responses could be kept anonymous.

We went to the National Theatre protest for three consecutive nights (11/28-11/30) with our Theatre Memory Box to understand why the protesters are so passionate about the preservation of the National Theatre. In addition, we visited the Polytechnic University of Tirana (12/4) and performed the same exercise with a group of first-year urban planning students. These different locations allow us to get different generation’s views on the National Theatre, the older generation from the protests, and younger generation from the University.
At each location, we invited participants to write their memories and opinion of the Theatre on the memory form, then insert it into the slot in the Theatre model (Fig. 28). This symbolic gesture of filling the Theatre with memories was chosen to start conversations about cultural heritage, memory, postmemory and the meaning of place.

After responses were collected for the day, we labelled each form with the date it was submitted and where the exercise took place. Each form was scanned and uploaded to a shared Google Drive folder. Responses not in English (e.g. Albanian and Italian), were sent out for translation by trusted colleagues. We read and analyzed each form, looking for unique stories as well as common themes across memories.
Virtual Reality Experience

The goal of using virtual reality (VR) to view the Theatre is to experiment with different ways of not only documenting the space but also of generating conversations about the Theatre. Virtual reality takes the user out of their current environment and allows them to feel like they are somewhere else (Ronzio, 2018). We used Google Cardboard as our VR headset, as it is both accessible and easy to use. We used this to give the students the immersive experience of being at the theatre. We created a slideshow of 360 images, using Momento360.com which allowed us to access as many images as we want without the need to remove the phone from the goggles to change picture. The photos included were from multiple locations near both the National and Experimental Theatres. We handed out a sheet with a QR code during the discussion. This code, when scanned by the phones camera, linked to the Momento360 and allowed the students to easily access the slideshow from their own phones.

In order to study the effectiveness of VR in stimulating a conversation around sense of place in buildings, we conducted a VR exercise using the goggles with first year university students studying urban planning at Tirana Polytechnic University, as part of a larger conversation with the students (Fig. 29). We showed the goggles to the students and explained how to work them, and the students accessed and viewed the multiple 360° images of the National Theatre through a QR code (Appendix E). After sharing the goggles and being allowed time to look through the images, we then prompted the students to discuss issues revolving around memory of the Theatre, and their views on the potential demolition (Appendix F). These questions were aimed to gauge the effectiveness of using VR exercise as a catalyst to both remember and to start conversations.

Figure 29: The virtual reality goggles at the Polytechnic University
FINDINGS ON SENSE OF PLACE
AND PLACE ATTACHMENT
We collected 70 responses from our Theatre Memory Box: 45 from the Theatre protests and 25 from the urbanism class. Responses were collected over the course of four days (three nights at the National Theatre and one day at the Polytechnic University). About 71% (32/45) of theatre responses and 92% (23/25) class responses had any form of demographic information, some of which were incomplete. Unless otherwise specified, responses lacking applicable demographic information have been omitted for quantitative analysis. Below are the gender demographics of collected responses broken up by location. Notice how the National Theatre protest respondents were predominantly male, whereas the Polytechnic respondents were predominantly female. See Appendix G for additional graphs and charts related to demographic information.

Figure 30: Gender data from Theatre Memory Box gathered at Theatre vigils

Figure 31: Gender data from Theatre Memory Box gathered at the Polytechnic University
Findings Framework

Our analysis and findings were guided, in part, by Altman and Low’s processes of culturally-based place attachment and sense of place. We referred to the four most relevant processes to analyze stories, memories, and information collected from interviews and Theatre Memory Box exercises. The four processes are: “genealogical bonding through history or family;” “linkage through loss of land or destruction;” “linkage through secular pilgrimage;” and “narrative ties through storytelling and place naming” (Altman, 1992; Najafi, 2011). We also consulted sociologist Shmuel Shamai’s sense of place scale in which there are seven levels of place attachment: “(0) not having any sense of place, (1) knowledge of being located in a place, (2) belonging to a place, (3) attachment to a place, (4) identifying with the place goals, (5) involvement in a place, and (6) sacrifice for a place” (Shamai, 1991).
LACK OF SENSE OF PLACE IN THE HISTORIC CENTER: SHAMAI’S SENSE OF PLACE

Not all stakeholders have a sense of place or place attachment to the National Theatre, the Sarajet Villa or the historic center. Given a lack of place attachment with the area, their beliefs do not apply to the processes outlined by Altman and Low. Instead, we consulted Shamai’s sense of place scale to help us understand this phenomenon. Many of the instances of place attachment previously discussed have been representative of the higher levels on the sense of place scale, but we did collect a few examples of the lowest levels on the scale that should be represented in our findings. These examples indicate levels zero and one of sense of place: (0) not having any sense of place and (1) knowledge of being located in a place (Shamai, 1991).

