

Infrastructure: Proposals for planning and settlement models connection and better access development in the Lezhë region.

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Abstract- *The organization of rural settlements is an important measure to cope with rural decline and to improve the quality of life and rural attractions, tourism, assets, natural resources, etc. This study tries to analyze and present the relationship that these settlements have, what are their assets and values, and in what way they can be more connected and have permanent communication and access.*

Rural areas in the Lezhe region have experienced a rapid depopulation in the last 30 years, accompanied by rural-urban migration. This extraordinary transition has caused a series of negative consequences, requiring a reorganization of access and interaction of rural settlements, to increase their economic efficiency, promoting agrotourism and local production.

In the continuation of the study, he takes into account the objectives of adaptability, compactness and local connection under the control of territorial limitations.

The main goal of our work is to improve the infrastructure as an important tool in relation to the development of tourism and agro-tourism, taking into account the growth of the population of Lezha in the projection based on the data from INSTAT.

The main ideas for improvement are based on expanding the information area of the "Rana e Hedhun" bicycle path; Connecting the most remote settlements with improved rural infrastructure and identifying natural areas that can be used for agricultural and tourist purposes.

Introduction- Lezha Region is a strategic area for Albanian tourism development for several reasons: firstly, the infrastructural connections with neighbouring countries, especially with Kosovo and Montenegro; secondly, the Kune Vain natural reserve, one of the most relevant in Albania; then, the presence of significant cultural and culinary heritage sites connected with the country history; and finally, the recent development of Shëngjin, one of the crucial seaside tourist destination in Albania. Nevertheless, nowadays tourism in this region is concentrated only during summer and focuses mostly on the seaside and this creates several consequences on the economic, natural and social levels.

Lezhe Municipality is composed of 10 administrative units which manage several villages, starting from Balldren,

Blinisht, Dajç, Kallmet, Lezhë, Shenkoll, Kolsh, Shengjin, Zejmen and Ungrej. Each administrative unit has its resources, which are mostly related to agricultural-livestock production, viticulture and horticulture. In the central part of the municipality passes an important infrastructure such as the railway network, which currently only transports products and is not functional for passengers. This railway network has a very strategic connection with the state of Montenegro through the Hani Hoti border point. Also, parallel and sometimes combined passes the highway which connects the north of the country with the central part, continuing to the south. The road network in the municipality is mainly distributed in the western part, which is most favoured by the terrain conditions and plains.

This contribution aims to provide tools for urban planning with two objectives: developing a more sustainable agrotourism during the summer and fostering alternative tourism during the rest of the year. To achieve these goals, it is essential to develop existing infrastructure and to build new ones, to facilitate mobility, accessibility and connectivity of the settlements mostly for them that are located in the eastern part of the municipality.

Methodology

The methodology applied in this contribution was characterized by two phases: the research phase, composed of field research, observations, and interviews with local authorities; and the analytical one, characterized by the infrastructural, settlement, morphological, hydrographic and cross-cutting analysis. Considering the objectives, this paper identified four main areas of intervention: Infrastructure seaside, agrotourism, naturalism and culture.

Analysis

The main seaside issues are related to the traffic reduction between Tirana and Lezha as well as the enhancement of Shëngjin accessibility. To mitigate these problems, it will be crucial to restore the railway for commercial and civil purposes on the route between Tirana and Lezha and to develop a cycle path to promote sustainable mobility in the section between Lezha and Shëngjin. Regarding the agritourist area, the main problem is the lack of connections

between mountain small villages and the Zadrime site. A possible solution could be to introduce train stops in the Zadrime plain to make those areas more accessible for the tourists and inhabitants coming from Tirana and Lezha. Moreover, this could be facilitated with the creation of a widespread road network to improve goods trade and cooperation between local farmers and agritourism, and to make this area enjoyable for tourists.

Deepening into the cultural heritage areas, the most important concern regards the lack of alternative infrastructural connections to access and promote local cultural sites. The railway activation could represent a way to increase the efficiency of the communication between Tirana and Lezha and between Lezha and the historical settlements of the piedmont areas. Furthermore, to integrate cultural and seaside tourism it could be important to connect Shëngjin with Lezha through a cycle path. Finally, these infrastructural solutions could be integrated with a series of artistic interventions to enhance attractiveness and promote cultural tourism during the whole year.

On the side of naturalistic tourism, relevant concerns are the preservation of protected areas and the integration of naturalistic tourism with the rest of the region's activity. A cycle path from Lezha to the Lagoon could be decisive to reduce the use of cars in the protected areas without negatively affecting tourist accessibility. For the same purpose, also a panoramic cycle path from the lagoon to Shëngjin could be an opportunity. Another relevant naturalistic area is situated in the North-



Fig.2 / Hurdha me Shkallë. Source / Flori Nikolli 2016.



