

Rethinking the “UNESCO City” Gjirokastra, Albania: Can architects and city planning stimulate hope and growth for shrinking cities?

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The main idea of this one-year international PhD project of POLIS & UNIFE was to elaborate a critical thought around the concept of “Shrinking city”. This was seen as an occasion to investigate the concrete city of Gjirokastra Albania, through an approach established via the individuation of autonomous objects or urban fragments, within the existing city patterns, capable of injecting new hopes for the future of Gjirokastra. Within this framework one of the main objectives of the workshop has been to define urban strategies in order to reestablish a new relationship between the historical city and its interrupted objects, due the depopulation crises. In other words, the objective has been to give a second life, or chance, or opportunity to the city, which means to reactivate a cultural debate, starting by shaking the attention of the Albanian citizens, local communities, and the local authority as well. So after a session of introductory theory, than the participating PhD students had to observe, select and investigate specific urban fragments; in order to develop strategies involving different disciplines and fields of knowledge. POLIS and UNIFE strongly believe in the interdisciplinary approach. They both believe at “frontier research” in order to be able to explore the borderline of knowledge on architecture and territorial planning, in close relations with other areas of expertise, knowledge and disciplines.

PART 1: Theoretical

Aliaj & Dhamo - try to summarize theoretical references for the phenomena

of shrinking city. They refer to Hollander and Glazer for the suburbanization as one of the reasons behind the reverse-urbanization; the lack of appreciation on national infrastructure such as highways, and increase of interests on railroads and ports. They also mention Pallagst, whom thinks that shrinkage is a reaction against de-industrialization. In addition, they mention Bontje whom proposes four main factors contributing to the shrinking cities effect: i) Urban development model; ii) One-company town or Mono-structure model; iii) Shock therapy model; iv) Smart decline. Such theoretical framework also analyze pragmatic political philosophies such as “planning for less – less people, less buildings, less land uses – in order to maintain or increase the standard of living”.

Besnik Aliaj - latter on describes a bottom-up process of city envisioning for Gjirokastra, which he technically lead himself. The idea was to understand the needs and priorities of local people and communities and demystify the expectations for the future. According to local people Gjirokastra represents for them the main gravitational center of the southern Albania region, that has a strong interaction with the main gravitational center of the North-Western Greece, Ioannina. In this regard, the development priorities of the two sides of the cross-border regions need to be better coordinated, especially in the context of Albania's efforts towards European integration. This means that the main infrastructural trunks of the Gjirokastra

region, is good potential for fast and direct connection with the main European infrastructure corridors, thanks to the quick access to Greece (see Albania 2030 Manifesto @ <https://ombresearchseries.org/>). The municipality of Gjirokastra then is proposed to be developed according to five priorities: i) Development of infrastructure and public transport; ii) Urban and environmental development; iii) Tourism, landscape, history and other development resources; iv) Consolidation of city as a regional center for education, culture and sports; v) improvement of public services, like: water supply, urban waste, lighting and electricity network.

Bauer & Deegros - with collaboration of Bagarić & Fauster, show experiences of shrinkage in Austria. They underline the fact that small towns throughout Europe are also facing severe similar challenges. Many are shrinking in population size, and losing the younger generations. This often results in close-down of infrastructure, which are necessary for local supply, education, medical care and public transport; lowering also the quality of life. Experts in the fields of urbanism, traffic planning and administration are actively engaged with studying such towns to find reasons and possible ways out of such development typology. For authors it is often overlooked the fact, that not only conurbations themselves are changing, but their transformation is also linked closely to the surroundings. There are parts of territory that exist and function as unit - or not. Indeed the transformation processes of relations within a territory

are directly related to the development of individual conurbations. In addition, territorial relations, as well as everyday realities and mobility, in and between European cities have changed, as the situation within these cities themselves. While a classification of areas that no longer applies is still utilized in practice. The authors stress the fact that what we witness today is a hybridization and transformation in those categories, as one could be "rural - through our residential perspective; and urban - through our social practices ...". Therefore, in order to meet contemporary planning challenges it is necessary to shift from the common static typology (the urban, the rural, the small and the big cities) to a typology of relations. According Béhar, examining these relations holds the potential of depicting why some small cities are more successful in their development than others. Within the small towns a distinction needs to be made among those remaining under the influence of a dominant city (urban dependent); those that operate in a network of cities without true hierarchy (network city); and those embedded in a local basin organized with strong internal relations (local basin). This is the first step to draft strategies on how to develop small cities in a future-oriented way and thereby improve access to opportunities depending on local territorial conditions.

