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XVIII International WoodEMA 2025 Scientific Conference

WOOD FOR THE FUTURE: INTEGRATING SUSTAINABILITY ACROSS INDUSTRIES

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“THE ROLE OF WOOD IN ALBANIAN TRADITIONAL RESIDENTIAL TOWERS: STRUCTURAL AND CULTURAL SIGNIFICANCE”

Arbresha Ibrahim, Manja Kitek Kuzman, Dick Sandberg

¹Department of Architecture, Faculty of Engineering, International Balkan University, Skopje, North Macedonia

²Department of Wood Science and Technology, Biotechnical Faculty, University of Ljubljana, Ljubljana, Slovenia

³Department of Manufacturing and Civil Engineering, NTNU Norwegian University of Science and Technology, Gjøvik, Norway



Introduction

- Albanian **residential towers (kulla)**: key symbols of culture & defense (9th–19th century)
- Found in: Albania, Kosovo, North Macedonia
- Materials: stone, but **wood** (chestnut, oak, and pine) **is essential** for structure, comfort, and cultural identity





Historical Context

- Towers = hybrid of **fortification + domestic life**
- Influenced by:
 - Tribal structures
 - Customary law (*Kanun of Leke Dukagjini*)
 - Defense needs (feuds, invasions)
- Evolution across centuries = adaptation to society & climate



Tower Development Phases

- Phase 1 (9th–19th c.)
- Phase 2 (1912–WWII)
- Phase 3 (1950s–80s)
- Phase 4 (2015–today)



Residential towers (Graphics in Watercolor: Maksim Mitrojorgji by Maksim Mitrojorgji and Joli Mitrojorgji (M. Mitrojorgji & J. Mitrojorgji, 2013)



Preservation Challenges

- Modern restorations = use of **concrete & industrial materials**
- Lack of **skilled craftsmen** in traditional joinery
- Poor documentation of original techniques
- Risk: towers become imitations instead of authentic heritage





Current Efforts

- Heritage protection laws
- Training programs for new craftsmen
- Government + NGOs involvement





Conclusion

- Wood = structural necessity + cultural identity
- Authenticity at risk due to modernization
- Preserving woodworking techniques = essential for:
 - Structural durability
 - Cultural continuity
 - Sustainable architecture inspiration



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Wood in Albanian towers is more than material; it is memory and identity.