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AUTHOR: *AMANDA TERPO, LEDIO ALLKJA*  
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## Planning the "new" Shkodra

*Amanda Terpo / Research Center of Sustainability, POLIS University, Tirana, Albania*  
*Ledio Allkja / CO-Plan - Institute for Habitat Development, Tirana, Albania*

*Contributing authors / Prof.Dr. Besnik Aliaj, Sotir Dharmo, Prof. Dr. Sherfi Lushaj, Dr. Godiva Rembeci, Ledian Bregasi, Braden Kay, Artan Kacani, Elona Karafili, Michael Underhill, David Swindell, David Pijawka, Iva Tavanxhiu, Sindi Haxhija, Besjana Qaja, Ina Brata, Alda Subashi, Voltana Ademi, Dritan Meta, Arben Gjuraj, Aida Shllaku, Joana Serrmi.*

### Introduction / The context of planning in Albania

Over the last decade, the planning approach in Albania is changing from an urbanistic to a more comprehensive, integrated planning approach (Toto, 2012) (Allkja, 2017). The "reform" was initiated in 2007 with the start of the preparation of a new legislation on "Territorial Planning". It culminated in 2009 with the approval of law 10911 "On Territorial Planning", and subsequently in 2014 with law 107/2014 on "Territorial Planning and Development" (Toto, 2012). Of course, to change the legislation is not the only issue as planning practice and the institutionalization of a new planning culture takes time and is an incremental process of continuous change (Allkja, 2017). Thus planning changes from a "technical and regulatory" discipline towards a socio-political process of policy making in support of better territorial governance and territorial development. After all, planning as a profession, by nature is subject to continuous changes based on territorial, social, economic and environmental challenges.

Decentralization is also one of the main reforms going on in Albania which impacts territorial governance and spatial planning. In 2013, a new territorial administrative reform was started aiming at the consolidation of local governance (Ministri i Ceshetjeve Vendore, 2015). As part of this reform from 373 Municipalities (urban

and Communes (rural) local governance in Albania was "reduced" to 61 Municipalities composed from urban and rural territories (Ministri i Ceshetjeve Vendore, 2015). This reform has great implications for planning and supports the change in approach from "urbanism" towards comprehensive and integrated. The latter was also supported by the drafting of the first document of General National Territorial Plan for Albania prepared by the Ministry of Urban Development. The drafting of General Local Territorial Plans (GLTP) was the natural next step not only to complete the territorial planning framework in Albania but also to support the Territorial Administrative reform.

The newly formed local governance units were in a "confusion" as now they had to govern a larger territory which they knew very little about and on top of that a relatively new planning approach which they had little experience with. On top of the absence of capacities in planning at the local level, the absence of data was one of the main and greatest challenges. Therefore, the planning process in Albania was faced with a challenge in terms of process as well as technical capacity thus the central government decided to allocate financing for the preparation of GLTPs of 26 main municipalities in the country (AKPT, 2018).

Shkodra is one of the largest and important municipalities in the northern

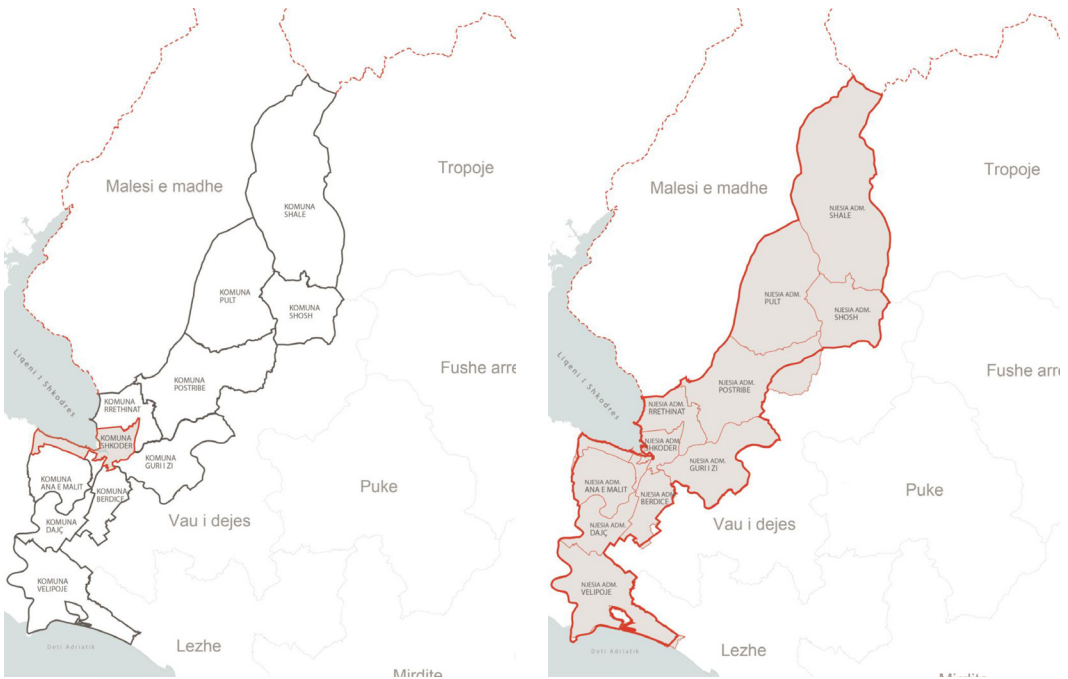


Fig1 / Before (left) and after (right) the Administrative Division source / the authors

part of Albania. Shkodra has always been a strategic city throughout history and its location has made this municipality an important part of the northern Albania. Historically, the city has played an important role from the economic point of view as a result of the trade routes and connections with the Venice in the XVIII century. Shkodra through the lake and the river Drin, has had also important trade connections with the east (Skopje, Kosovo etc.) on the 18-th century. This role is clearly demonstrated in the cities functioning, development and was an important characteristic to be considered. Now the new municipality is spread from the Shkodras new territories the Adriatic Sea (Velipoja) up to the the border with Montenegro, including vast forest areas and traditional houses and as well as natural protected areas of national importance such as the lake of Shkodra and the Park of Theth. The new administrative division has changed its configuration not only in territory but also in population. Prior to the administrative division Shkodras had a total area of 31.48 km<sup>2</sup> which changed to 763.77 km<sup>2</sup>, bringing together 12 former communes. Its population doubled from 79.633 to 137.612 people. The new municipality had many problems in terms of access and disparities in economic development, mainly because of the topographic barriers of the areas. Prior to the territorial division, only three of the former communes had local plans (Shkodra, Velipoja, Rrethinat) and only two had development strategies (Dajc, Guri I Zi) living the rest with no previous studies, development strategies or vision.