Dorina Papa - Deals with esthetic quality of the historic urban landscape. She focuses on the historic city image and townscape tradition. This means a pleasing experience related to the city perception,

as one of the most important qualities of the urban environment. Since antiquity, such element of appeal and appreciation of the city has been considered as crucial in city and architecture treatises. Aristotle sustained that the city should be built in a way to transmit happiness. This atmosphere is evident in the traditional cities, in which monuments, residential buildings, squares and roads make up together a harmonious whole. Papa refers to the visual quality of traditional cities, via Camillo Sitte's influential book "The Art of Building Cities". Sitte states that traditional cities transmit a sense of nostalgia that remind us of happy times and argues that this feeling of nostalgia is perceived due to the artistic harmony of the city image. The art of building discussed by Sitte includes the idea of the city as an arrangement of its parts into a harmonious whole. This design unity that characterizes traditional ensembles is the key element of visual appeal. Unity happens at different scales. Elements composing the urban structure must be interrelated visually and contribute to reliving the overall image as a whole. Therefore the author thinks that this is the key point for a strategy that brings Gjirokastra out of depression.

Skënder Luarasi - Underlines the other side of story. He says that one of the things Gjirokastra contests, inverts and destabilizes is precisely the myth of being an old, 'traditional' town, a monument of a past destined to remain frozen, reminiscent of a time that no longer exists, before modernity. Author underlines that by walking in the very heart of the historical town of Gjirokastra, one finds a distinct and varied modern texture, which consists of modern buildings of different periods, from the early twentieth century to the late 60-s and 70-s. The volumes and façades of the modern structures are either distinctly articulated with pilasters, or are simply left as plain, finished with stucco. What is even more striking, is the 'naturalness' with which the modern 'fits' into the old, so much so that it is easily missed. Yet such 'fitness' is not a synthesis but rather a juxtaposition of two different things. So, what makes Gjirokastra heterotopic is the proximity and combination of a vernacular, about which a lot has been written in the official historiography, with a disavowed modernism, about which nothing is written yet. What makes Gjirokastra heterotopic is the juxtaposition of the vernacular and the modern, which are neither opposed nor synthesized. They take place in under the same castle, in the same neighborhoods,

across the same slope, more often than not adjacent, juxtaposed, and intertwined with one another. We often think of modernity as monolithic and as a rupture with the past. A closer look reveals, however, that modernity is characterized by a stylistic multiplicity, which is structurally connected to economic, social and cultural distributions that go well beyond the physical and imaginary confines of the old town. So Luarasi together with Papa, pave the way for a combined strategy of revival against the shrinkage effect, by combining both the traditional and modern features and revoking the a successful way out from history towards future.

Sonia Jojic - Deals with the strategy of promoting sustainable tourism, where (re-)branding Gjirokastra could be an enhancer. She says: the cultural routes, creative tourism and tourism-for-all; could be all perfect as (re-)branding strategies for the creation of sustainable tourism in Gjirokastra. Such strategies are seen as potential tools in enhancing Gjirokastra as a tourist destination and re-adapting/re-vitalizing its economic and demographic aspects. Branding is associated primarily with economic value. Yet, through sustainable tourism, branding also holds symbolic value, since it constitutes a strategy to provide places, cities, towns, with image and cultural meaning. The integration of the three pillars of sustainable tourism, indicates the need for individuality and emotional connection with the environment in the contexts of globalization, thus giving cities and regions depth, originality, and a distinctive character. The Image of the city' is an important factor in persuading native people to return to their city, and the tourists with different means to visit the city.

However, authorities should be more than responsible in giving proper consideration to a strong brand that will trigger the urban development of the city and the strengthening of its identity. In the case of Gjirokastra, city branding is seen as the process of distinction and diversification, where the potential local tourism organizations, cultural and arts facilities, and many other institutional or individual actors should join to develop images of the place. This will to attract potential consumers and investors to particular local areas, involving the component of place making (the process which makes a specific place more attractive) and city branding (the process of promoting a place). Thus the promotion of such places through creative tourism and tourism-for-

all as enhancers of “cultural tourism” can promote city branding, and reshape the city image. This will help develop the city's image and improve its economy.

