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interdisciplinary exchanges

A bottom-up visioning process of "Gjirokastra 2030"

Prof. Dr. Besnik Aliaj
Polis University / Tirana, Albania

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The City and the Municipality of Gjirokastra have historically been the most important center of socio-economic-administrative gravity for the whole region in particular, and for the Southern part of Albania in general. Gjirokastra Region has given a multi-dimensional contribution to the country, which is highly appreciated by all at the national level. But at this moment the city suffers from serious demographic depletion, and mass migration of the population (particularly the young generation) toward Tirana the Capital, or emigration abroad, especially to the bordering Greece. However, Gjirokastra is a municipality with great potentials too, particularly for the fact that its historic center is recognized by UNESCO as part of the global heritage. The municipality has a regional university, a regional hospital and many other regional services. The administrative reform of the territory in 2015, although it did not have the expected effects, it served for the overall consolidation of the territory and its population (Fig.1). As result of this reform, the newly established Municipality faces a 50% increase in population and a 15 times higher increase in its surface area, while it integrates 7 previous smaller administrative units (communes and old municipalities) into a new single unit. During the envisioning processes of some local development plans of the Gjirokastra region, as well as during planning exercises and research-oriented visits of POLIS University, several interviews were conducted with strategic actors and institutions, as well as focused group. The meetings provided many comments

and ideas on how the development of the Municipality of Gjirokastra can take place, including possible pillars of approaches, as presented as below (Fig.2).

As mentioned earlier, Gjirokastra is the gravitational center of the southern region of the country, and has a clear interaction with the city of Ioannina as the gravitational center of the region of North-western Greece. In this regard, the development priorities of the two sides of the cross-border regions need to be coordinated, especially in the context of Albania's efforts towards European integration. This means that the main infrastructural trunks of the Gjirokastra region have a potential for fast and direct connection with the main European infrastructure corridors, thanks to the quick access to Greece. The concept is further explained below (Fig. 3), which is detached from the vision document "Albania 2030" developed by the research units of POLIS University. The municipality of Gjirokastra itself is then proposed to be developed according to five priorities.

Priority 1:

Development of infrastructure and public transport in the Municipality of Gjirokastra.

Priority 1 aims to materialize these action plans required by the community:

- Creation of a single identity for the new Municipality with the motto "One Municipality, One City, One Community". This means that the representation in the municipal administration should better respect the historical legacy of the previous administrative division, with more efficient community-based structures in the form

of liaison offices in each administrative unit (mini-municipality unit), and through the establishment of mobile/wireless service units according to needs or ad-hock priorities.

- The main axis of the municipal infrastructural development remains the national highway: Tepelene-Lazarat-Kakavije, as well as the historic inter-urban branch (Dropull-Sarande), and the new one (Ura e Kardhiqit - Sarande). But other axes of Municipal and Inter-Municipal importance will be the main rural axes and historical itineraries: ii) ii) Gjirokastra-Poliçan-Zagori-Çajup-Gjirokastra and the connecting road of the villages of iii) Lunxheri-Libohove-Dropull, or the historical itineraries: iv) Paleokaster-Golem-Fushe Bardhe-Mashkullore-Gjirokastra.

- This is accompanied by the design and implementation of the project for the construction of the Bus Terminal Station of the new Municipality at the location of "Ura e Lumit" in order to make the connection of International and Inter-Urban lines with the re-conceptualized municipal public transport to connect each settlement and suburb within the territory of the new Municipality with the core city of Gjirokastra.

- The development and modernization of the Gjirokastra Regional Airport that will serve to the local needs of the entire South of Albania, including the Ionian Riviera region, through a fast connection via Kardhiq-Saranda and Kardhiq-Borsh new roads. The regional airport has also an important role for the needs of the post-offices, army, civil emergencies, tourism,

air sports, other local functions in order to access the UNESCO city with the global market of tourism.

Other measures to be taken, which are identified in the meetings with communities and strategic actors are:

- The identification and reconstruction of historical paths and recreation of the "historical itinerary" such as Ali Pasha itinerary, or Çerçiz Topulli itinerary - as part of the "Natural Orbital" of Gjirokastra. This would connect the entire territory of the new municipality, as an integral part of the road system with 'off roads' and/or pedestrian paths, in the function of mountain tourism, 'hiking' and horseback riding, caravans, etc.

- The establishment of a restricted traffic time in the historic area of "Qafë e Pazari" at certain times. Creating a strategy for car parking along the entire perimeter of the historic area, limiting business supply hours and the turnover of cleaning cars, limiting the traffic of residential and official vehicles, etc.

- Providing low cost public-transport from perimeter parking lots within the historic center and castle through the use of earmarked and quality mini-buses/mini-vans.