The municipality received financial support to draft the local plan (AKPT, 2018) and a consortia composed of two universities (POLIS University- Albania and Arizona State University-USA) and one architecture and planning studio (MetroPOLIS) was selected to work with the municipality through a tendering process to draft the GLTP. Besides the two challenges above, due to the situation in the country, the government decided that plans had to be drafted in a “record-breaking” time-frame of only six months. Therefore, this case is interesting to report as it represents a new planning approach in a difficult context. The aim of the plan was not only to support the municipality in drafting a planning document, but in supporting them to build a process which was open and democratic and supported the municipality to overcome the initial difficulties of the territorial administrative reform. The paper offers a short report of the planning process and the main policies proposed in the plan to achieve territorial cohesion and development in Shkodra.

### Shkodra profile

The aim of this section is to give a quick profile of the municipality and its implications for planning.

**Territory** / Shkodra is located in the north-western part of Albania and has a complex territory including the Adriatic Sea and some of the highest mountains in Albania. The city of Shkodra is located in a field that varies from 9.5m to 24m above sea level. This municipality is rich in water resources, in the middle is located the lake

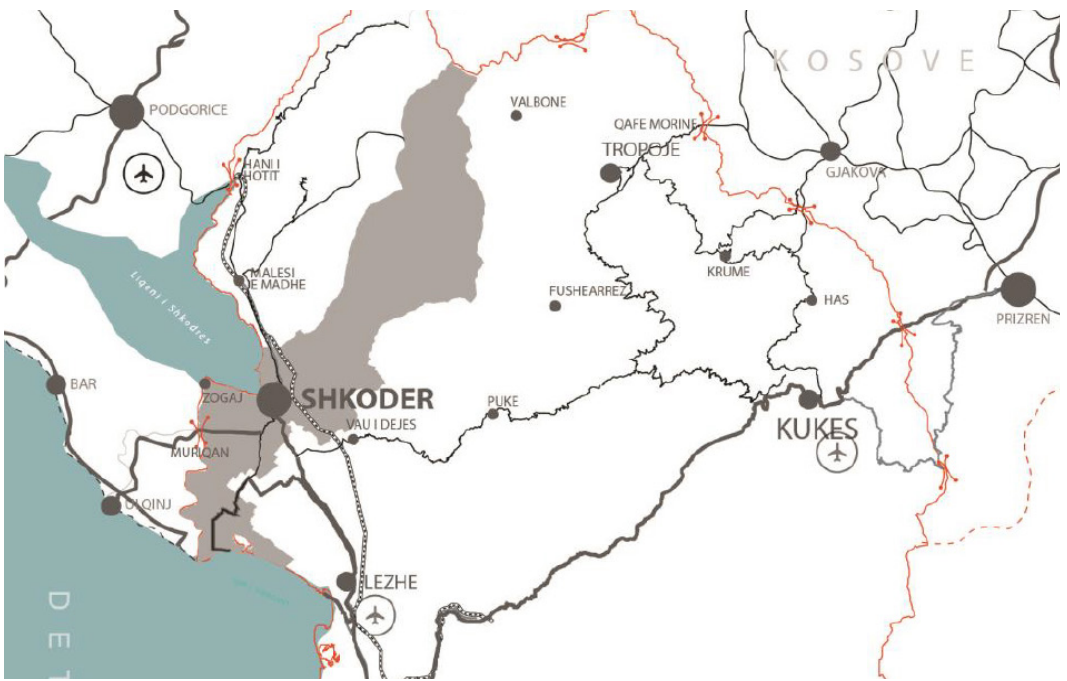


Fig2 / The Geographical position of Shkodra source / the authors

of Shkodra from where derives the river of Buna (44km) that ends in the Adriatic Sea. The river Buna in the southwestern part merges with the river of Drin about 2 km from the city of Shkodra. From the Eastern part of the city runs the river Kir which derives from the northern mountains (43 km) and converges with Drin River on the southern part of the city. The part of the city located in a flat area is 1.150 ha and the part located in the hills surrounding the city is 350 ha. The sea is only located 30 km away from the center of the municipality (Shkodra city). Not much further is also the northern part of the Alps with mountains that go above 2000 m altitude like the mountain peak of Jezerca (2694m), the peak of Radohima (2570m), and the mountain of Shenikut (2550m). There are also smaller mountains like Tarabosh (595m) and beautiful valleys like the Shala valley and the Kir valley.

**Population** / From the population point of view in Shkodra live 63% of the districts population, the rest is distributed in the neighboring municipalities of Malësi e Madhe, Vau i Dejës, Pukë and Fushë Arrëz with 14.3%, 14.1%, 5% dhe 3% of the total population. The population of Shkodra has increased 76 % more with 136 000 people. The population of the municipality is mainly concentrated in the main city Shkodra from which the municipality is also named after. Nearly 57% of the total population of the municipality is concentrated in the city, leaving the rest of the population divided between the other former communes, 16% to Rrethinat and 6% to Guri i Zi. The rest 27% is divided among the remaining 8

former communes with approximately 4% of the population in each of them.

**Environment** / This municipality is rich in landscape, nature and agriculture. The protected areas have an important role in this municipality, one of them is part of the Emerald network of protected areas due to the rich flora and fauna. To the south we can witness large agricultural lands, part of the national agricultural grid. Part of this municipality are also the protected areas such as the National park of Theth. The lake of Shkodra (5500m<sup>2</sup>) is located in the center of the municipality and is shared with Montenegro and has some of the most important national and international ecosystem. In the western part there is Velipoja with the river of Buna and the Vilun lagoon, both very environmentally important protected areas as part of RAMSAR network.