In our discussion with students at the Polytechnic University of Tirana, a few students spoke of their lack of place attachment to the Theatre. One student argued that she has attended a show at the theatre and has memories at the Theatre but doesn’t feel a strong enough connection to the building to be against its demolition. In a Theatre Memory Box submission, another student wrote:

“Yeah, maybe some people will lose their memories there, but I think having better conditions to do the profession that they love and better conditions to enjoy what we love is more important.”

Polytechnic Student

This demonstration of a lack of connection to the Theatre is a manifestation of Shamai’s level 1 of sense of place, knowledge of being located in a place. Students that the Theatre is a “distinguishable place” but do not “have any kind of feeling that binds them to this place” (Shamai, 1991).

Another student believed that the conditions of the current Theatre are so poor that the audience can’t enjoy the show and the actors are working in a detrimental environment. He supported the Special Law in order to have a safer, more modern theatre that would benefit the actors and audience. This position is indicative of the lowest level of sense of place: not having any sense of place. The student recognized problems with the theatre but lacked expression of place attachment as he supported the demolition and rebuilding of the Theatre rather than the restoration of the current Theatre.

Interestingly, Professor Lori Amy argues that some people involved in the development of the Special Law are doing so in order to suppress and ignore the story of the Albania’s
traumatic past (Lori Amy, personal communication, November 2018). She argues that it is an attempt to avoid addressing the country’s traumatic past through the demolition of the site of show trials. The demolition of the National Theatre and Sarajet Villa, in Dr. Amy’s viewpoint, is a way to manage shame and guilt for the horrific acts of the communist regime (Lori Amy, personal communication, November 2018). This idea is very similar to Shamai’s first level of sense of place because, as Amy explains, some of the people involved in the development and passage of the Special Law recognize the National Theatre’s historic significance and understand that it has historic value. However, instead of resulting in a bond with the buildings, this recognition of value has resulted in their attempt to destroy them. This suggests that there is a different type of sense of place that is not outlined by Shamai, where people recognize that buildings have meaning, but want to destroy it rather than protect it.
Altman and Low define “narrative ties through storytelling” as a process that links people to a place through the stories they tell about that place; the narratives may include myths, family stories, political commentary, etc. (Altman, 1992; Najafi, 2011). Based on the stories we collected from the Theatre Memory Box, personal memories are the narrative ties we found to be relevant to the sense of place of the National Theatre and Sarajet Villa.

The Theatre Memory Box is, in itself, a means of storytelling: it provided an outlet for individuals to share their memories or stories related to the National Theatre. These memories put the Theatre in a more personal context. As Scannell et al. outline, sense of place is developed through the interactions, realizations, and milestones that a person experiences in a place (Scannell, 2010).

Some participants described quotidian memories of being at or near the Theatre, emphasizing everyday experiences or milestones.

“In this theatre I gave my first kiss”
Theatre Vigil Participant

“After passing the doorkeeper, we entered into a small hall and then into a bigger one, which was full of portraits of famous actors. When we entered the theatre house my eyes got locked onto the huge chandelier. I was amazed, I had seen different stages and lodges, but I had never seen such a wonderful chandelier. I am still attracted to it, even today.”
64 Female Theatre Vigil Participant

Figure 32: A submission from the National Theatre Memory Box (64 year-old woman)
“I was 13 years old the first time I came to this theatre with my classmates and my teacher. I remember the director of the play we saw was Edmond Budina, who still comes here every day, but now to protest against the demolition of the theatre. The play was entitled “Luiza Miller” and the seats were all taken, while outside the yard was full of people waiting in line to get a ticket.”

47 Female Theatre Vigil Participant

Special moments that are filled with overwhelming emotion, like a person’s first kiss, contribute to sense of place. This is due to the psychological processes of place attachment described by Scannell et al.: affect, cognition, and behavior (Scannell, 2010). Each of the memories shared with us are connected with emotions, such as the excitement over a show or marveling at a beautiful chandelier and theatre. These affective components are directly related to the connections formed between person and place in the cognition process of place attachment. These connections and feelings are relived and strengthened through the behavior of storytelling.
Altman and Low define linkage through religious and secular pilgrimage as “pilgrimage to a place, the desire to visit a place, and participation in a celebratory cultural event such as a parade or festival” (Altman, 1992; Najafi, 2011). Taking part in these types of events constitutes participation in a cultural tradition. Secular pilgrimage, in this case, relates to attending theatre performances and the desire to visit the Theatre. Participation in a cultural event relates to acting in a show or play at the Theatre or participating in the vigils.

From stories collected at the National Theatre, we saw evidence of linkage through secular pilgrimage through that the desire and act of visiting and attending the theatre:

“Love for true art has connected me to the theatre. True art I consider to be local and international classics. These classics I've had the chance to see in the irreplaceable stage of this simple theatre. The interpretation of the characters of these classics or contemporary pieces have been marked in my soul and in my heart by the brilliant actors part of whom are now closer to God.”

