



## Preface

### **Gjirokastra.**

#### **Between the "UNESCO City" status and the phenomenon of "Shrinking Cities".**

*Gjirokastra is one of the most beloved cities in Albania and beyond in the region. The city with extraordinary historical values, and with unique traditions and landscape, is rightly included in the UNESCO list. Gjirokastra has always been, and continues to be, among the main settlements that serve as a reference for the development of southern Albania, and the cross-border area of northwestern Greece.*

*After the 90s the city has entered a demographic and economic recession that is typical for those inhabited centers that face the global phenomenon of 'shrinking cities'. Often this has been considered a local shortcoming, typical of this city. In fact, the phenomenon occurs everywhere in the world, where there are dramatic social, economic, and political changes, such as those in Albania after the fall of the 'Berlin Wall'.*

*Meanwhile, the phenomenon is typical for developed countries in terms of market economy, especially when a certain city, region, or country goes through the process of 'de-industrialization'; the transition from industrial development to services and other sectors.*

*The opening of Albania's borders in 1991, the introduction of free movement and market economy, the closure and privatization without criteria of local factories and manufacturing industries, the fact that they did not go through a technological transformation in accordance with the new economic-political conditions, etc., - all these together stimulated a depressive atmosphere in the city. As a result of this situation: i) many families and individuals emigrated to Greece, Europe, and the USA; ii) many others moved to the metropolitan area of Tirana; iii) mountain villages were almost emptied both by the emigration abroad, and by the migration to big cities or the capital; iv) departure especially of the youth.*

*Beyond that, local, regional and central authorities and certain international partners have tried to curb the phenomenon as much as possible. The inclusion of Gjirokastra in the UNESCO list was a turning point. Already investments in infrastructure, agriculture and tourism have increased.*

*Today it can be said that Gjirokastra is a tourist destination, but suffers from a lack of human resources, especially young people. Institutions such as the County, Prefecture, courts, university, hospital, or other regional services, are one more reason to give more importance and a regional and cross-border development function to this municipality. The project of*



[www.bucketlisttly.blog](http://www.bucketlisttly.blog)

*transforming the historical-museum center into a "business district" has given hope that things can be different and better.*

*It is now clear that the Municipality should be better acquainted with the phenomenon of "shrinking cities" and learn from other cases in Europe and in the world: how other settlements have been gradually transformed and turned for the better? How investments, enterprises and residents have been gradually assimilated? It is evident today that Gjirokastra from a municipality with an "industrial-agricultural" character, should make a "shift" towards a services center with an "administrative-touristic-transitory" character. The villages need to be reactivated to bring life to the whole territory where there is real potential, authentic churches, and natural resources, to revive tourism and the agriculture with unique products.*

*The purpose of this publication is to demystify the phenomenon of "shrinking cities" in the context of Gjirokastra, and to identify strategies and instruments that will help the city out of this transitional state. The publication in question is part of a series of visions developed over the years within the International Doctoral Program (PhD) between POLIS University, Tirana (Albania) and the University of Ferrara (Italy).*

*For more see:*

<https://ombresearchseries.org/>

*This series which is also documented by the Library of Congress in USA, has first built a territorial development vision for the country and a proposal for its regionalization in the framework of European integration. Furthermore, each year a region has been selected and detailed with projects and specific development instruments to each region. The most recent region to date is Gjirokastra. Previously, development programs have been drafted for the regions: Durrës-Tirana metropolis, the southern Riviera region, the Seman watershed area, the cross-bordering municipalities of Shkodra (north) and Dropull (south), the regions of Prishtina (Kosovo) and Tetovo (Northern Macedonia), etc.*

*We hope you will find this study valuable both for communities and local authorities in the processes of local regional development, but will also it can hopefully serve as a reference for academic, student and research communities in their daily scientific work.*

Prof. Dr. Besnik Aliaj  
Rector of POLIS University, Tirana