On the other hand, there are also several problems and challenges from an environmental point of view. The greatest problem, which is also expected to be exacerbated due to climate changes is related to flooding. A series of man-made interventions combined with an absence in terms of infrastructural measures has created a system where flooding has become common almost every year. Meanwhile rising sea levels and coastal erosion are problems which are expected to increase in the not so far future. Waste management is another problematic issue in Shkodra. The latter also contribute to the pollution of rivers and the whole agricultural system as a consequence.



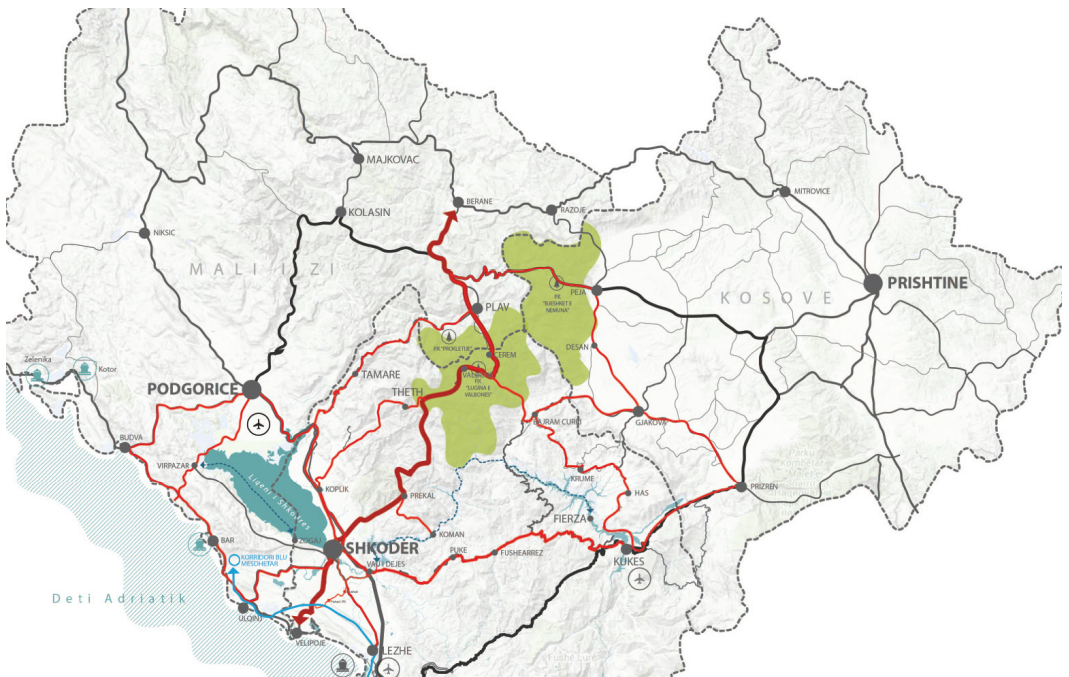


Fig3 / Shkodra's relationship with the Sea and Mountain source / the authors

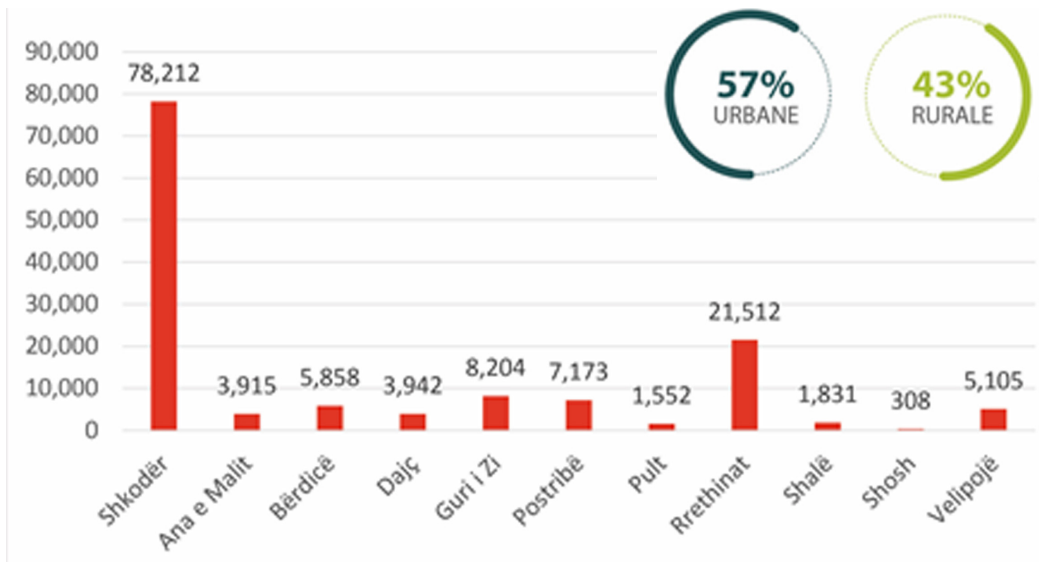


Fig4 / Population Division by Administrative Units source / the authors

**Economic Development** / Shkodra from an economic development point of view is the strongest in the northern region. The main economic activity is divided between industrial production, energy, agriculture and tourism. The agriculture part of the economy is mainly concentrated in the Bërdicë, Vellipojë, Dajç, Guri i Zi and Postribë. Production industries also make for an important contributor to Shkodra's economy. In the region of Shkodra are located 7.300 businessis with 62% of them based in the city.

Tourism in Shkodra has a big advantage since the municipality can provide 360o of tourism all year long, partly because of the territory, history and culture and partly because the vicinity to both Montenegro, and Kovoso. Being one of

the main centers of the north, Shkodra has opportunities to be a gate for the north connecting the cities of Ulqin Podgoricë - Gjakovë, Prizren, regions of Shkodër – Lezhe and the region Kukës-Has-Tropojë. The northern part of Albania where Shkodra is located contributes 24% to the total GDP of the country with only 30% of the countries population. In 2013 the region of Shkodra contributed 5.5% to the total GDP of the country, raiting Shkodra 7-th in the state.