Erida Curraj - In her article seeks production footprints in favor of innovation for Gjirokastra. One of the main findings of her research is the emergent awareness for protecting the Albanian industrial heritage. The industrial heritage in Albania is underestimated, and few actions have been taken to preserve it. Each day is costing a huge loss to the Albanian heritage and the preservation of the historic industrial sites. The author identifies the industrial landscape of Gjirokastra between 1950-1990. The main challenge for her has been the documentation and gathering evidence, since there is a lack of previous research, and no good documentation of the privatization process. No previous studies have focused on the industrial infrastructure of this city, considering it as something not useful. This shows a lot about the mentality of governance in the past, and only by changing that it is already a big step for Gjirkastra.

In this regard, the author aims to foster a political, institutional, and civic awareness on preserving the industrial heritage. Through an active understanding of its own production capacity, Gjirokastra might be the next destination of the investment on the sites of preserved industrial heritage. Gjirokastra's case study in her research could be a good model for other preservation initiatives for industrial heritage in general in Albania. Therefore the preservation of the industrial heritage in Albania will not be an easy process, but of course it will not be impossible. To achieve it, two main steps need to be undertaken: i) first, to increase awareness of the importance of industrial history in understanding it as a heritage; ii) and second, to harness the tendency to use industrial heritage. The identified potentials of industrial heritage in Gjirokastra are: textile industry, metal processing plant, leather and shoe factory, furniture factory, beverage implant, construction material industry, etc.

Besjana Qaja – Elaborates transport network impact in the shrinking city of Gjirokastra and its rural region. Author says that in order to be able to improve the settlements that inherit certain historical development, there must certainly exist incentives which include social, economic and infrastructural aspect, in order to bring back inhabitants and investments in those “traumatized” living settlements.

These can be achieved through a series of measures starting from: i) reducing unemployment by stimulating entrepreneurship; urban renewal programs (renovation of central parts of the city, protection of industrial craft and cultural heritage, revitalization of various facilities for cultural/educational purposes, etc.); ii) reactivation of local actors, adjacent towns and main villages, as well as enterprises, business environment institutions, non-governmental initiatives, etc.; iii) stimulating cooperation with more advanced spatial units, in order to achieve the adaptation of successful strategies for the return of residents and their subsidization; iv) improving the secondary and tertiary road network to create a network of more connected living settlements to the main access corridor such as the upcoming European motorway (the so called “blue corridor”) in the case of Gjirokastra; v) improving the transport network to start a new life cycle for the city and its neighboring settlements. As recommended before, all social-economic-infrastructural measures combined together aim to improve the performance of the living settlements in relation to their living conditions, and by not letting down the local people which makes them to escape in other cities or countries. In contrary authorities must encourage the creation of an atmosphere of valuing local resources and promoting the city and region, with the rest of Albania and with the nearby cross-bordering Greece. Genuine complementarity in this cases is more useful than the wild competition.

Gian Andrea Giacobone – Elaborates the concept of driverless transition - the value of autonomous mobility for sustainable urban development. To him cases like Gjirokastra city has a dynamic and difficult terrain. Therefore despite walking and biking, driving (especially in public transportation) must also be somehow earmarked and branded to the local conditions there. Author emphasizes that in the last two centuries, contemporary cities have been progressively changing their urban landscapes according to the functional necessities of the auto-centered transport system, but, over the years, that model of consumption has unfortunately contributed negatively to the environmental degradation of public spaces. Nevertheless, with the advent of autonomous vehicles, urban planners have new opportunities of rethinking urban mobility in a new and sustainable way by completely reshaping transport infrastructures and re-organizing land