Fig. 3.1/ Fishte village and railway line. Source / Author

East of the region. To make this mountain area more usable it will be crucial to improve the railway path in the piedmont area and to develop a series of trails for trekking and tracks for bike tourism.

Taking into consideration the relevance of the region, the forecast regarding population growth and tourism development, a deep rethinking of the region's infrastructural system is needed. These new investments have to deal with the four areas outlined above to promote tourism attractiveness, environmental sustainability and inhabitants' quality of life.

Improvement of existing tourism Infrastructure

Seaside Area, Issues

- Traffic reduction in the intersection at the entrance of the city Roundabout
- Enhancement of Shëngjin accessibility
- Demand for safe and low-impact mobility (difficult access to public transport during pandemics)

▪ Making public transport safe, efficient and attractive (both for locals and tourists)

Solutions:

- Restoration of the railway for commercial and civil purposes
- Reactivate the railway to increase the communication between Tirana and Lezha and between Lezha and the piedmont areas: safety measures, high frequency, especially during the summer and art interventions ("art train")
- Development of a cycle path to improve and promote sustainable mobility in the section between Lezha and all the areas nearby.

- Improvement of the road signal and tunnel construction
- Blue corridor

Cultural Heritage Areas, Issues:

- Lack of connections to access and promote local cultural sites
- Increase the quality of life of the locals
- Promote cultural tourism during the whole year
- Difficult access to public spaces during the pandemic
- Mitigate contagion risks
- Preservation of cultural and natural heritage (raise awareness)
- Increase participation (denied during the pandemic) and involve locals

Solutions:

- Connect Shëngjin with Lezha through a cycle path
- Artistic interventions to enhance attractiveness and promote cultural tourism during the whole year (squares, bus stops, along cycle paths...)
- Introduce a network of public spaces in the intersection between the cycle path and the Drini river
- App that monitors touristic sites' crowding levels and provides cultural information
- People can suggest significant places to be added to the app

Agro-Touristic Area, Issues:

- Lack of connections between mountains, small villages and the Zadrime site.
- Reduce daily commuting to Tirana and foster the possibility for more people of Lezha and Shëngjin to live there also during the winter



Fig 3.2 Fishte village and railway line. Source / B.Qaja 2021

- Promote housing in rural areas
- Solutions:
- Introduce train stops in the Zadrime plain to make those areas more accessible;
 - Creation of a widespread road network to improve goods trade between local farmers and agritourism and to make this area enjoyable for tourists.
 - Implement hubs encouraging remote and co-working

Naturalistic Areas, Issues:

- Preservation of protected areas
- Integration of naturalistic tourism with the rest of the region's activity

Solutions:

- Creation of a cycle path from Lezha to the Lagoon to reduce the use of cars in the protected areas
- Panoramic cycle path from the lagoon to Shengjin
- Improve the railway line in the piedmont area and develop a series of trails for trekking and tracks for bike tourism

Recommendations

Development of an alternative model of tourism focus on 4 main zones and main villages for each zone.

Development and connection of zone no. 1 (with the main focus on the production of the vine):

- Kalivac: The village is located in the administrative unit of Ungrej, and has as a feature the production of viticulture and grapes.
- Kashnjet: The small village in the mountainous part of the municipality that has natural resources like Lakes, and cultural like churches.
- Ungrej: small village

rich with trees, old buildings and natural places,

- Ungrej: A small village located on the road Lezhe-Kalivac, in the hilly-mountainous part in the eastern part of the municipality of Lezhe. Favorable for the creation of recreation and camping areas.
- Fregen:

Development and connection of zone no. 2 (Zadrime agriculture):

Fishtë: agro tourism, some of the best restaurants in Lezha, beneficial for development of bio and organic food, touristic village.

Kallmet i Madh: it's an old town, is characterized by old archeologic findings that prove the old civilization of this village, in this village some characteristic that divide it from others are: dressing of the girls, agriculture, for bio products, some religious places, and for wine production.

Blinisht: Blinisht is located in the Zadrime region. The region has been subordinate both the Roman Catholic Diocese of Lezhë and Roman Catholic Diocese of Sapë.

Dajç: It has an agricultural-based economy, with many producing fields, but in need of better mechanics and organized market. People of this region are called Zadrimeorë, from its field name 'Zadrime' stretching from Shkodër to Lezhë cities. This region has a very rich cultural tradition. Livelihoods of the people are mainly field work, growing crops including grain and vegetables, foraging, arboriculture (figs, plums, and pears), and some vineyards. With the new main highway, SH1 / E762 running by the village South-North from Tirana to the Montenegro border, trade and