Although Shkodra shows great potential for economic development it is also faced by different challenges. Initially, the "brain-drain" towards Tirana or other cities in Albania and Europe has reduced the creative and working force in Shkodra. The latter is also associated with high

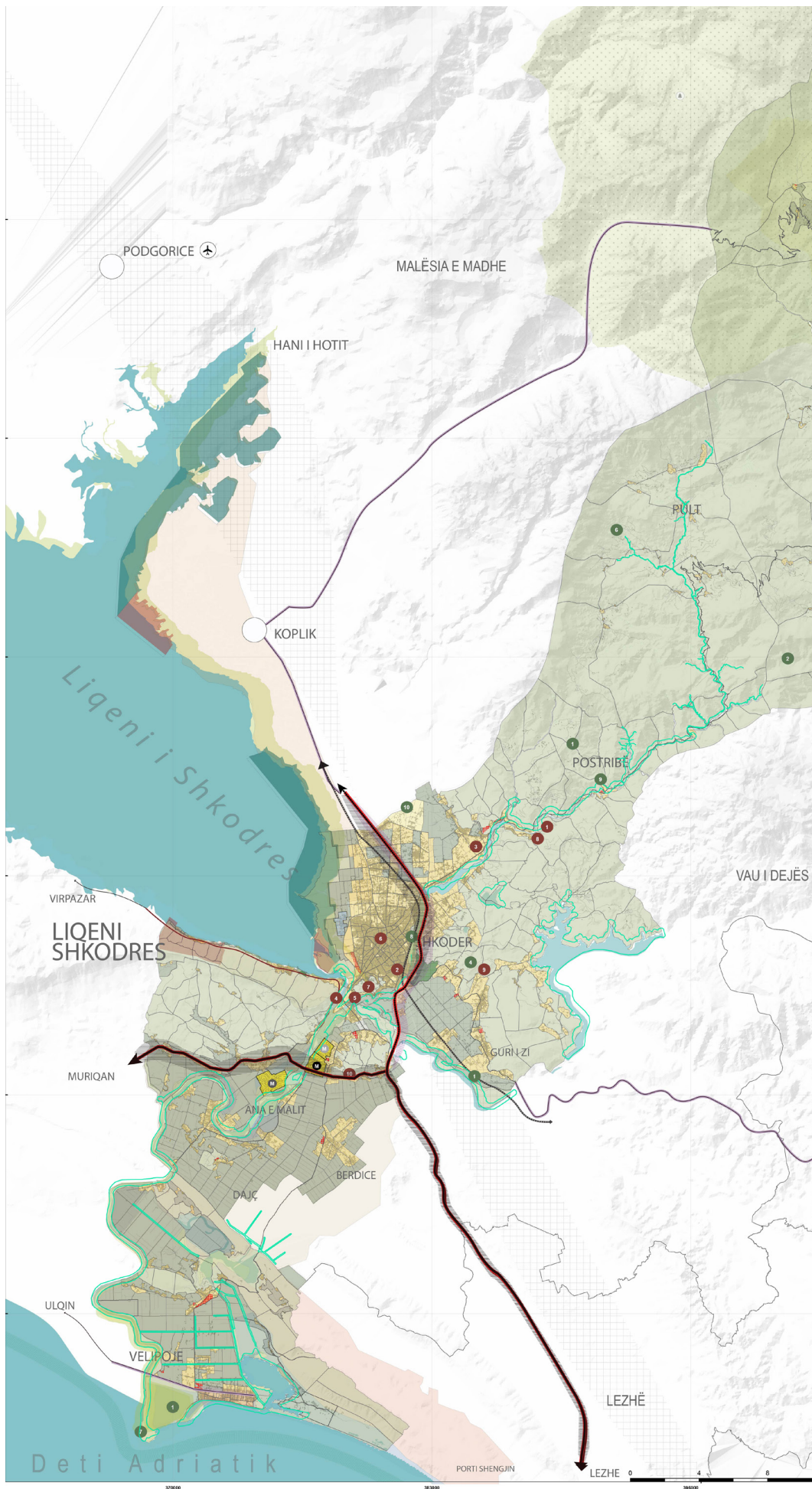


Fig5 / Map of the Protected Areas of Shkodra Municipality  
source / the authors



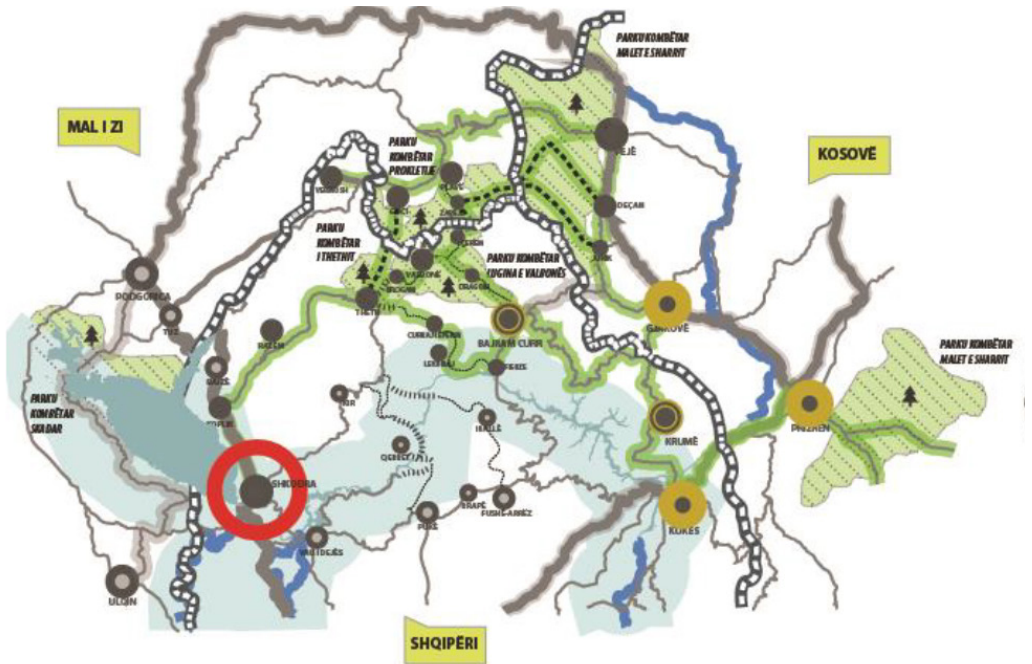


Fig6 / Regional touristic itineraries  
source / the authors

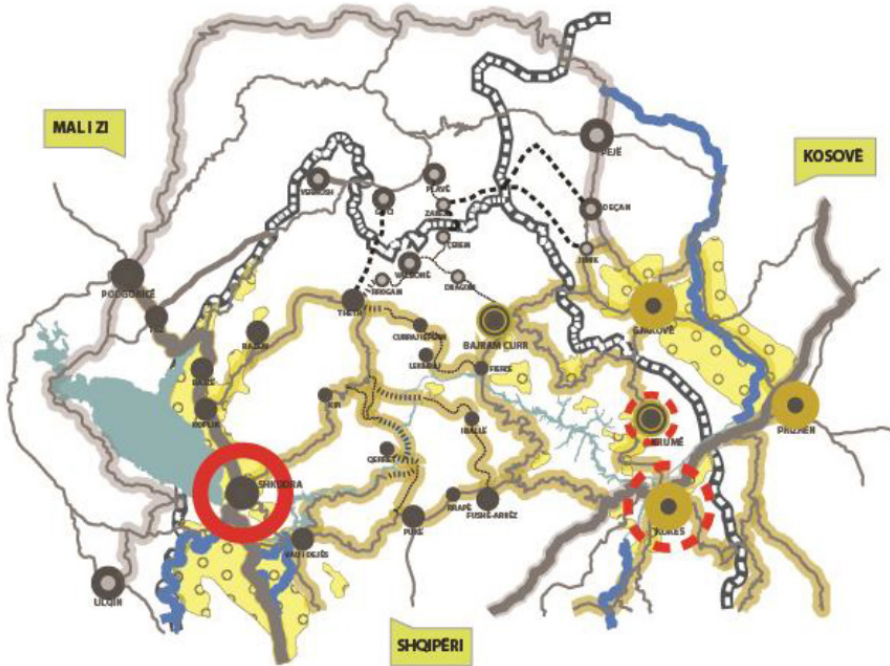


Fig7 / Regional economic itineraries  
source / the authors

unemployment rates of young people. They find it hard to gain access to work although from an education point of view the level is relatively high when compared to the region. Lastly, the tourism industry has one of the potentials to become a key contributor to the economy but the absence of infrastructure combined with un-coordinated and non-integrated policies reduce tourism to a seasonal sector rather than an all year round economic activity.

**Infrastructure** / Shkoder is relatively well connected with road infrastructure and railway. The railway is only active for

transporting goods and runs from the border of Han i Hotit towards the port of Durres and Tirana. The current condition of the railway is very poor, keeping in mind that the railway has build during the socialist era with no interventions made to improve its state in more than 25 years. The municipality is well connected with national roads, in the southern and middle part. The northern part has poor connections and fragile infrastructure that is isolated during the winter because of the snow. This municipality has one of the most important border passing points of the country, connecting Albania with the European infrastructure corridors.



Fig8 / the Infrastructure of Shkodra Municipality  
source / the authors

Shkodra used to have an airport located in Gjader (southwestern part) that is no longer active. Its also located 90 km from the main airport of Tirana-Rinas 39 km from the port of Shengjin and 90km from Durres port, the country's biggest port for people and goods. The GNTP - National Spatial Territorial Plan - defines Shkodra as center of primary importance, giving it a greater importance and role for the region.

**Education** / The population of Shkodra is young and the municipality has within its territory a variety of educational institutions including universities located in the city of Shkodra. In the municipality of Shkodra there are 190 public and private institutions that operate in the educational field. In the beginning of 2015 more then 28 thousand students were registered in school and 2000 teachers. An important part are also professional high schools, more than 10 public professional high schools are located in the municipality and are very important for the economic development of the industries and capacity building.