uses for the future development of more accessible and livable cities. In fact, autonomous vehicles are expected to transform the use and experience of the vehicle itself but also change the overall infrastructure design, which, in turn, will have a great impact on urban planning, location choices, and land use organization, etc. For these reasons, this theoretical contribution sheds lights on the urban transition towards autonomous transport by reporting the main advantages – in terms of safety, social and economic inclusion, freeing of public space, as well as sustainability of the urban environment – under the condition that the new technology is able to offer to urban planners means for improving the quality of existing mobility systems. Moreover, Giacobone highlights the benefits of autonomous vehicles by describing briefly an ongoing research experiment that is testing the use of driverless cars in the real world. Considering this, the manuscript gives urban planners a new perspective capable of adapting spatial planning and land-use organization to future and uncertain challenges related to the implementation of advanced technologies such as autonomous vehicles in the existing urban context. In particular, the opportunity of assessing the impact of those vehicles on the existing cities (including Gjirokastra) will prepare urban planners to play a strategic role in defining a common urban development policy framework for helping Albanian and European cities to evolve in perfect symbiosis with the new and disruptive driverless technology. Not mentioning that autonomous vehicles could be the “new brand & image” to help the city even indirectly to stop shrinking and change negative opinions about it.

Alessandro Massarente – Illustrates the concept of “dynamic heritage” with the case of Havana, Cuba. He discusses practices and theories related to urban planning and architectural design in a similar UNESCO listed cities, promoting a shared approach on the theme of urban regeneration, although in other historical context. The practices and theories of Massarente derive from concrete field researches, as well as didactic experiences within the “interdisciplinary logic”. This research and pedagogical experiences in Havana, has been related to the concepts of rehabilitation, regeneration, heritage conservation, which were considered like “moving concepts”. The emblem of such dynamic is the evolution of the concept of heritage: from tangible to intangible,

from monuments to cultural landscape. Havana and its territory, indeed represent a privileged case study from which is possible to observe not only influences of European and North American culture on the Global South cities, but could also be observed an original hybridizations process deriving from the intertwining of different practices related to the local urban planning and architectural design, with UNESCO cities guidelines and practices, which is also a good reference for Gjirokastra as well.

PART 2: Practice

CHWB, Culture Heritage without Borders & Department of Architectural Conservation (DAC), at Royal College, University of Fine Arts, Stockholm, Sweden - two old partners of POLIS University, with their permission allowed us to republish their research and strategy on how to restore a world heritage site like Gjirokstra, via bottom-up process of stakeholders participation. The work describes in depth preparatory actions for preserving and restoring cultural heritage in transitional/shrinking situations. For professionals from abroad it is not an easy task to evaluate how to handle internal questions in a foreign town. They often don't know how their opinion differs from that of the local inhabitants. However, in this case they successfully tried to find possible spaces for their proposals, and suggested things which may be regarded as (un-)realistic. So the question is: which consequences will arise for Gjirokastra being a “UNESCO World Heritage”? What kind of knowledge is necessary for the local handling of it? What is important to save and to what extent can some buildings be demolished? What seems most important for the town are the dilemmas: i) revitalization and modernization; ii) or, preserving the cultural heritage? But of course, at the end one must make all this work together and create a well-functioning unity in the city. This is not an easy task.

CHWB & DAC have undertaken first an in-depth analysis of the city. Then they posed the question: how to revitalize the city? They put a special attention to the origin and later on to the “Ottoman town” by going through a process of walk along origin and history of the city. Then they document examples of everyday heritage from the urban ensembles and bazar, public spaces, exteriors and interiors of historic buildings, etc. They pose also the alternative of hosting the local university of Gjirokastra in the premises of “historic town”, in order to make it alive and functioning, especially

thanks to the presence of young people. They advise also adaptation of certain houses for commercial functions or touristic purposes. Authors underline the importance of educating local masters and artisans, especially on maintaining the tradition of masonry; stone, iron and wood works. They also try to link the city with the heritage of the local villages, rich in agriculture, landscape and historic itineraries along Drinos river valley, as well as winery and raki production customs. Concrete improvement projects and renovation field camps are also described in this part of publication, and in many of them students of POLIS also participated, by contributing to the renovation organized jointly by NGOs like: CHwB, Mozaik, Co-Plan, with the help of local and international donors.

MetroPolis.al architectural studio @ POLIS University - illustrates in this book a case of how a modernist and historical building, in the same time, is renovated as part of a historic neighborhood, but without losing its originality. This is the case of "Asim Zeneli" gymnasium school building in Gjiroakstra, a concrete project under implementation, that uses some of the principles mentioned above. This is a kind of acupuncture intervention tries to illustrate how selected and strategic interventions of public investments can be used to fuel city improvements in general.