- The expansion of "Çerçiz Topulli Square" by creating a "vertical parking" next to it, and reconceptualization of the square to respond to the current and prospective developments in support of the historic center. Restoration, expansion and construction where possible of new sidewalks for a greater safety of pedestrians and bikers.

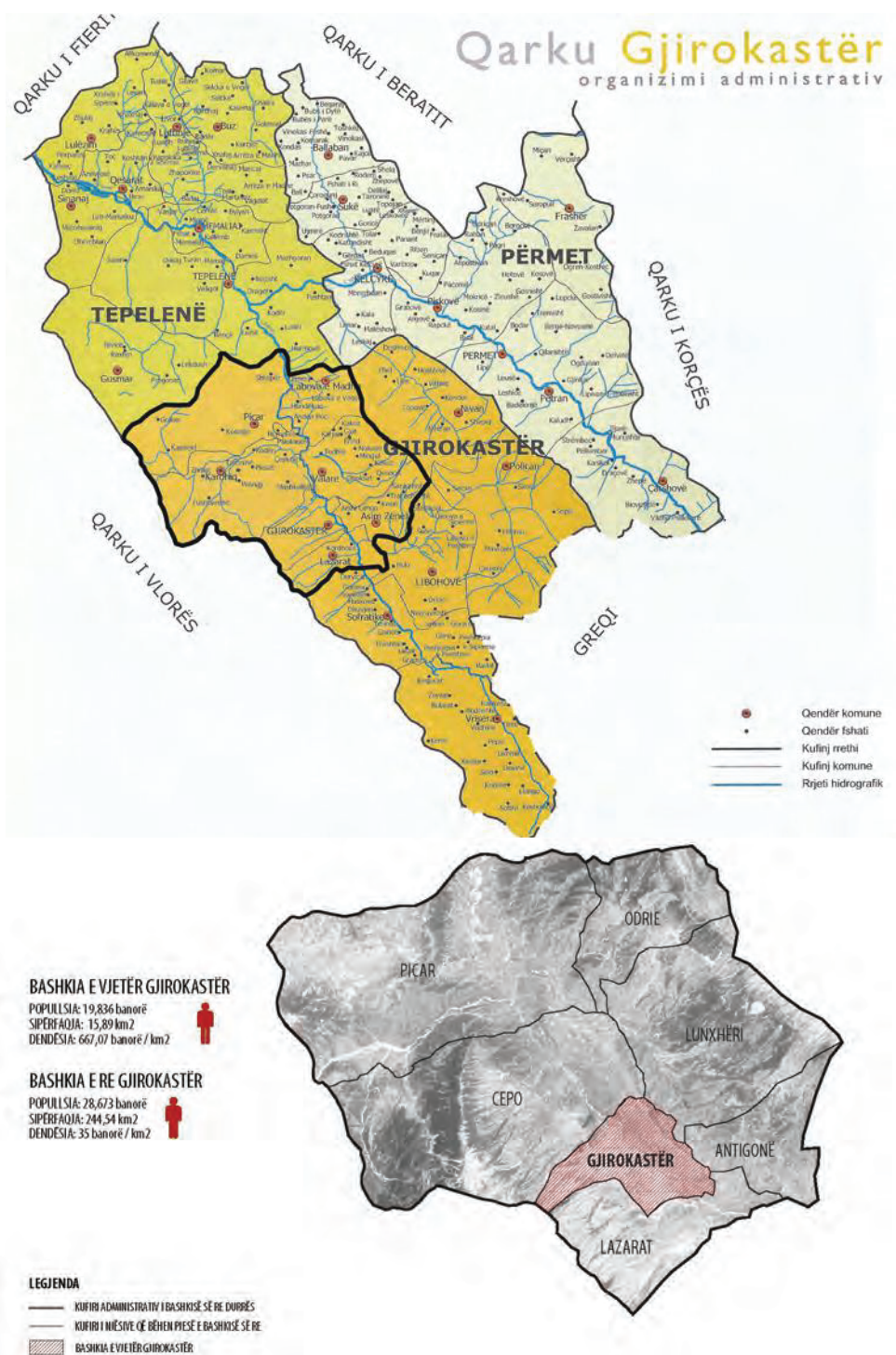


Fig. 1 / Consolidation of the territory and population in the Municipality of Gjirokastra as per the territorial reform 2015. Graphics from E. Janku.

- The cleaning of existing sidewalks from parasitic vegetation, cleaning of the informal constructions that hinder the movement of citizens, as well as the reorganization of aesthetic urban furniture with traditional construction materials and quality greenery in the historic center.
- The maintenance of a continuous sidewalk along "Postblloku" location and "Çerçiz Topulli Square" so that pedestrians have alternatives for walking safely from their vehicles. Same could be carried out around Gjirokastra football stadium
- The consolidation of specialized teams of craftsmen for the maintenance of cobblestones, for the preservation of

historical values in the pavements and urban furniture of public streets and squares, and restoration of buildings.