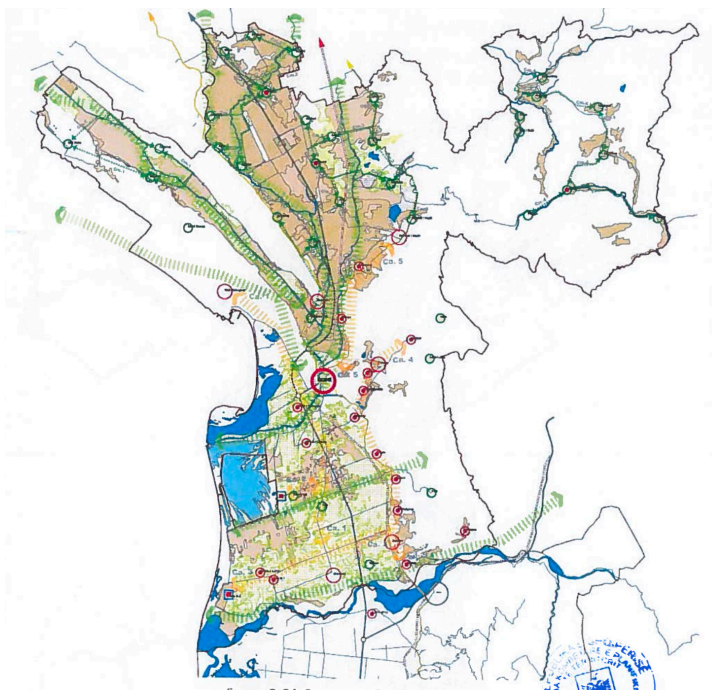


Fig 4 Strategies of agricultural system, Source / Lezha Municipality 2017

economical development is expected to thrive in the coming years. There are many new houses being built everyday, and the face of the town is changing continuously.

Balldren: The name comes from the Albanian, which means "in front of the Drin". In Latin and later Italian sources, the town was known by the names Blandin or Baladreni.

Gocaj: It is a village in Lezha and part of the Balldren administrative unit, which focuses on agriculture, and production, family farming.

Gjadër: It is located in the western plain of the municipality and part of the Dajç administrative unit. It is known for the former military air base made famous during the Cold War.

Pirraj: It is a settlement located in the plain part of the municipality, and near the interurban road Lezhe-Shkodra. It is a small village dedicated to agricultural production.

Gramsh: Gramsh is a settlement in the Lezhë County, northwestern Albania. It was part of the former municipality Dajç.

Development of zone no. 3: Lagoon Villages
Making the "Lagoon Villages" usable to tourists and researchers

Ishull Shëngjin: It is part of the administrative unit of Shëngjin. Located near the lagoon of kune vain.

Barbulloj: It is part of the Kolsh administrative unit, located in the western part of the municipality near the kune vain tale lagoon. There is potential for the use of agricultural land and fishing in permitted areas.

Gryk-lumi Shënkoll: it is a small village in western part of the municipality, focused in agriculture and fishing.

Tale: It is a seaside resort town, part of the former municipality of Shënkoll in the Lezhë

County in Albania. Its beaches attract many tourists, especially with the increase in small local hotels.

Gajush: It is located near the river Mat, in the south of the municipality favored by the fertile lands of the river.

Development of zone no. 4: Protected area

- Velë
- Kaçinar
- Kolç
- Tresh
- Spiten
- Markatomaj
- Zajmen
- Berzanë

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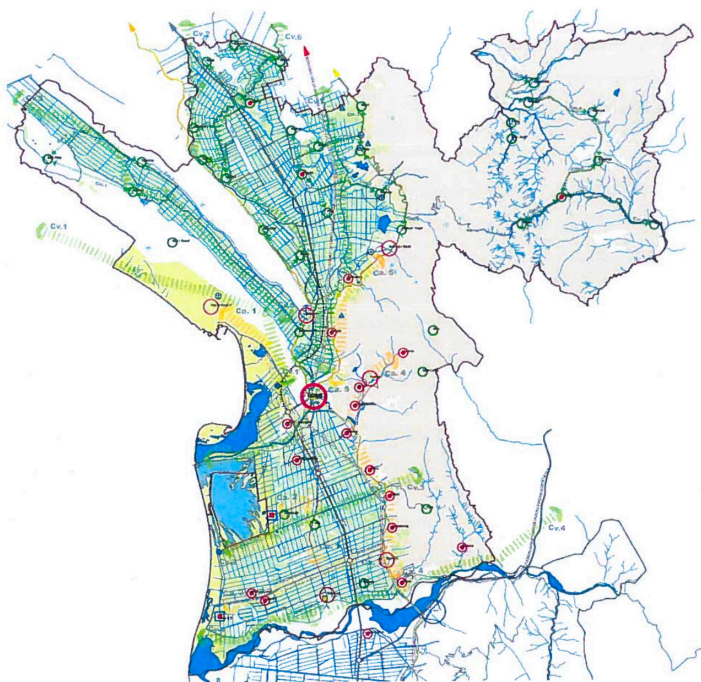


Fig 4 Strategies of water system, Source / Lezha Municipality 2017

compactness, and local connection under the control of territorial limitations.

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