Polis Planning Unit - illustrates how rural areas of Lunxheri, Mashkullore and Lazarat at Gjirokastra municipality, could be planned and developed by combining historic, agricultural, landscape and touristic potentials, and in the same time promote the reverse effects of shrinkage. This is done thanks to the bottom-up planning experiences in another similar area, at nearby municipality of Libohova. The images of work undertaken in Zagori area, show how planning instruments in a shrinking area are combined with guidelines of tourism promotion to stop shrinkage.

Llazar Kumaraku - deals at the end with the subject of innovative urban design strategies for a traditional city like Gjirokastra. It also refers to the work done by the Polis Planning Unit in the case of "city center bypass" for Gjirokastra - an international competition - organized by local and central authorities. The main point for the proposal is to avoid hard infrastructure works, by using soft innovative design instruments that better facilitate circulation and public transport,

without traffic encroaching in the historic center, and without damaging it by heavy civil works.

PART 3: Research

International PhD Workshop - elaborates shortly a kind of Terms of Reference for the annual International PhD Research Project between POLIS and UNIFE. As main objective of research, each group must elaborate a strategy in the scale of the city developing acupuncture interventions. All the groups worked under the same general strategy, developed under the framework of the International Competition: "Gjirokastra Organic Loop" by POLIS University, as mentioned above. In terms of methodology, the workshop is structured in a way that promotes the merger of different expertise to address the diverse aspects related to Gjirokastra and its region. The following steps are used as a pragmatic approach to combine theoretical knowledge, physical environment and existing data: i) Introduction to the project and area ; ii) Theoretical lectures and illustration via case studies; iii) Site visit and fieldwork; iv) In-studio work and project discussion; v) Theoretical research and paper which is elaborated over the year.

The leading team of professors: Besnik Aliaj, Loris Rossi, Llazar Kumaraku, Skender Luarasi, Sotir Dhamo, etc., focused on this paradigmatic approach: The symbiosis between the city and the character of human life, is seen as a reflection throughout the centuries, which has led to the creation of persistence to the spirit of place. In addition, during the recent years, due to drastic social, economic and technological changes, typical for modern times, the fragile equilibrium between humans, architecture, and traditional urban landscape system, has been put into risk. The abandonment of the historic city, the degradation of buildings, inconsistent interventions towards the existing context, new abusive construction, as well as the chaos produced in the city as a result of the increasing number of cars and their concentration in the bazaar area, it has decreased gradually the interest of tourists and is seen as a risk factor for the historical values that the city embodies. That's why, trying to preserve a certain balance constitutes the challenge of intervention in such contexts, that necessitates the activation of urban life, as much as the conservation of the historic image in return can contribute for the reactivation of urban life and touristic attractions.

Rossi & Pedata - paper tries to recognize the importance of drawings, diagrams and notations as form of knowledge. Building on the concept on Stan Allen's theoretical framework - which defines drawing as a tool capable of conveying a design project from a distance - the same concept of distance (understood as physical disconnection from Gjirokastra's urban reality) was applied by the PhD students of POLIS/UNIFE in their proposals for suggesting transformation of the reality at certain distance. This means transposing through drawings and notations of their ideas to the city's abandonment process. In few words, they conclude by saying that drawings have the capacity to represent the world as it is, and to imagine also what it could become. At the same time, drawings should be considered for both their speculative (devising possible futures) and demonstrative function (tools of composition and communication). So drawing as a form of knowledge, underlines the importance of drawings in architectural research, regardless of the execution time and technique. This means that drawings are equally important as written text, capable of being read, translating reality, and devising future scenarios.

Below are summarized the conclusive findings of the work done under the above mentioned logic:

Team 1: Covered Embers (Eleonora Baccega, Nicola Tasselli, Stefano Romano) - Identified and used 3 typologies of the so called "empty pixels": i) The first typology, divided itself into two sub-types, uses the abandoned and damaged buildings of the historical area (sprawl); ii) The second typology, instead uses the "unfinished" of the industrial and the contemporary areas of the city (linear); iii) The third typology of abandoned buildings, differs from the previous ones due to the very large dimensions of buildings in the contemporary texture of Gjirokastra. These buildings are former factories and former schools that might be used as residences for artists and ateliers, in which could be encouraged further collaborations between the public and private sectors. According them a separate description deserves also the stadium of the city that they decided to transform into a public space, superimposing on its previous identity as a soccer field, with a new identity of performative space; opening the stadium at ground level to guarantee functional practicability at all times and adding a stage on which to perform.