- The establishment of a building management system for public space and vertical parking in the '18-Shtatori' neighborhood and where there is a high population density.
- The construction of green gardens and playgrounds within the urban blocks in front of the "Sport Palace", at the "Pedagogical school", etc., and avoid traffic and parking in them.
- The reconstruction with priority of the national road "Postbllok-Dervican", with side corridors for bicycles, with greenery



Fig. 2 / Main principles and potential development pillars for the Municipality of Gjirokastra according to U-POLIS. Graphics from E. Janku.

and lighting.

- The construction of the Rings: i) Palorto-Granice-Gerhot-18 Shtatori; and ii) Zinxhira-Manalat-Dunavat; in order to enable alternative traffic restrictions in the historic center.
- Several road rehabilitation: i) Sfakë neighborhood; ii) River Bridge-Topullaraj-Valare with pedestrian and biking corridor; iii) the highway in the Cepo area; iv) roads in Zhulat and Fushe-Bardhe; v) Picar-Kolonje-Golem; vi) internal roads in Lazarat; vii) roads in Karjan Lunxheri, etc., including maintenance and connections, etc.

Priority 2:

Urban and Environmental Development in the Municipality of Gjirokastra.

This priority aims to materialize with these action plans required by the community:

- Review of the Strategic Development Document of the new Municipality, and adaptation / implementation of the General Local Plan (GPP) with priority projects and action plans.
- Any development is done in respect of urban / environmental legislation and urban / territorial plan. This helps the revitalization of historic centers, as well as orients sustainable and contemporary

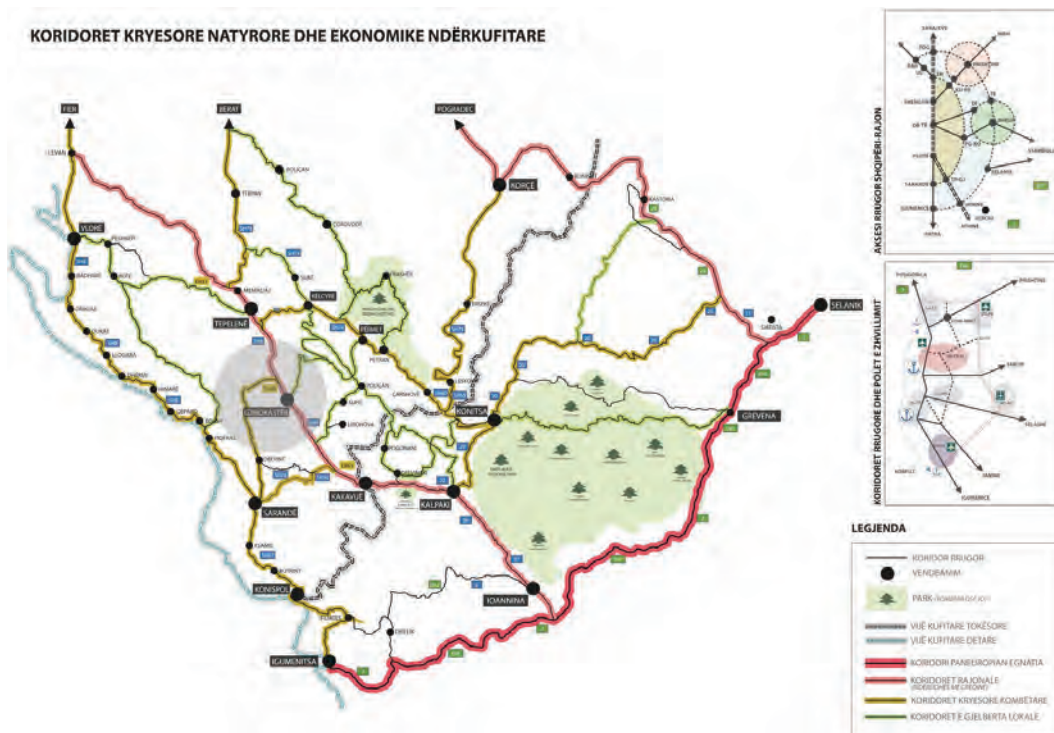


Fig. 3 / Fragment taken from the national vision "Albania 2030 Manifesto" for the southern region of the country and for the cross-border area with Greece, by U-POLIS (Aliaj, Janku, Allkja, Dhamo).

development with services, norms and standards at the level of UNESCO and the European Union.