### **The planning process**

As mentioned above, the planning process in Albania is based in law nr.107/2014, date 31.07.2014 "Territorial Planning and Development" and the Decision of Council of Ministers Nr.686, date 22.11.2017 "On the approval of planning rregulations". These define the general content of the GLTP - General Local Territorial Plan. One of the first things that this document considers is analysing and comparing the previous planning initiatives within the territory.

The methodology started with a literature review of the previous planning documents, including partial strategies, local plans and inter-sectorial plans. For the purpose of proper information structuring all the planning documents have been divided into three categories: Plans & strategies of international and national level, Plans & strategies of "Regional" level and Plans & strategies of local level. All of these documents are cross referenced with each other to understand the objectives and future implications that these plans might have on the new local plan.

Following that a detailed territorial analysis was conducted. Shkodra as many other municipalities in the Albanian reality has a severe lack of data. Besides territorial surveys and visits for data collection, due to the limited time, key local experts were interviewed in order to gain further local knowledge. Once the analysis was completed in order to achieve to a

territorial vision scenarios were used as a method. Three scenarios were developed and discussed extensively with focus groups and in public hearings.

Public participation was a key element for the planning process and not only a mere legal requirement. To oblige to this specification, the consultants and the municipality of Shkodra official's drafted e platform for transparency and communication with people. This platform was divided into some sections to assure the equal involvement of all actors:

**Major public presentation** / The first open public hearing was organized the 15-th of March 2016 at the local university of "Luigi Gurakuqi". The meeting was open to everyone and announced in various way 15 days before the date of the meeting. The meeting presented the main analysis of the territory and it had a twofold aim. Firstly, to confirm the analysis with local stakeholders and secondly to start a process of discussion about the most imminent challenges that Shkodra faced. Following that four more meetings were organized the local university of "Luigi Gurakuqi" which were associated with different stages of the plan.