Team 2: Accessing Gjirokastra (Endri Duro, Marco Negri, Xhoana Kristo) - The concept of constellation of this team is referred to a group of "urban stars" (the city texture is the "sky") that forms an imaginary territorial outline or pattern, which in return represents an image to be used, through which actual reference points of Gjirokastër can be revitalized, and new ones could be added. These will serve for the team as important poles in the proposed territorial "constellation". The concept can be well-defined in Gjirokastra due to the accessibility-related issues, like: lack of infrastructure, abandoned buildings, lost heritage and lack of public transport, etc.

The proper definition of these territorial poles, as well as giving them a strategy of connection, can solve a lot of problems in relation to the accessibility in this city, reducing also the problem of shrinkage. The territorial poles have different characteristics, and are mainly seen in alteration with modern parts, like: the stadium and industrial zone, the historical and cultural heritage zones, the old bazaar, etc. Abandoned areas are also taken in consideration with the aim of revitalizing all the surrounding buildings in these territorial poles for different purposes and functions. The landmarks in each territorial pole have a vital role in the proposed strategy of the team, since they would help in giving an identity to the poles in itself; and contribute to the better orientation within the city. Landmarks could be already existing, like: the bazaar, the castle and clock tower, or the chimneys in an industrial areas, as well as the highest points of churches and mosques (all to be categorized as vertical landmarks). Others might as well be added based on the location, characteristic of the zones, etc., where the territorial poles are proposed. Authors referrer also to the famous international landmarks examples like "Luca Piazza Anfiteatro", "Walnut-Public Spaces", "Serpentine Pavilion", etc.

Team 3: Against the Grain (Alberto Grando, Dasara Pula) - focused on three main issues: i) the abandoned architectural heritage, as well as the lack of social life and other activities in the old city; ii) the absence of relationships between the modern city and the old city; that seems to be developed in the past separately from each-other; conceptually, aesthetically and functionally; iii) the large number of informal buildings and residential quarters built on non-appropriate or dangerous land. To address all the three issues, the

team's proposal deals mainly with the urban morphology and the process of "deleting". The used approach is to frame the city in a modern condition: Gjirokastra is not just a historic city, it is a modern city with a historical part, it has a university, a hospital, a stadium, etc. In addition the morphology of Gjirokastra followed the topography of the city, creates an organic street pattern. The same characterizes also the modern city, which is built in the outskirts of the old city. Another distinct element of Gjirokastra's urban morphology is also its hydrography, signified by water "paths" along the narrow streets of the city. By using all such elements of the urban morphology, their project tries to create a relationship between the old and the modern city.

Team 4: Health City (Doriana Musaj, Ivonne Ortiz, Luca Lezzerini) – proceeded by realizing a spatial analysis with maps, dividing it into layers of populated areas, parklands, communication and circulation elements. The identification of spaces and analysis of their potential intervention were required further by the team. From a designer's perspective: the focus on identity, construction techniques, local materials with potentials to develop original products was used to unify the specializations and generate a redistribution of activities within the city. From the engineer vision: the promotion and the development of services in order to improve comfort and accessibility, was also seen as highly necessary. As a result of these arguments, the team came up with a proposal for the redevelopment of a city focused on art and design, in which different services and programs can be offered.

All activities could be centered towards the objective of the identity recovery across the development of original local products, which uses original local techniques and materials. Finally, a territorial activities circuit has been also proposed, focused on the objective of maximizing the city and its surroundings points of interest, in order to generate a wide spectrum offer of activities to all segments of the public.

The ideas are latter on elaborated in depth by the individual papers of each project participant finalizing also their main recommendations for Gjirokastra:

Eloenora Baccega – says that the attempt to stop the depopulation of the city should start from the unification of the three different parts of Gjirokastra into a single project by establishing a 'connecting loop'. This is not enough, however, to keep

people in the city and keep the city alive, so the adopted approach considers a more forward-looking intervention by attracting and involving people in the city and using art as a catalyst.