70 Male Theatre Vigil Participant

“I was brought to this theatre by my parents when I was a child. I have brought my children here too and I want for them to do the same thing when they get married and have kids.”

53 Male Theatre Vigil Participant
These personal stories reveal the importance of the act of going to the National Theatre. Participating in this “pilgrimage” and sharing it with family and friends gives the building significance. Just as the desire to visit the Theatre is important, so is participation in events at the Theatre.

Deep connections to theatre performances and the symbolism of the theatre result in strong place attachment to the National Theatre building itself. Experiences like these tie this specific theatre to the emotions generated by individual experience.

“The theatre is the most important institution. It has shaped my inner world. On that stage, I have seen my favorite actors interpreting (acting) incredible shows. Some of their lines we still use in everyday life. Every time a play ends, my eyes get full of tears when the actors come back on stage and wait for our applause.”

38 Female Theatre Vigil Participant

“This is where I have seen the first theatre play. It was an experience that inspired me to study choreography. I have danced here and I have also prepared the choreography to one of the plays performed here.”

Theatre Vigil Participant
Film and theatre director, Robert Budina, considers the art of theatre to be “the symbolic value of freedom of the free word in a way” (Robert Budina, personal communication, November 19, 2018). He applies this connotation of theatre to the National Theatre and cites it as a reason that this specific building cannot be replaced by a new one. He is opposed to privatizing the majority of the public land on which the Theatre stands, and he is against commercializing a place meant for free speech and challenging of ideas (Robert Budina, personal communication, November 19, 2018).

“I had the chance to be the main actress of that show, so I cannot forget all the applauses that people gave me.”
Polytechnic Student (Fig. 34)

Figure 34: A submission from the Theatre Memory Box at the Polytechnic University
Genealogical bonding is based on a person identifying with the history that occurred at a particular place. Altman and Low describe genealogical bonding as “the linkage of people and land through the historical identification of place and family or community” (Altman, 1992; Najafi, 2011). Similar to secular pilgrimage, part of the strength of this bond comes from a person feeling a connection to the past through a particular place. The difference between the two is that the linkage from secular pilgrimage comes from culture and tradition, whereas the connections that result from genealogical bonding are related to the history of a family, community, or nation.

“Perhaps everyone hopes to have a better history, but this is our history.”
Robert Budina

This quote from director Robert Budina encapsulates genealogical bonding. While he acknowledges Albania’s difficult past (specifically referencing the show trials held at the National Theatre), he identifies with it, calling it “our history” (Robert Budina, personal communication, November 19, 2018).

During our conversation at the Polytechnic University of Tirana, students explored the idea of how the Theatre and its story are part of the Albanian identity. One student said that if Albanians keep destroying their buildings they would lose their identity and part of what makes them Albania. Another student questioned,

“What if our ancestors destroyed the castles? Where is our history then?”
Polytechnic Student
One student likened the destruction of the Theatre to the hypothetical destruction of old buildings in Berat and Gjirokastra, two UNESCO world heritage sites with buildings from the 19th and 20th centuries. She claimed that if these buildings were deemed too old and were destroyed it would be “like starting from zero.” Even students not from Tirana, and who had not been to the Theatre had some degree of place attachment to the building because of its historic significance. One student from Permet who had lived in Tirana for only four months wrote,

“I have never been in the Theatre but I don’t agree with the fact of destroying it because it is part of our history of our culture.”
18 Female Polytechnic Student

Another student from Burrel who had lived in Tirana for seven months and had never been to the National Theatre responded to the question of what she would miss if the Theatre was destroyed,

“Nothing, but the theatre it’s part of Albanian history. We should protect our old things, because sometimes the old things have more value. And there are people who have memories and we shouldn’t destroy them memory like there have never exist”
19 Female Polytechnic student
We note that attachments form even without direct interaction with or experience at a building or site such as the historic center. This attachment is strong enough for individuals to favor preservation of an old building over its replacement with a new one. This aligns with the findings of Furman et al., who argue that “people-place interactions are often formed through psychological procedures rather than physical contacts” (Najafi, 2011). According to Najafi, this means that people do not have to interact physically with an environment to make “strong emotional bonds” with a place (Najafi, 2011).

Figure 35: A submission from the Theatre Memory Box at the Polytechnic University (19 year-old woman)
LINKAGE THROUGH LOSS OR DESTRUCTION

The threat of destruction generated some of the strongest forms of place attachment and sense of place that we observed during this study. We found that advocating for the preservation of a “valued” place, through such things as a nightly vigil at the National Theatre, strengthens the bond and creates a new place attachment that builds upon genealogical bonding. Altman and Low define this bonding as “another kind of place attachment based on the loss or destruction of place” (Altman, 1992; Najafi, 2011).