- The coordination of the development priorities of the inhabited urban centers with agricultural, mountainous, rural and landscape territory, giving special values to the squares and centers of the villages and communities, as an integral part of a tourist network of the Natural-Historical Orbital of Gjirokastra, adding to them new strategic elements of urban / territorial "acupuncture" type, in favor of economic activities, public services, and traditions.
- The establishment of a Development Office with qualified local and foreign specialists for the design and absorption of projects for Greater Gjirokastra, identifying the resources of Gjirokastra, Lunxheria, Cepo, Picar and Lazarat, etc., as well as complementary neighboring local units as: Saranda, Himara, Tepelena, Dropull, Zagori, Delvine, or the neighboring country Greece, etc.

Other measures for improving and extending services:

- The establishment of a "Task Force" Unit for consulting and assisting citizens to facilitate the procedures for issuing reconstruction or construction permits, especially in the UNESCO historic area and the 'buffer' area, to avoid citizens bothering and wandering the offices of the Institute of Monuments of Culture in Tirana.
- The establishment of a "Fire Brigades" with specialized small vehicles capable of entering even the narrowest streets

of the historic area and neighborhoods and the strengthening of the Municipal Construction Police.

- The constant and reactive monitoring of the World Heritage to assess the general state of conservation of cultural assets, its development and management.
- The monitoring of the construction activities in the new municipality, by identifying, controlling and prohibiting illegal activities. The design and implementation of a plan of measures for the modification of existing illegal constructions, elimination of red tiles, and the use local stone roofs in the museum area.

Other environmental specific measures:

- Dry and steep slopes at risk of landslides should be included in the program for planting ornamental shrubs and trees, in accordance with the climatic conditions of the area.
- Planting vegetation with the system of root propagation on all slopes, especially around the castle area, Kerculla and Granica area, etc., to strengthen earth surface and avoid erosion, as well as to provide shading without interrupting the visual-landscape view of the city.
- Decorative and panoramic greenery, for all city streets, and afforestation especially along the Drino riverbed.
- The development of a communal forest with recreational and sports facilities.
- The creation of an itinerary for pedestrians and bickers along the river from Kordhoca to Virua locations.