Endri Duro - The old bazaar and the fortress are two of the most distinguished sites in town and can be seen as the main territorial pole from which the revitalization of the city can begin. The fortress, extending on a rocky hill, is the biggest and one of the oldest constructions in Gjirokastra. Due to its superior position relative to the other parts with an elevation of about 370 meters, it serves as an important 'landmark' that divides the city into two parts. However urgent and periodic actions must be undertaken to prevent erosion and seismic faults.

Ivonne Ortiz Sanchez - seeks to emphasize the strengths of the city, such as: tourism infrastructure, hotels and restaurants, restored buildings, and courses and workshops organized by the local municipality and NGO-s, which focus on the culture and history of the city, by pursuing new sources of income and taking advantage of the tourist development beyond 'normal' seasons. This means to empower Gjirokastra citizens to have their own businesses and be active part of the city, via organization of summer/winter courses and artistic residencies.

Luca Lezzerini - investigates how to support the renaissance of Gjirokastra economy and society, fueling both through the redesign of its urban plan and to support its transformation into a "City of Health", which means widening the main economy pillar from tourism towards health, services. The idea is to create a local market for medical and sanitary services that will cause the creation of new industries and companies, and attract new, younger and professionally prepared people, as well as it will bring equity and start a virtuous loop that will fuel itself for a long time. The local sanitary and medical market will be initially powered by attracting older people, following the example of other countries, like in Portugal. This balances supply and demand for the city markets.

Marco Negri's - accessibility approach tries to include different points of view such as the notion of accessibility seen in transportation terms, and based on its efficiency and multimodality. It also contributes to the complex issue of accessibility concerning people with

disabilities, by making use of the digital technology and transformation. The pervasive transition from 'analogue-to-digital' processes and the development of information-and-communication technologies, has provided new opportunities to supply information, infrastructure, and public services to people. Nowadays with our smartphones, citizens can access and produce data, which can then be used by them to increase the awareness about urban opportunities and optimize urban projects and policies. Worldwide internet connection has blurred the relation between a place and its use, deepening reuse strategies for buildings and neighborhoods. The development of shared and circular economy and new health standards in cities has led to the innovation of public services both in an evolutionary way (e.g. water supply and management, waste management) and in a disruptive way (e.g. transportation design, urban hybrid services). Smart Cities logic try to catch most of these opportunities, focusing on innovative urban solutions able to exploit such a potential.

Nicola Tasselli - underlines that Old Gjirokastra located close to the ridge, is characterized by a dense and organic fabric. The new city, located at the foot of the ridge, has a modern fabric. The industrial area is developed along the primary road network and the Drino river as well. These represent three distinct phases, which contribute to the identity of the place and people. Therefore the maintenance and preservation of this triple-identity must be the primary driver to develop any intervention strategy.

Stefano Romano – says that art outside institutional spaces, and located in the urban spaces of the city, is an extraneous element that could act as a 'vector' in the local context, to convey reflections, emotions, physical and social changes. The old town of Gjirokastra has in its urban fabric many abandoned or decaying buildings. They could become integral parts of the structures of as many art-works that make use to the local architecture and nature. In this case, art becomes a narration over time, through site-specific installation of artworks that can affect reality through reflection and interaction with people and spaces.

Xhoana Kristo - investigates possible scenarios on how to stimulate social interaction as a dynamic and changing sequence of social actions between

individuals or groups. Well-being for her should be also improved through design for locals and visitors, unifying the image of traditional cities, and requalifying public space. 'Intermediate spaces' and 'leftover public, semi-public and semi-private or private areas' between or among the adjacent existing buildings could be important assets for starting transformation, simply by using morphological logic.

Final Reflection

The processes of "shrinkage" are multidimensional phenomena encompassing cities or regions of nowadays. Such territorial entities are experiencing dramatic decline of their economic and social bases. The dominant factors for the phenomena are usually diverse and complex, but the two most evident factors of the "shrinking cities" are: i) the loss of employment opportunities; ii) and out-migration of population. Other research also underline that decline is usually enduring. This makes shrinkage to jeopardize the prosperity of the city, the region and their competitiveness. Therefore - following also recommendations from the partner School of Planning at Kaiserslautern University, Germany - it can be said that in order to provide a perspective for the development of resilient and sustainable nature, in certain shrinking cities, it is necessary: i) to adapt to the selected shrinking city a multi-disciplinary approach of research; ii) to analyze in addition case studies and paths of concrete actions in favor of the selected shrinking city; iii) to develop methodologies, training skills and applications for the strategies how to combat the shrinkage phenomena; iv) last but not least, to provide trainings for a new generation of planners, where universities can play a significant role.