An example of linkage through loss can be seen with the demonstrations at the National Theatre. Linkage through loss usually builds upon an existing genealogical bond, and many people at the demonstrations have a personal connection to the Theatre. This connection is threatened by the possible destruction of the Theatre. The history that connects an individual to a building can be either familial or country history, and through many Theatre Memory Box submissions and conversations, the idea that “history should be enough” to save the Theatre is prevalent in those who support the preservation of the building. Protesters at the nightly vigils at the National Theatre demonstrate place attachment through loss or destruction saying such things as:

“I love the theatre very much, with its simple and elegant architecture and I will be there to protect it in every moment.”
64 Female Theatre Vigil Participant

“I would miss a part of my life that I have dedicated to coming to the theatre”
42 Female Theatre Vigil Participant
The participation at the National Theatre is only happening because of the threat of destruction and the threat of lost connections for many people. These people feel a deep connection to the Theatre and memories at the building, from shows and plays or the nightly demonstrations. Along with their previous genealogical connections, protesters are forming new strong connections because of the threat of loss.

“I can say I have more than 183 memories of every day of the protest.”
23 Female Theatre Vigil Participant

The potential destruction of the theatre allows for a new level of attachment, showing how deeply the theatre has affected the lives of the people that have both been attending the shows and the vigils that have been running for almost 200 days.

The potential destruction of the theatre allows for a new level of attachment, showing how deeply the theatre has affected the lives of the people that have both been attending the shows and the vigils that have been running for almost 200 days.

“I regret my grandchildren will not be able to walk to this part of the city.”
58 Female Theatre Vigil Participant

Figure 36: A submission from the Theatre Memory Box at the National Theatre (58 year-old woman)
“All my pride for this theatre building would be under ruin, since it is a living proof that tells how much Albanians love art”
23 Female Theatre Vigil Participant

“This is not just a theatre, this is the resilience against the communist regime that lasted for 70 years”
53 Male Theatre vigil participant

Examples like these mirrored the sentiments of Robert Budina. Budina believes that “[the reason] our government wants to destroy this theatre is to cut the freedom of the artists and if they cut this free word, for them it’s much more easy to govern”. The linkage through loss is important here for the symbolism the theatre represents, by losing the theatre, people will be losing their freedom, their resilience, and their pride in their country. This creates a strong bond and sense of place that is occurring in the moment.
Albania’s traumatic past adds another layer of complexity to sense of place. Place attachment through genealogical bonding and linkage through loss becomes stronger in the context of traumatic memory and postmemory.

“My uncle was shot by the communists, without a trial, in this theater.”
Theatre Vigil Participant

Traumatic events like this, where a family’s future is forever altered, persist through generations as postmemory (Hirsch, 2012). Statements such as these serve to remind us that events that happened in the National Theatre over seventy years ago are still remembered and felt.

“In Tirana I miss all the buildings that have been destroyed by yesterday’s and today’s communists.”
70 Male Theatre Vigil Participant

The majority of the protesters at the demonstrations were approximately 50-75 years old. All of these older demonstrators experienced life under communism and, in their written stories, many of them drew parallels between the current government and the communist regime. Through the creation of a space where people openly discuss their political views and history, participants are creating a social place of collective memory that was then shared through personal stories placed in the Theatre Memory Box. According to Dr. Amy, social places of collective memory are part of the framework of lines of transmission between individual and collective memory (Amy, n.d.). These vigils allow the protesters to create a contrast to the former regime that would imprison people for participating in critical discussions. Through the nightly demonstrations at the National Theatre, protesters are contributing their experiences to the collective memory of the communist regime and the current government. As a result, the Theatre vigils contribute to the healing of traumatic postmemories by rebuilding lines of transmission of memory and encouraging discussions about the communist regime and the National Theatre.

During our discussion with the urban planning students we observed what Dr. Lori Amy refers to as “broken lines of transmission” (Amy, n.d.). We found that despite advocating for the building’s preservation, many students were not aware of the history related to the National Theatre. From formal and informal conversations we’ve had, we learned that the youth in
Albania have little formal education on the former communist regime. Additionally, many young people have told us that the older generation are reluctant to tell them stories of the nation’s communist past. Consequently, lack of awareness and absence of information constitutes one facet of postmemory.

**Elvis Kazazi’s Story**

Elvis Kazazi’s experience with the Sarajet Villa exists at the intersection of place attachment, postmemory, and trauma. Mr. Kazazi’s unique and powerful bond to the Villa suggest the importance of understanding postmemory and trauma to understand the intensity of place attachment.

The Kazazi family, like many families during the communist era, were persecuted by the government for having a “bad biography,” meaning that they were marked as enemies of the Party (Lori Amy, personal communication, October 24, 2018). After the Sarajet Villa was expropriated from the Kazazi family, Elvis Kazazi’s grandfather, Abdullah, was imprisoned, tortured, and killed by the regime for being a wealthy landowner (Lori Amy, personal communication, October 24, 2018). As a result, the Kazazi family was given a bad biography and punished by the regime. Mr. Kazazi’s parents were exiled and ostracized, however most of his immediate family remained out of prison. In an effort to keep their family safe, Elvis Kazazi’s parents did not tell him about his grandfather, his family’s affluent history, or the Sarajet Villa (Lori Amy, personal communication, October 24, 2018).