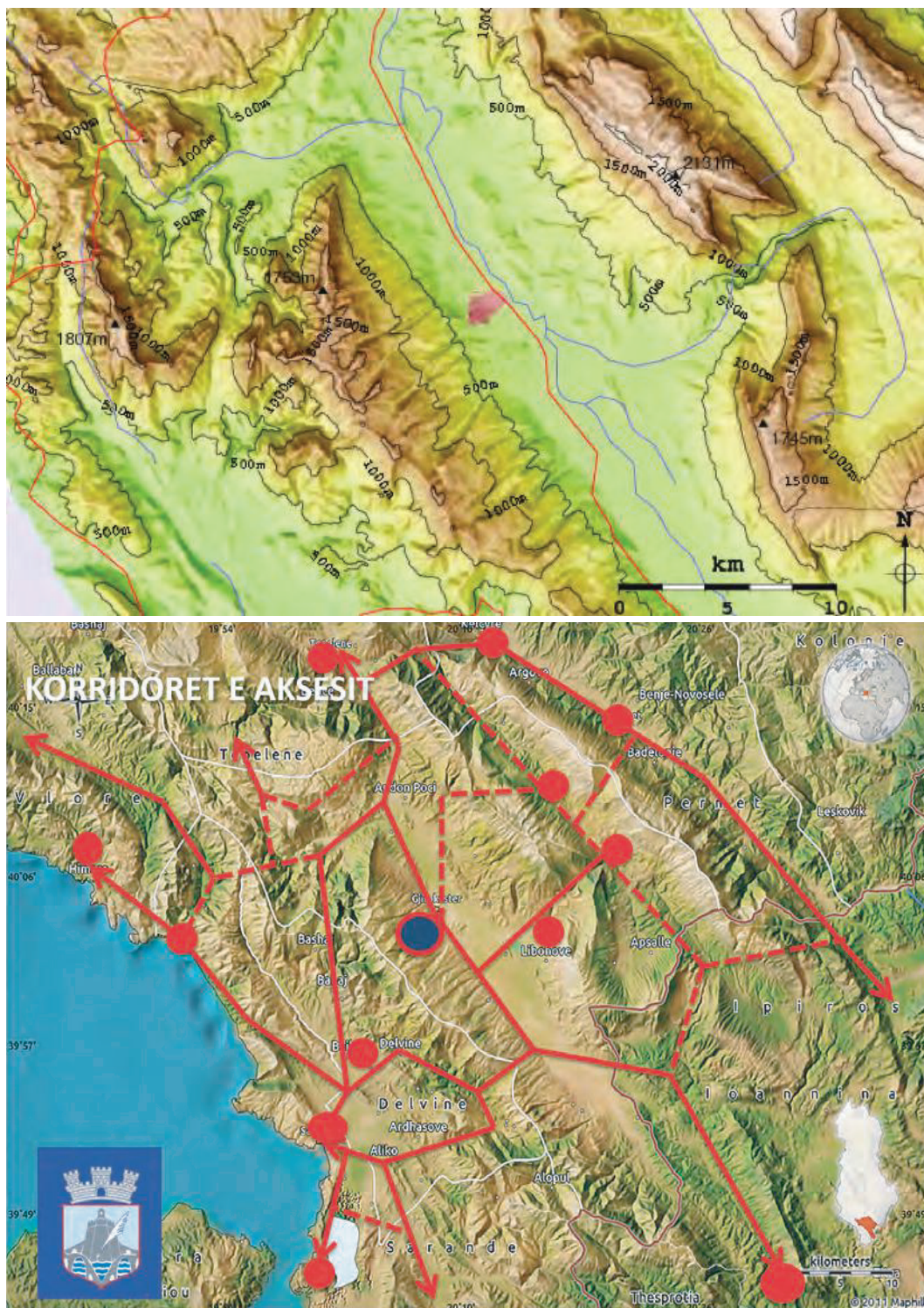


Fig. 4 / Topographic context of the Drino valley, and identification of the regional priority road axes.

- The construction of a wastewater treatment plant that flows clean waters into the Drino River.
- Finding a new position for the urban waste collection plant.
- Repositioning and increasing the number of bins for household waste as well as increasing the number of small bins throughout the city.
- Reorganization of schedules and the increase in the number of waste collection machines and cleaning workers.
- Cleaning of streams near inhabited centers that have not been cleaned for many years.

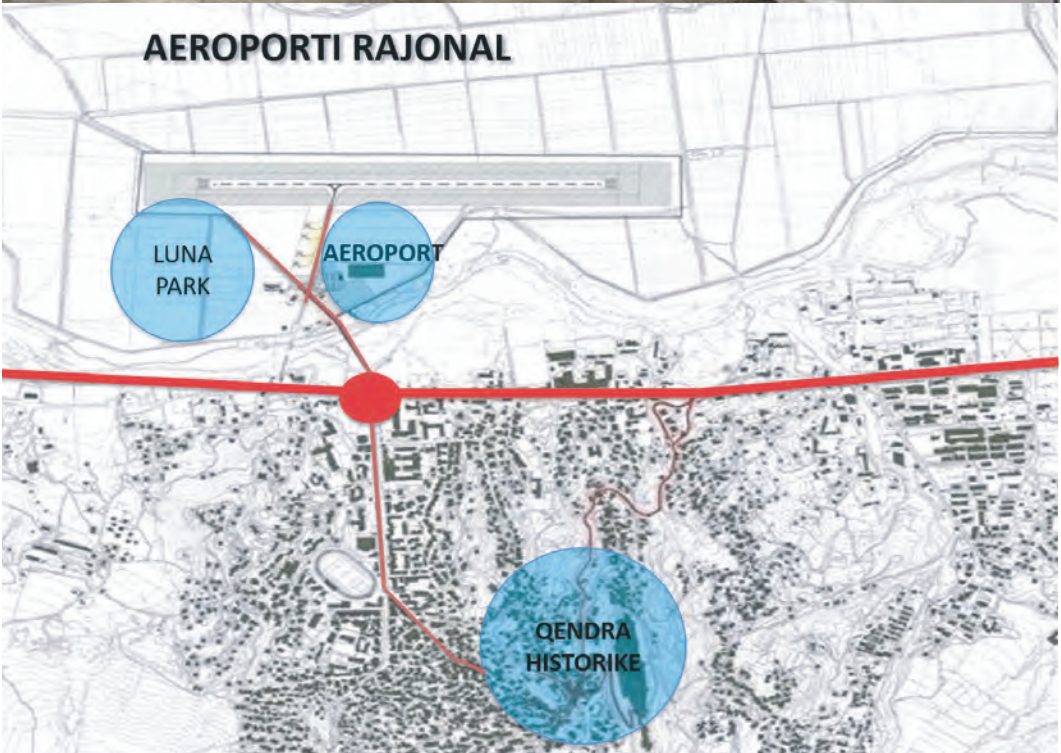
- Putting into operation public toilets in the city, especially in the historic areas with dense flows.

Priority 3:

Tourism, Landscape, History and Development Resources in Gjirokastra.