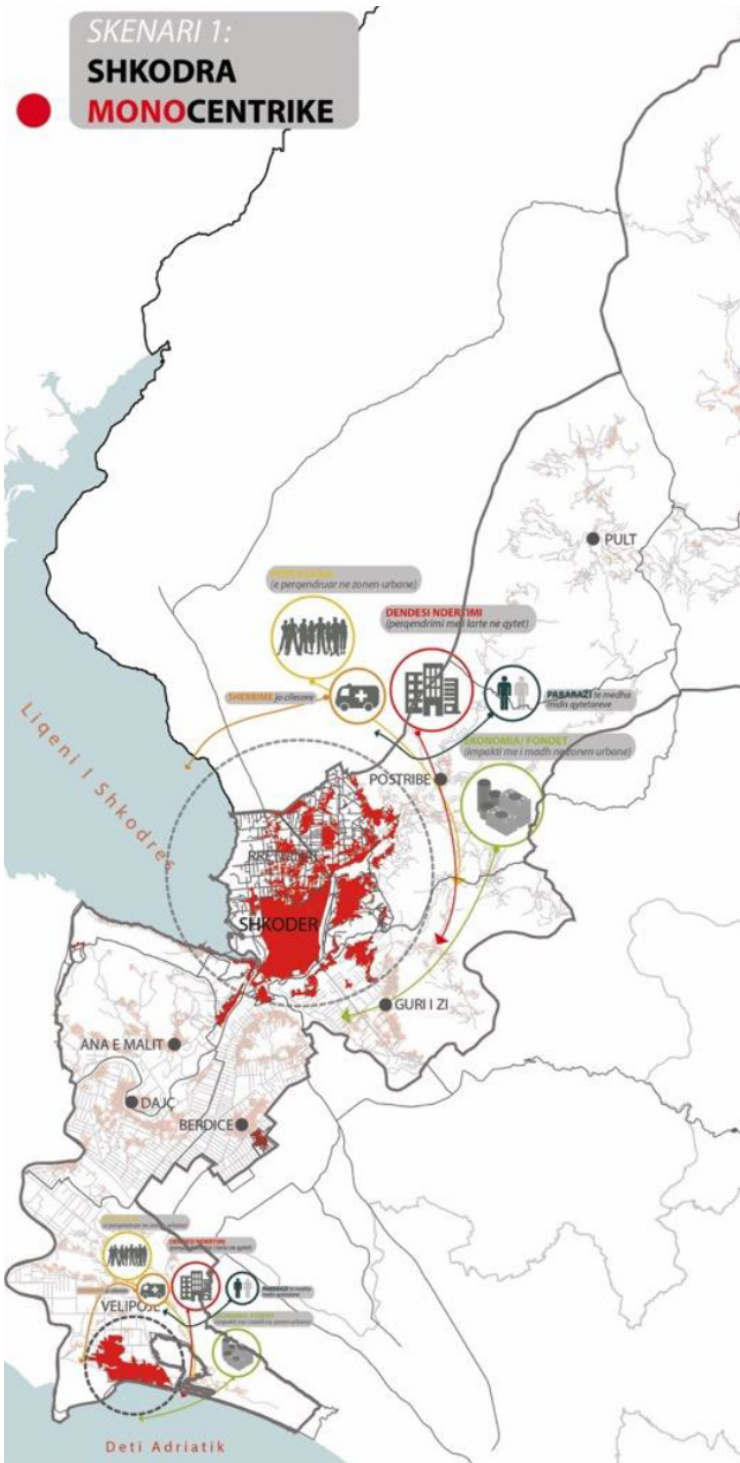
**Focus Grups** / As part of the focus groups, different meetings were conducted with the arts and culture actors, developers, youth, environment, university staff and students. At different times during the process of drafting the plan, many more meeting took place with the regional directory of Environment, Agriculture, Crises management, Water management and Infrastructure. Also many cross border meeting took place such as with municipality of Ulqin and meeting with the municipality of Podgorica.

In addition, due to the large territory focus groups were organized also with the representatives of the different administrative units (former communes). Pult. These former communes are mostly rural and have the bigger economic and infrastructure barriers, so the discussion has concentrated into their quality of life and services, in the tourism development and sustainable use of resources, the agricultural development and production issues as well as rural development.

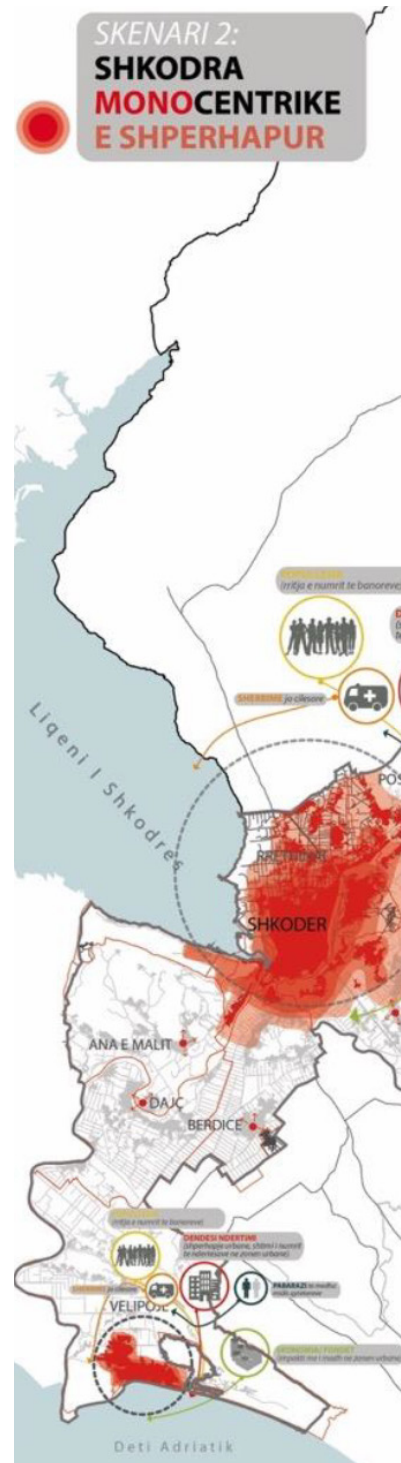
**Social Media and local news stations** / Special attention was paid into the media communication were members of the working team, discussed and explained the various aspects of the planning process. To be able to get more feedback from all citizen, an online open questionnaire



**SKENARI 1:  
SHKODRA  
MONOCENTRIKE**



**SKENARI 2:  
SHKODRA  
MONOCENTRIKE  
E SHPERHAPUR**



about the city was made and lunched into several platforms including Facebook. Some of this findings were also included in the proposal of the plan.

