

Architectural Heritage in MisFit. Spatial Forms, Excluded Bodies in mountain settlements

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This paper examines the mountain settlements as an example of architectural and historical “fit” that gradually evolved into a contemporary condition of “MisFit”. In this context, the term “MisFit” describes the phenomenon whereby historically adapted settlement forms no longer correspond to contemporary requirements of accessibility and inclusive habitation.

Located in the region of Epirus in north-western Greece, the forty-six traditional villages of Zagori (Zagorochoria) serve as the main case study of this research, having developed across the steep terrain of the Pindus Mountains in close relationship with topography, climate, local materials, communal life and historical need for security. Their formation within this demanding landscape shaped a distinctive architectural identity, demonstrating that these villages were not conceived as static compositions, but as adaptive and evolving spatial systems responding to environmental constraints and human necessity.

These characteristics led to the recent designation of Zagori as a Cultural Landscape by UNESCO. Today, however, demographic aging, depopulation, tourism pressures and restrictive heritage regulations bring light to new forms of spatial exclusion, especially for people with disabilities, elderlies and those with reduced mobility. Spatial qualities historically valued for their cultural authenticity often no longer align to the contemporary bodily experiences.

This raises a fundamental question: for who are heritage environments designed, and to what extent can they be modified without undermining their intrinsic value and or becoming socially exclusionary landscapes?

Within the framework of an ongoing doctoral research that repositions accessibility as a cultural and territorial prerequisite central to rural regeneration, this paper critically investigates the relationship between cultural heritage, conservation, adaptation and spatial inclusion in mountain settlements. By examining settlement morphology, public-space accessibility and circulation patterns, it argues that preservation and inclusivity should be faced together as conditions of rural regeneration and long-term vitality.