These priorities aim to materialize with these action plans required by the community:

- The restoration and commissioning of cultural monuments of Gjirokastra, Lunxheria, Cepo, Picari, Antigonea, Odria, etc., to promote the development of



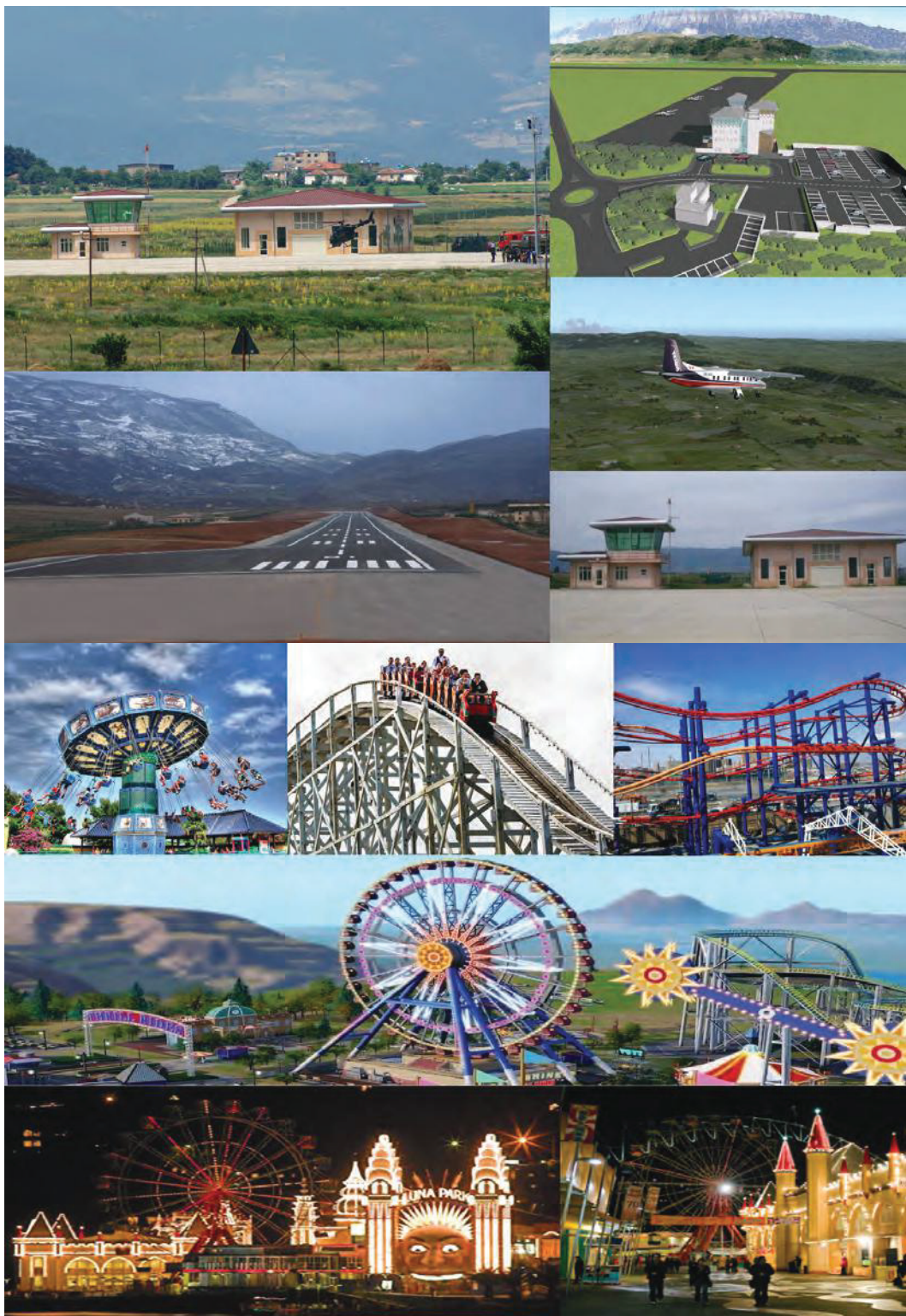


Fig. 5 / Images of the "Progress Valley" corridor along with Tepelena-Kakavija axis, the bus terminal station, the regional airport, the regional "Luna Park" complex and the connection with the city of Gjirokastra.

tourism economy.

- Better marketing of the city.
- The orientation of tourists with signs in the territory and especially in the museum area, including: hotels in the characteristic houses, museums, traditional restaurants, as well as special stands in the city to explain its history.
- The placing the logo of the municipality and the sign of the autochthonous production on every local handicraft product sold to locals and tourists.
- The Tourist Information Center must

stay open seven days a week, to provide uninterrupted tourist information, including the provision of maps, brochures, and good city orientation. The Information Center should also serve as a point for data collection and survey.