In 1991, Mr. Kazazi left Albania when he was eighteen to live in Italy as a refugee. When the Sarajet Villa was restituted to the descendants of the original owners, Elvis Kazazi finally began to learn about his family’s past. After living in Italy for more than a decade, Elvis returned to Albania in 2008 in an effort to preserve and restore the Villa, stating that he felt it was his “responsibility” to his family and his country (Elvis Kazazi and Lori Amy, personal communication, October 24, 2018).

Elvis Kazazi’s story demonstrates strong genealogical bonding. Although he had never been to the Villa, the bond that Elvis Kazazi felt with the building solely from what he learned about its role in his family and nation’s history was strong enough for him to uproot his life and return to Albania to protect it. Mr. Kazazi’s experience reinforces Furman et al. and Nafaji’s position that place attachment can exist without physical interaction with a place. The strength of the genealogical bonds that can result from psychological interactions are not limited to opinion on an issue like with the Polytechnic students, but can be intense enough to lead
someone to uproot their life propelled by a place attachment through genealogical bonding.

As certain groups have become increasingly interested in convincing the Kazazi and Kosovu families to sell their shares of the Sarajet Villa, Elvis Kazazi has become more devoted to protecting the Sarajet Villa. One winter, Mr. Kazazi received threats that someone was going to burn down the Sarajet Villa. In response, Elvis Kazazi spent the winter living in the house without heat, electricity, or running water (Lori Amy and Elvis Kazazi, personal communication, October 24, 2018). This example highlights how genealogical bonding can be advanced by the threat of loss. Threat of destruction advanced Mr. Kazazi’s commitment to the Villa, including the investment of his own resources (time and money) into the building, to risking his life for the Villa (Najafi, 2011; Shamai, 1991).

Through this, Elvis has exhibited an extraordinarily high level of place attachment as outlined by Shamai (Shamai, 1991). Shmuel Shamai describes the highest level of place attachment as, “sacrifice for a place: this level is the last and also the highest point of sense of place.” He describes it as the “deepest commitment to a place.” People with this degree of place attachment are willing to sacrifice “important attributes and values such as prosperity, freedom, or, life itself” (Shamai, 1991).

While we have discussed Elvis Kazazi’s strong connection to the Sarajet Villa through the lenses of genealogical bonding and attachment through loss, these frameworks don’t tell the entire story. The depth of Mr. Kazazi’s ties to the Sarajet Villa cannot be understood without considering postmemory.

When families like the Kazazis experienced a trauma but were unable to openly mourn and discuss it, postmemory results. For the duration of the regime, families had to endure their traumas in silence while they were surrounded with propaganda glorifying communism and by informants who might imperil their daily lives. In these situations, the individual and collective experiences do not align. As a result, lines of transmission between individual and collective memory are broken (Amy, n.d). Elvis Kazazi may have been so attached to the Sarajet Villa before he physically interacted with the building because it helped rebuild these lines of transmission by explaining the suffering his family experienced under communism. However, while Mr. Kazazi was able to learn about the source of his own family’s trauma, the collective memory of Albania has yet to fully realize the trauma of the communist regime (Amy, n.d.).

OTTOnomy’s vision for the Sarajet Villa is to restore the building and transform it into a cultural center that educates and celebrates Albania’s history (Elvis Kazazi and Lori Amy, personal communication, October 24, 2018). In doing so, OTTOnomy is creating a place to change the collective memory of Albania through discussion and education of the past. For Elvis Kazazi, someone who has spent his professional life as a holistic healer, the Sarajet Villa is an opportunity for him to help heal the memory and people of Albania.
The magnitude of Elvis Kazazi’s place attachment to the Sarajet Villa can be explained through Altman and Low’s genealogical bonding and linkage through loss, but they don’t explain the entire story. The traumatic postmemory that is the result of the Villa being in the Kazazi family gives it more meaning than simply a building that has existed with a family for generations. The Villa gave Elvis Kazazi an explanation of his past, but also a way for him to create a different, better future. Turning the Sarajet Villa into a cultural center would allow Elvis Kazazi to turn the place representing his family’s torment by the communists into a place to help others deal with their own traumatic postmemories caused by the regime.

\[ \text{Figure 39: The doors of the Sarajet Villa} \]
CONSIDERATION OF PLACE
ATTACHMENT, SENSE OF PLACE,
AND POSTMEMORY
SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

We found that four of Altman and Low’s six culturally-based processes of place attachment and sense of place were an applicable framework to understand a majority of the responses from the Theatre Memory Box and many statements from key informants. The four processes we chose are narrative ties, linkage through secular pilgrimage, genealogical bonding, and linkage through loss or destruction.