**Scenarios Shkodra GLTP**

Since the municipality of Shkodra is an important landmark for the northern part of Albania, the team created and stimulated scenarios of development to better understand the implications of each scenario. After careful consideration the group selected three main scenarios that would be presented to the public hearing and put for discussion. The purpose was

to choose one of this scenarios as future guideline for development.

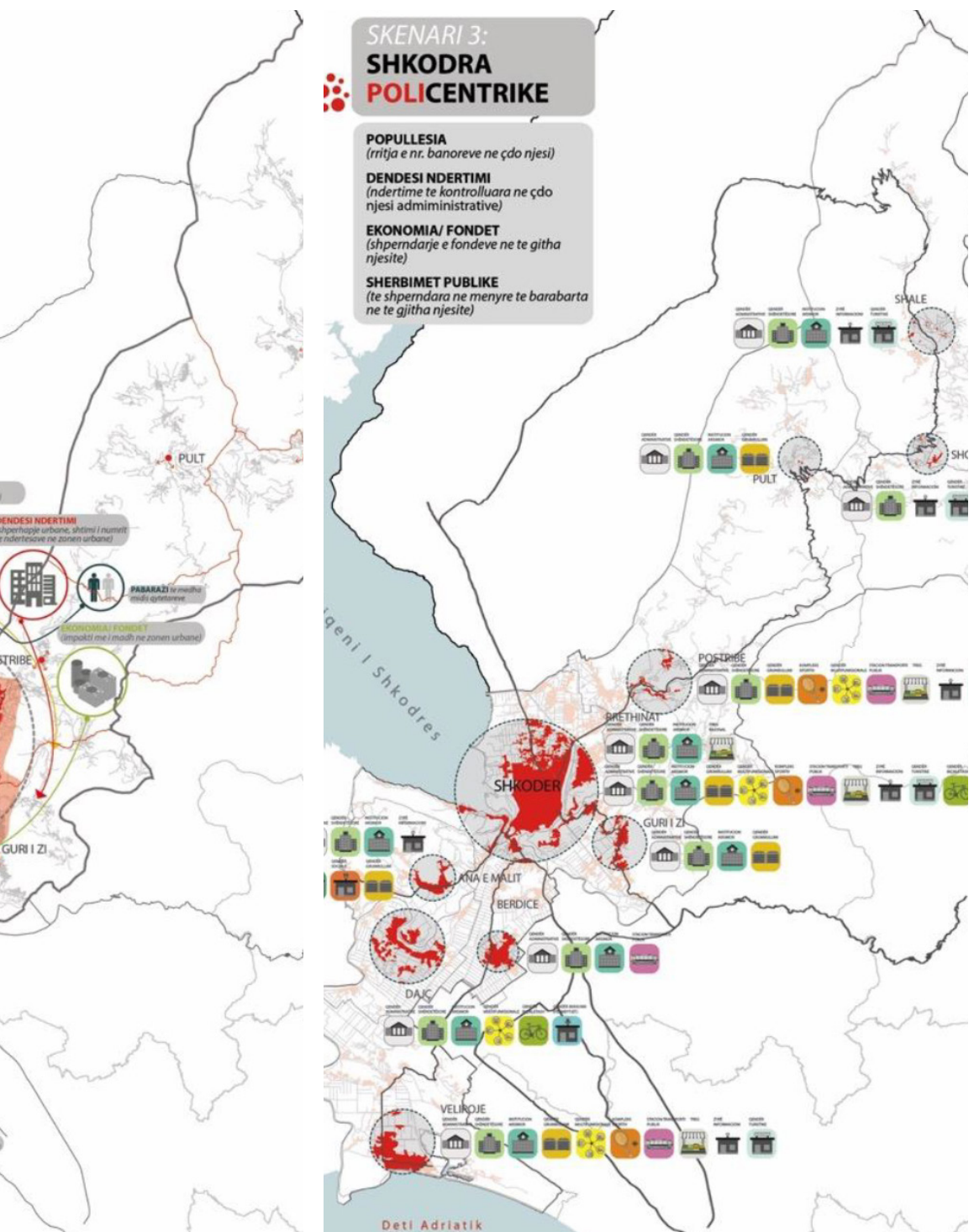
**The first scenario / Monocentric development**

This development is based in the idea of centrality, concentration of good services all in center. This development would encourage people to migrate to the main city giving and rapid expansion to the urbanization of shkodra.

**The second scenario / (sprawl) Monocentric development**

This development would be following the current development trends, with





very little control over the development leaving everything in the hands of the free market. This would further encourage the uncontrolled development threatening the agricultural and natural lands.

**The third scenario / Polycentric development**

This development would be based on the planning principle of subsidiarity, giving the opportunity of development, but within the established regulation. This would bring the services closer to the people discouraging the concentration of people in the center, but offering equal service to all.

**Vision and objectives**

The vision for the 2030 city of Shkodra is: "Shkodra municipality in 2030 will be an important center and a gate to the western Balkans in terms of mobility and infrastructure. This municipality will be the main economic pole of Shkoder-Lezhe-Podgorice region, as a sub region of tourism and nature.

Shkodra a municipality with an integrated territorial development, which provides equal service and access to its citizens and visitors. A primary center with a high quality of life, where water resources and historical heritage are the focus. A

city of international model of cycling, multimodality, economic development, cultural heritage and natural resources. The yearlong tourism will be an added value in the local economy, guarantying multi-sectorial development with ecotourism, agro-tourism, and cultural tourism of Sea and mountain. A municipality which supports and promotes new entrepreneurship attracting local talent. Shkodra a clean environment that lives in harmony with the protected areas and water resources.

To fullfull the vison of shkodra 2030, the team established five main objectives based in the three principles of the GNTP. The principle of Green and Resilient shkodra, Smart Shkodra and Liveable shkodra.

The objectives of this vision are drafted to be achievable and measurable. To this porpuse are established some also monitoring indicators. The main objectives are:

- OBJ 1 / Improving accesses and regional relationships
- OBJ 2 / Territorial cohesion and service equality
- OBJ 3 / Improving competitive advantage and economic development
- OBJ 4 / Improving quality of life and urban development
- OBJ 5 / Environmental protection and risk management

### Main Policies

To implement the strategic objectives and their specifications they were divided in specific policies and projects which for the purpose of this report will be presented only a few of them.