Shrinking crises often and repeatedly confront urban development in our realities. In the past, 'old' crisis such as structural changes in society, and nowadays, recent global crisis like COVID 19 pandemic, all affect aspects of our life, like: health, economies, education, social and political stability, thus posing new challenges for cities and urban development in general. Although it is still unclear to what extent cities are changed now and in the future, it is urgent to be considered that the future-oriented solutions with sustainable and resilient considerations, should be designed to guide development in general. However, cities that lose population due to structural changes in longer periods of

decline are the most vulnerable ones. But cities in different contexts and geographic locations might react differently. Many of them are now eager to learn from their own mistakes, and to identify “best practices” as examples of solutions towards shrinkage. Indeed, crisis often offers space for creativity and innovations, such as: i) Schneidewind, et al (1) suggest in their ‘Post-corona city’ paper; ii) and Pallagst, et al (2) mentions on “out of the box” strategies for shrinking cities. The research project of POLIS/UNIFE in Gjirokastra tries exactly to acknowledge research tools and methodologies to tackle “shrinking cities” and their revitalization, while considering also sustainability and resilience dimensions. It intends to engage researchers, practitioners, and policymakers in concrete reflection about approaches, strategies, practices of different territorial scales, as well as underline their limitations with the goal of becoming resilient at the end of the tunnel of ‘shrinkage’.

Some of the main identified strategies and instruments against shrinkage could be grouped as below:

1. Conceptualizing and governing shrinking cities – This means investigating the concepts and paths for revitalizing shrinking cities, especially disruptive events; factors of dependencies and uncertainties; overlapping between ‘shrinkage’ and ‘growth beyond’, etc. It is essential to investigate the real reasons behind and the complete picture of the phenomena, rather than merely looking into the superficial causes of shrinkage. In addition, the affected cities must first analyze policy responses and planning strategies in governing shrinking cities, by understanding the way processes, planning strategies and policies, are directed; as well as by discovering which are the involved stakeholders.

2. Greening and right-sizing shrinking cities - Underlining ‘greening’ and ‘right-sizing’ as catalysts for new ideas and innovative methodologies to deal with the issue of ‘shrinking cities’; it needs to involve a paradigmatic shift from “growth-centered” planning to “shrinking” sustainably logic. While “greening” has become almost standard in many revitalizing initiatives, “urban gardening” programs in the public spaces and cities could become the next step towards bio-economic and energy efficient objectives, that bring back trust on shrinking cities.

3. Re-growing and post-growing cities

– By focusing on the strategies of shrinking cities, it can help stop decline and encourage new/robust “place-based” development. It is very important to understand that shrinkage per se, is not the final destination of a city. It can be indeed a starting point for new type of urban economies and innovative land uses. The response of the local authorities through creative and innovative experimentation of spatial planning and city management, could be a positive turn-around of a city’s crisis.

4. Social factors of reviving shrinking cities – This means that by establishing a way to understand the impact of social infrastructure improvements, we can also better understand the (non-)active social networks; social groups with special requirements such as: migrants, elderly, etc. This means we will be more aware for the role they play in the process of ‘shrinking cities’, be this in terms of housing, economy, or social life. This requires also monitoring the role of flexible services, co-production spaces, and public investments that aim growth against decline.

5. Impact of the Covid-19 pandemic of shrinking cities – The situation in the last 2 years, shows us that monitoring of urban development in shrinking cities situation, must be done by following the COVID-19 pandemic in different countries and cultural settings, in order to verify: if pre-existing urban trajectories have changed, accelerated or stabilized? Anyway, sustainability and resilience this will be a specific theme for research to be developed in the next international PhD project of POLIS/UNIFE along with 2021-22 academic year.

6. Frontiers of the shrinking cities – Last but not least, new developments affecting shrinking cities must be also verified under the perspective of changing regional/cross-border perspective and globalization patterns. This includes travel restrictions, protection and adaptation to climate change, etc.

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