We found that people become attached to buildings by the memories they hold in or around those place, and by how they express or share those memories. Memories that contain strong emotions form strong connections to the buildings and places where they happen. The stronger emotions that happen with the memory the greater the sense of place connection that is created (Scannell, 2010). These emotions lead to how the story is told in order to express those feelings.

Linkage through pilgrimage can be formed through two main actions: visitation (pilgrimage) and participation in a cultural event. Examples from the Theatre Memory Box included stories of going to the Theatre with family or on vacation; these acts form connections through pilgrimage. The demonstration itself is a cultural event, and stories involving going to the vigils every night are memories that form connections to the building. Others participated in plays at the theatre, after being inspired from one of their visits.

We also found that linkage through loss, as defined by Altman and Low, was a very prevalent and important theme in the responses we received and the interviews we conducted. Elvis Kazazi’s connection to the Sarajet Villa was strengthened by the threat of destruction, indirectly from the law and directly from personal threats. The nightly demonstrators at the National Theatre also formed a linkage through loss because the threat of the demolition directly threatened their genealogical bonds to the Theatre.

Since memory is an important factor that contributes to place attachment, postmemory should be considered when assessing sense of place. Elvis Kazazi’s complex history with the Sarajet Villa is augmented by the traumatic postmemories he formed in his youth. These memories were caused by the communist regime’s persecution of political opponents and his family’s inability to tell him why his family was being punished, for owning the Sarajet Villa. Postmemory heightens the genealogical bond by having the building not only represent history but also lived experiences that are a result of that history.

Using Shamai’s scale of sense of place, we discussed people with little or no place attachment to the Theatre, the Sarajet Villa, or the
historic center. These people exhibited levels 0 or 1 on the scale as defined by Shamai, meaning they have knowledge of a place but no connection, or no connection to the place. Students at the Polytechnic University exhibited both 0 and 1 on the scale: as some knew about the Theatre but believed it should be demolished so it could be improved, despite others having connections to the building and other students completely lacked any acknowledgment of place attachment. Other examples of level zero sense of place came from secondary sources, as some of our key informants described conversations or gave motivations other people had for the destruction of the Theatre. Some in favor of the demolition experience first level sense of place because despite the acknowledgment of the Theatre’s historical importance, they still believe it should be torn down.

In conclusion, Professor Lori Amy often talks about the power of “bearing witness” to a trauma, and how the act of “bearing witness” can be a useful tool in healing. We like the think that through our Theatre Memory Box exercise at the National Theatre, we bore witness to some people’s deep connection to the building and will help them cope with whatever future the Theatre may have.

Figure 40: The Theatre Memory Box at the National Theatre Vigil
LIMITATIONS

Initially, our project was focused exclusively on the Sarajet Villa. Due to factors out of our control, we lost access to the Villa during our third week in Albania. We then regrouped and redefined the scope of our project to encompass the National Theatre and historic center. While the information we gathered on the Villa, sense of place, and cultural heritage in the first three weeks and ID2050 was still applicable, there was much more research to be done after the shift in scope. This caused a slight time constraint that we were able to overcome, however more time to collect and analyse data could have allowed for a more thorough investigation of sense of place related to the historic center.

A major limitation for our findings was the biased selection of our key informants. All of the key informants we interviewed were in favor of the restoration and preservation of historic monuments and buildings such as the National Theatre and Sarajet Villa. This population sample was selected because we wanted to interview people with strong opinions about the subject in order to have rich, in-depth interviews with people who cared about these buildings. Our personal biases also played into the decision; our initial project description was framed with the intent to protect the Sarajet Villa, and ever since our mindset has favored the preservation and restoration of monuments. This favoring of informants limited our findings because we did not take into account all perspectives on the Theatre law. We could have interviewed a select group of people who support the new law to collect a wider range of opinions, but we decided to focus more on the importance of cultural heritage than on the support for the law and demolition of the Theatre.

As a result of having a limited selection of key informants, we could not fully understand those who are in support of the new law. This caused us to speculate that they believe memories and sense of place attachments were minor or not relevant to the significance of the building.

It was not until later into our research that we discovered how strong the link between buildings and memory/postmemory is. For us, postmemory was a very abstract idea and is subtle in its manifestations. Because of this, we were hesitant to explore the concept in our initial findings, but we were able to expand on the idea of postmemory and how it relates to sense of place.

Due to the withholding of information through the communist regime, Albanian archives are often incomplete. We are unsure what additional information we would be able to find if the Sigurimi records were to be published. It can be assumed that information regarding the Special Court for War Criminals and Enemies of the People (show trials) would be more readily available, as well as other information on and uses of the National Theatre and Sarajet Villa during and before the communist rule. This would have allowed us to more thoroughly research the historic center and could potentially add to our findings.
ETHICS

Throughout our project, we interacted with many different key informants and individuals invested in the preservation of the National Theatre and Sarajet Villa. While this allowed for us to collect many different types of stories and memories, it also could have given the people a feeling of false hope. By attending the National Theatre demonstrations and inviting people to share why they were there, we risked potentially misleading the vigil protesters into believing that their voices were being heard on a larger scale than was the case. As WPI students, we could not become directly involved in the politics of the situation, but we may have given people at the vigils the false hope that we could share their stories and reasons for attending with political figures or the greater public in order to have a greater impact.