- The qualification of the "local tourist guides" and the unification of the scientific information on the tourist publications not only for the knowledge they provide in different languages, but mainly for the quality of information they transmit to visitors. Every tourist agency that

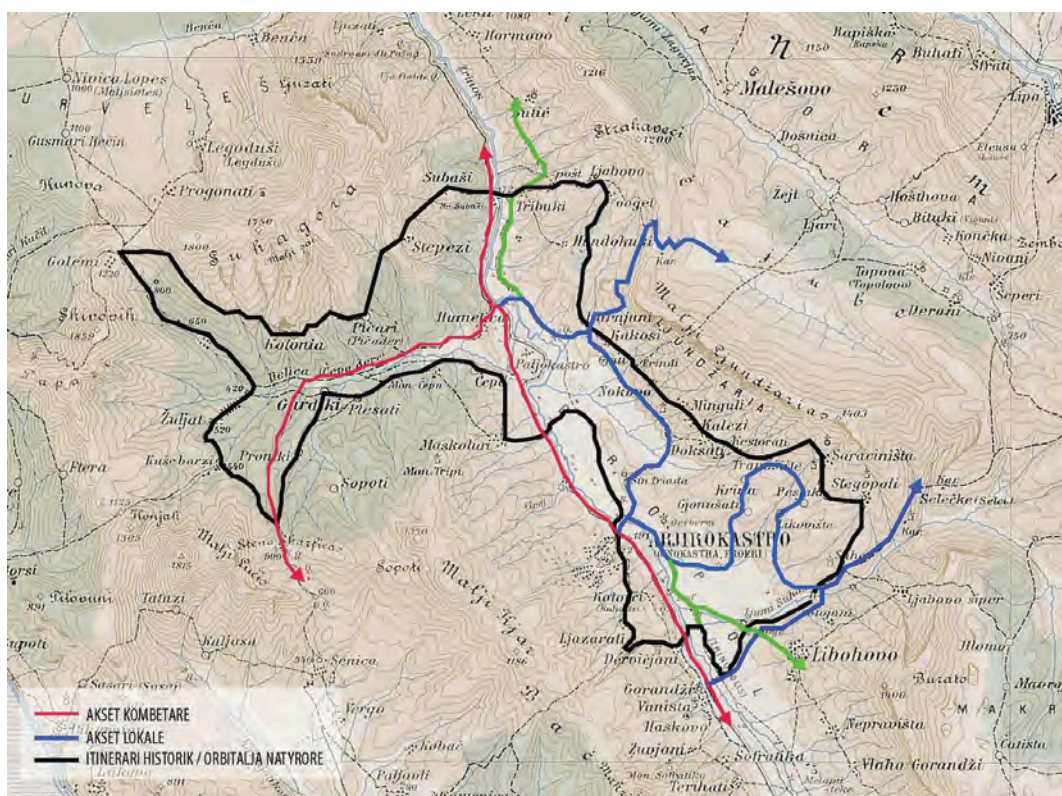


Fig. 6 / Historical-tourist attraction in Gjirokastra region, and Historical Itinerary of Ali Pasha and Cerciz Topulli, as well as the Natural-Historical Orbital of Gjirokastra.

operates within the territory of the new Municipality must be subsidized by the local guide to guarantee this quality of information, image and marketing. This creates employment opportunities, mitigate informality, and increase the development of tourism quality.

- The reconstruction and periodic updating of the museums, as well as the creation of daily tickets for all/combined local chain of museums at Gjirokastra (Museum

of Education, Ethnographic Museum, National Museum of the Liberation War, Museum of Armaments, Archaeological Gallery-Zekat, Art Gallery, etc.).

- The promotion of local production and traditional handicraft or agricultural products of the area, the support of such production with assistance and development projects, as well as selling them in authorized and controlled shops.
- The monitoring of cultural monuments



Fig. 7 / Examples of rehabilitation of urban and rural squares, as well as natural-historical itineraries.

through digital signaling systems, cameras, etc.

- The establishment of an annual municipal fund where the owners of museum dwellings with economic shortcomings, based on pre-designed projects, which can be stimulated with soft loans and basic co-financing referred to the law of cultural heritage. This is implemented by specialized technicians and local builders, and re-qualified or organized by the municipality.
- The creation of public areas and squares with free internet, especially within the historic area and the castle.
- The Functional reconceptualization of the interaction of "Viroi Park" with the "Historic Center", with the "itinerary along main road and the river Drino", as well as other parts of the city or the surrounding provinces.
- The rehabilitation of the original castle clock and bells as both a visual and acoustic reference to the old city.

Priority 4:

Consolidation of Gjirokastra as a regional center of Education, Culture and Sports.

