

Conclusions from the planning process

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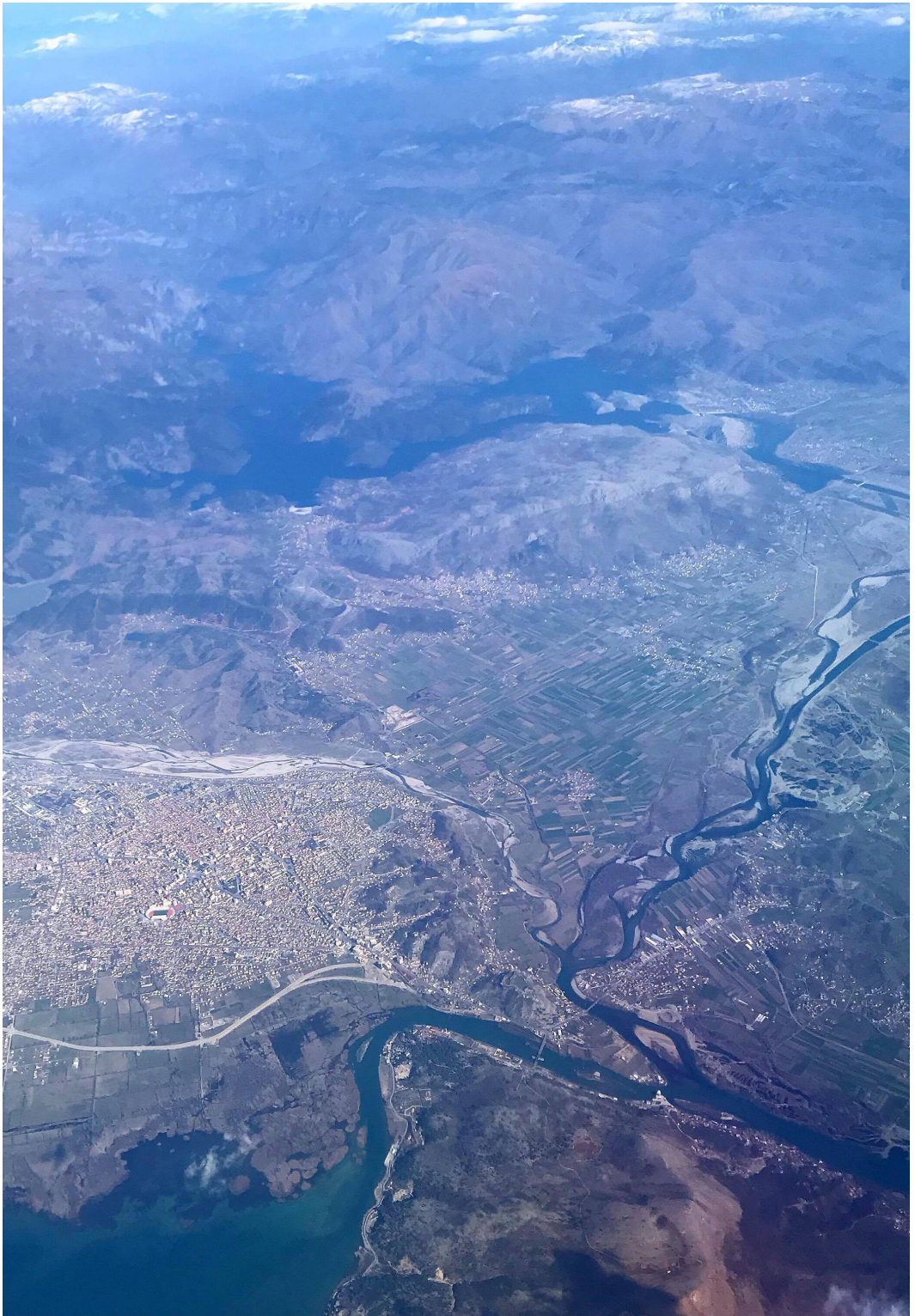
In such a highly volatile environment characterized by continuous changes in the role of authority in controlling and developing of the territory, some conclusions can be drawn. These conclusions are to be intended as general guidelines for the Albanian case specificities. At the same time, the issues faced during the drafting process of the General Local Plan for Shkodra can serve as a precedent for future scenarios of planning in conditions of future uncertainties where the role of the institutions is not historically consolidated.

The case of Shkodra reconfirmed that a participatory planning process is crucial for the success of the operation. The involvement of the public and stakeholders guarantees the legitimation of the plan, guaranteeing in this way the sustainability of the instrument in the future. The lack of consolidated institutional culture makes it common for the plans to be revised or totally dismissed every time there is a change in the administration, so guaranteeing the involvement of all the actors will increase the plan's possibilities to be implemented in the future. At the same time, the participatory process can be misused by the authority. Other cases have been observed in Albania where the public hearings of the planning process are mere formalities or are used as propaganda moments used by the local governments. So, the public participation in the planning process, when understood as a moment of sharing opinions and debating about decision making can guarantee the legitimation of the plan and

its successful implementation.

Timing is crucial. It was proven very important to have an appropriate rhythm of activities during the drafting process. A good compromise between the urge to conclude the drafting of the plan in order to make it operative and the need to have as many discussion meetings as possible. The appropriate rhythm is important also for the fact that conditions in the territory change even during the planning process. By understanding that the plan cannot be a prescriptive instrument for any possible development of any possible parcel of the territory, but an open ended instrument that should guide the general development of the municipality in a unforeseeable future, the timing of the process can be tuned properly allowing participation and avoiding quagmires.

The institutionalization of the comments and feedback process proved to be important for the success of the process. Every comment or request, in order to be processed needed to follow a formal protocol that required the municipality to officially receive and forward the documents. This process increases the trust among the actors and avoided any kind of pressure coming from personal or unclear interests. Areas with high development interest or touristic areas often produce interferences in the planning process, especially in cases like Albania. Having the municipality as official and institutional guarantee of the feedback process has proven to be useful in achieving a correct drafting of the plan



*Fig1 / City of Shkodra at the confluence of the Drini and Bruna rivers
source / James Stevens*

and will serve as a reinforcement for its sustainability.

The involvement of three main actors increases the possibilities for further democratization of the planning process. The municipality, as the beneficiary of the planning, acted as a representative of the community interest. The local and international experts acted as drafters of the documents by bringing the most up to date know-how; it was their task to draft proper instruments for the specificities of

the Shkodra case. The National Territorial Planning Agency, also as a financing agent, guaranteed the legal compliance of the plan and its alignment with national directives and plans. The three sided collaboration guaranteed a deeper understanding of the state of the art and a profound commitment in the drafting process. The check and balance principle guarantees a high degree of trust and legitimacy of the process. It also allowed a faster course of formal approval of the plan.