Also at the Theatre vigils, we were asked to be interviewed on stage. Many of the questions were pointed and asked our opinions on the law, preservation, and more. Even though we stated that our project was not directly political, we also showed our support for the preservation of historic monuments. This could have reinforced the wrong idea that we would be taking action to preserve the historic center.

When we asked people to tell their stories, they opened up and shared to help us. They entrusted their personal memories to us in good faith, creating an obligation and burden on us to act responsibly. We need to ensure that the sharing of their stories would not be used against them, or for reasons against those they gave them to us for.

Many of the shared stories or interview questions were aimed at a dark part of Albanian history. Bringing up these topics can cause people to relive past traumas that they have tried to suppress or overcome. For this reason, we tried to be gentle when interviewing, but our hesitancy when interviewing, but our hesitancy may have narrowed the stories and information we collected.
REFERENCES

Appendix A: Transmedia Plan

Photography and Videography (2D and 360°)

- Pre-Production: We went to sites and created a shooting plan. For photography, we identified aspects of buildings that were of interest. For 360° shooting, we planned out each place to take a picture so they were not redundant.
- Field-Production: To make sure we were not attracting unwanted attention or making anyone uncomfortable, we had someone watching while we took pictures and videos.
- Post-Production: We labelled all media according to the following:
  - Mmdd_location_device_description
  - Location Abbreviations:
    - SV: Sarajet Villa
    - CHwB: Cultural Heritage Without Borders Office
    - NT: National Theatre
    - NET: National Experimental Theatre
    - HC: historic center
  - Device Abbreviations:
    - RD: Rode
    - ZM: Zoom
    - 360: Ricoh Theta V
    - DC: Digital Camera
    - DSLR: Digital SLR Camera
    - GP: GoPro
    - JP, PP, KP, DP: James/Paisley/Kyle/Dan Phone

Theatre Memory Box

- Pre-Production: We created a scale model of the Theatre from AutoCAD drawings to act as our Memory Box. We needed paper board, glue, tape, modeling tools, paper and printer access.
- Field-Production: Creation and decoration of the model.
- Post Production: Fully assembled and decorated the model to closely resemble the National Theatre. This model was used to collect and store the forms from our Theatre Memory Box exercise.

Virtual Reality Experience

- Pre-Production: We created a 360° Virtual Reality experience to allow people to look around the National Theatre no matter their location. See Part 1a for shooting strategy.
- Field-Production: Assemble the Google Cardboard VR headsets. See Part 1b for photography plans.
- Post Production: Compiled the 360 pictures into a slideshow that is easily accessed using momento360.com. Created a QR code for even easier access.
Appendix B: Interview Guide

Informed Consent Script:

We are a group of students from Worcester Polytechnic Institute in the United States. We are conducting interviews with our sponsors Cultural Heritage without Borders and OTTONomy about the area consisting of the National Theatre, Experimental Theatre, and the area and buildings extending behind them. [Show image of mapped area described] The goal of our project is to understand the relationship between the Tirana community and this Historic Center. We hope that with this research, we can gain an understanding of what the buildings and surrounding area means to your community and how we can cultivate the center's significance through documentation.

Your participation in this task is completely voluntary and you may opt out at any time. This interview will take approximately one hour maximum. Please remember that your answers will remain confidential unless your consent has been given. If you consent, we may quote your interview transcript in our final report and in a published website or Facebook page. Your participation is greatly appreciated and if you are interested, a copy of your transcript or recording can be provided. You can contact us at gr-b18sarayet@wpi.edu with any concerns.

Do you give consent for this interview to be audio recorded? Would you like your recording to remain anonymous? If so, we will save your interview file with an anonymous name (e.g. P3 for participant number 3). Do you give consent to be photographed? We will not identify you in any published information unless you consent. Do you have any concerns about how your responses will be used? Please let us know when you are ready to begin the interview.

Interview Questions: (slightly modified for each interviewee)

- What memories do you have of the National Theatre/Sarajet Villa/Historic Center?
- In what ways do you see the Historic Center as connected to Albanian history?
- What would it mean to you if the National Theatre and/or Sarajet Villa was demolished?
- What do you think of the design of the new theatre?
- How has the Historic Center (or one of the buildings) changed over the past few years?
- How do you feel about the urban development of Tirana?
Përshëndetje!

Hello!

Ne jemi studentë amerikanë që studiojnë trashëgiminë kulturore në Tiranë.

We are American university students researching cultural heritage in Tirana.