These priorities aim to materialize with the required action plans by the community:

- Education transforms society! Indeed Gjirokastra is the main educational pole of Southern Albania. For this reason, the improvement of public space and physical infrastructure at the university campus area by the municipality and the Ministry

of Education should be combined with the reform of higher education and its objectives, by turning the University of Gjirokastra into a research center for regional development. This includes investing in the qualification of its lecturers, researchers and students, in order to generate the needs of the municipality for human resources.

- The construction of new schools (middle and high school) as a result of population growth and urbanization in specific neighborhoods: 18-Shtatori, Kodra e Shtufit, Zinxhira, etc., as well as the reuse of the existing abandoned educational facilities according to the needs of the communities/municipalities/region, etc. This is accompanied by the reconstruction and recombination of the University infrastructure with a central building, and other decentralized branches of the city/settlements, according to their specifics and profiles (example: programs on tourism can be in the historic center, vocational schools in the economic zone), etc.

- The development of sports and related facilities, especially in the area of Gerhot, but also in each neighborhood, can be an impetus for the revitalization of the life and health of the communities, and the activation of the suburbs. Further on, the reconceptualization of the sports centers in specific areas / settlements with a population of over 2,000 inhabitants, such as: 18 September, Old Sports Field, Gerhoti, Historic Center (Bashteja e



Fig. 8 / Activation of cultural, sports, educational life, by the improvement of infrastructure and services.

tekkes), Zinxhira, Lunxheria, Kardhiqi, Picari, Topullaraj, Cepo, Kordhoca, Lazarati, Antigonea, Odria, etc., where sport becomes an instrument for social activation and community participation.

- The reconstruction of the Palace of Sports, and its return to a focal sport—social—cultural center.
- The Reconceptualization of the stadium with European safety standards and

services, for regional and international events.

- The Remodeling of the old sports field, and athletics track as an alternative for athletic sports, etc.

Priority 5:

Public Services - Water Supply, Urban Waste, Lighting and Electricity Network.



Public services aim to improve living conditions for the community and visitors. This priority aims to materialize with the action plans required by the community:

- The reconstruction of the lighting network for the city of Gjirokastra but also other territorial gravity centers, as well as other axes of importance in the territory, according to international parameters. The municipality might stimulate solar panels

lighting, which have economic profitability in the climatic conditions of Gjirokastra.

- The reconceptualization of the castle lighting and other monuments of the first category that are not evinced enough and properly in the historical-landscape context for the city.
- Build a new lighting system for public roads in the entire territory of the municipality of Gjirokastra, which are



Fig. 9 / Activation of plants and basic services of urban waste, lighting and electricity network

currently not lighted at all or poorly lit. Increase the efficiency of the existing and new lighting systems. The latter should avoid color dominance, while neutral tones must avoid the situation of light pollution.

- Study the possibility of relocating the existing electrical substation and merging it with the new substation. This should be accompanied by the drafting of a master plan for the development of energy resources of the new municipality by combining together solar, wind, and water lighting. The lighting of all communes and villages should be further improved and modernized.

Other action plans for this priority are:

- The establishment of a water supply company for the new Municipality with a modern water management.

- The upgrade of all water sources within the area of the new Municipality, starting with: Gurra e Picarit, Tranoshishta Springs and many other sources. Meanwhile, this must be accompanied by solving the water supply problems for all neighborhoods and villages in the territory of the municipality

- The installation of water consumption meters that will create an opportunity for a more effective management of the potable water, especially for the city of Gjirokastra and the neighboring villages.

- Free water billing for all those who affect the environmental protection and quality increase, including those that plant trees of public-private interest, on the basis of a previous agreement with authorities.

- Support donor projects for the rehabilitation-maintenance of Gjirokastra water supply system. Efficient tracking of investments and complete solution of the entire water supply network for the city of Gjirokastra and all surrounding areas, as

well as for those villages/settlements that demand autonomous systems.

The final objective:

The use of planning as a legal instrument for development.

This means that:

- The new municipality will stop illegal construction activities. This era is over. All constructions, development and restoration activities are carried on the basis of the regulatory plan, and of the urban, heritage and environmental laws.

- The strategic document for the municipal-regional development is periodically reviewed in the municipal-regional council, paving the way for the ambitious implementation of the urban-territorial plans (PPV).

- The PPV plan for the entire territory of the municipality, and all other strategic documents for the region, should serve as a kind of developmental "constitution" for the municipal and regional governance of Gjirokastra.

- This finally paves the way for drafting, approving and implementing the detailed and partial plans, including legal development permits of the new municipality.



Fig. 10 / Reactivation of a scientifically-based "story-telling" line for Gjirokastra based on:
 1) own rich and complex history; 2) annuall programmed with concrete activities.