

Abstract

This dissertation is concerned with the effects of political economy dynamics on land use. It tries to find answers to the questions how and why land use has changed in Albania since the collapse of socialism. It examines these questions from a political ecology perspective in which broader political and economic forces drive land use change at the local level.

The dissertation is based on material collected during 11 months of fieldwork in three villages in southeastern Albania. It includes rich ethnographic accounts of postsocialist land relations and develops a ‘political ecology theory of postsocialist land use change’. The theory suggests that changes in the mechanisms through which land and economic rents are created and distributed among differently positioned social actors and across space have shifted incentives for land use and caused land use change.

Based on the political ecology theory of postsocialist land use change, the dissertation examines the shifts in the creation and distribution of rents and their effects on land use. Its findings indicate four distinct patterns of land use change taking shape in Albania since the collapse of socialism (fragmentation, intra-village intensification/extensification, inter-village intensification/extensification, forest degradation). The four patterns are attributed to broader political and economic changes, such as decollectivization and economic liberalization, shifting the rents available to land users.