Ne do të donim të dëgjonim për historitë tuaja në lidhje me Teatrin Kombëtar.

We would like to hear your stories about the National Theatre.

Ky hulumtim do të studiojë se si përvoja jetësore dhe kujtimet e njerëzve janë të lidhura me ndërtesa e vende si Teatri Kombëtar.

This research will be used to explore how the lived experiences and memories of people are tied to buildings and places like the National Theatre.

Ne nuk do kerkojme emrat tuaj, tregimet do të jenë anonime. Ju lute-mi të na trogoni moshën tuaj, gjininë, prej nga jeni dhe sa kohë keni që jetoni në Tiranë për të na ndihmuar në hulumtimin tonë, megjithatë kjo është tërësisht fakultative.

We are not asking for people’s names so your stories will be anonymous. We ask that you tell us your age, gender, where you are from, and how long you’ve been in Tirana to help our research, however this is entirely optional.

Faleminderit që i ndatë tregimet tuaja me ne!

Thank you for sharing your stories!
Appendix D: Memory Form

For your privacy, all responses will be kept anonymous.
Per të ruajtur prindetësit, të gjitha përqëndruesit do të ndihmoni anonimisht.

Përshkruani kujtimin tuaj më të fortë në lidhje me Teatrin.
Çfarë do t’ju mungonte më shumë nga Teatri, nëse ai shkatërrohet?

*Describe a memory you have of the Theatre.*

*What would you miss about the theatre if it were to be demolished?*

---

Optional / Fakultativ:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age / Mosha:</th>
<th>Gender / Gjimia:</th>
<th>Place of Origin / Originja</th>
<th>Time lived in Tirana / Viti banimi në Tirana</th>
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Cultural Heritage IQP

Historic Center VR Tour

goo.gl/E2dMHo
Appendix F: Virtual Reality Exercise

Questions for the Students following using the Virtual Reality:

- What do you think of the Theatre? The design of the new Theatre?
- What elements of the space do you like/dislike?
- Do you think it's important that a new theatre is built where the old one is?
- How do you think this space would change with the new theatre?
- What do you think a theatre should look like in terms of public space?
### Number of Responses Broken Up by Location Collected and Demographic Information

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Appendix G: Demographic Information of Theatre Memory Box Respondents

Time Lived in Tirana of Polytechnic University Respondents

Time lived in Tirana in years
Appendix G: Demographic Information of Theatre Memory Box Respondents

Time Lived in Tirana of National Theatre Protest Respondents

Time lived in Tirana in years
Appendix G: Demographic Information of Theatre Memory Box Respondents

Age of Polytechnic University Respondents

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Appendix G: Demographic Information of Theatre Memory Box Respondents

Age of National Theatre Protest Respondents

- Age in years
- Age distribution from 13 to 70 years

The graph shows the distribution of respondents' ages, with a peak around the 60-64 age group.
Appendix H: Reflection: Curiosity, Connection, and Creating Value

Curiosity

Curiosity has been a driving factor in our data collection and entire project. We were very interested in learning about why people were participating in the vigils at the Theatre for more than 180 consecutive days, so we decided to do a Theatre Memory Box exercise to document the unique stories each person has regarding the Theatre. This same curiosity allowed for us to come up with and embrace different non-traditional ideas including modeling the Memory Box after the National Theatre and incorporating virtual reality, a technology primarily used for entertainment. Learning about Lori Amy’s and Elvis Kazazi’s emotional attachment to the Sarajet Villa made us eager to seek out additional key informants so we could learn about their connections to different buildings.

Connection

The connection between WPI and our IQP work became more and more evident the longer we worked on our project. The theory and practice mindset that we’ve learned to recognize in classes at WPI was manifested during this IQP project, with ID2050 setting up our understanding for our project, and the IQP practicing it. We also continued to learn new concepts like sense of place and postmemory and investigate them. Many WPI classes that we’ve taken such as CH2640 and RBE2001 are heavily teamwork oriented, and IQP was no exception. All the work completed in these two months has been a collaborative effort between our four group members. This collaborative culture at WPI prepares us for future career opportunities, as engineering jobs require team and interpersonal skills. Prior experience doing research from other classes has assisted in our continuous research throughout WPI. The more information we gathered from our methods, the more research we did to fill the gaps between discovered findings.

Creating Value

A large part of our project for us was how we could have some form of impact on the community and how we could be impacted by the people of Tirana. This allowed us to search for what people valued most and determine how we could emphasize that. Our biggest impact was how we allowed stories and memories to be heard that might not have been if we didn’t connect with the community through interviews, the Memory Box exercises, and conversations. These stories are (anonymously) highlighted in our project, and will be published on CHwB’s Facebook page to show the importance of cultural heritage.

Although we are not experts in the fields of memory and sense of place, we hope our work related to that National Theatre and Sarajet Villa contributes to a deeper understanding of the relationship between memory, postmemory, and sense of place.