**Urban Development** / Shkodra main aspects on urban development focus on the creation of new centralities within the municipality in order to create a better and more polycentric structure which offers better services and options to the citizens. These policies are complemented with the regeneration and restructuring of main urban and rural centers. For all villages, specific projects have been identified which aim at the improvement of the centers of the villages, a typical and traditional gathering point for the community. Meanwhile at the urban level, regeration aims at improving quality of life and public spaces. Especially in the inner parts of the city, public spaces are absent or have been occupied by other activities. Therefore, the plan aims to improve and further enhance these aspects. Another important aspect of the city of Shkodra are also historical neighbourhoods which





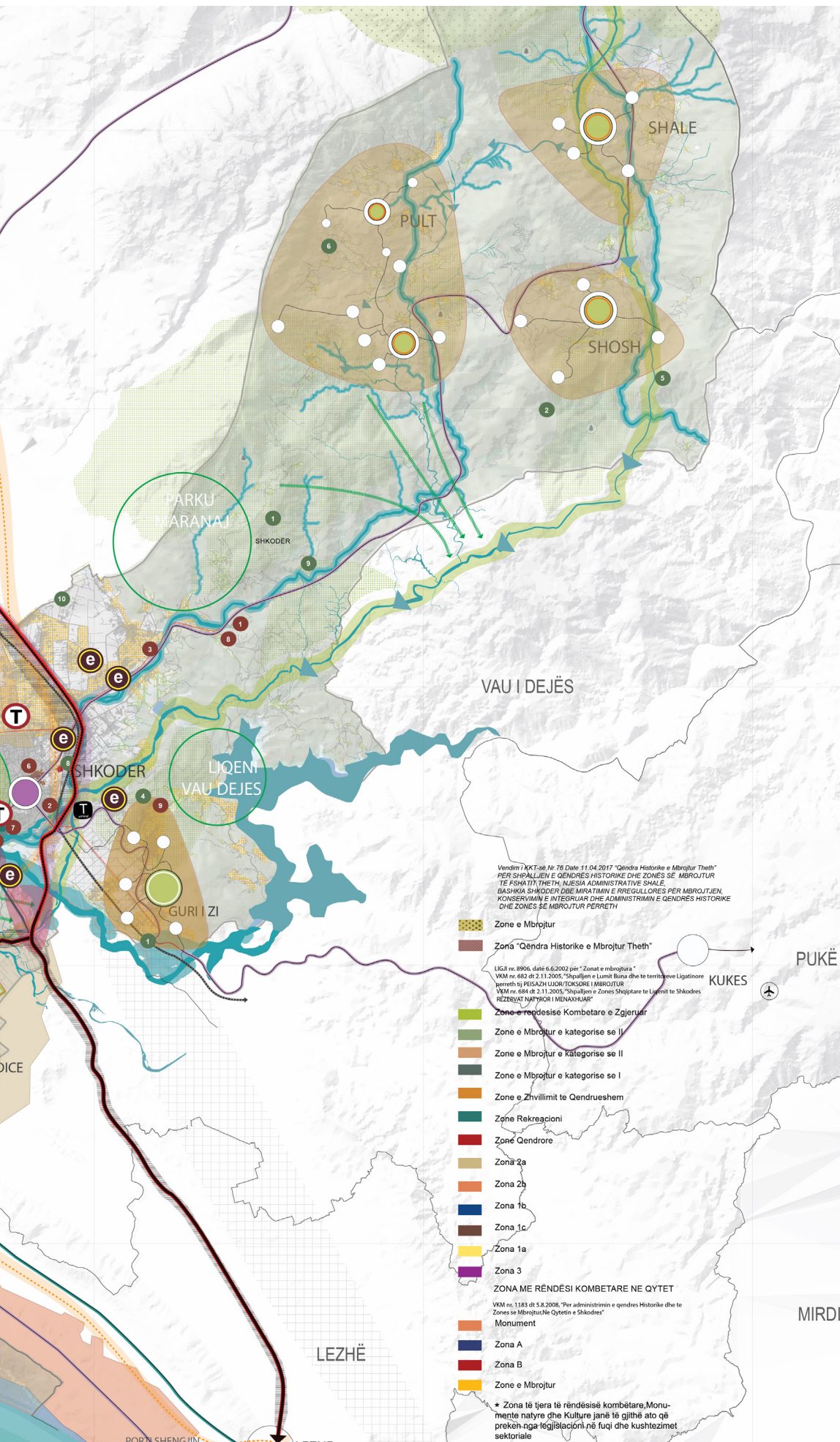


Fig 10 / Vision Map of Shkodra source / the authors

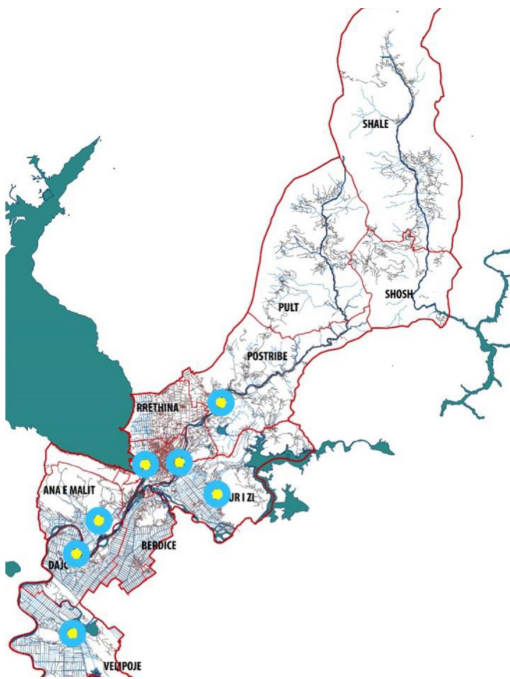


Fig11 / One Stop Shops (left), New economic areas / near new centralities (right)  
source / the authors

do not all have “protected area status”. The plan aims to promote these areas for their architectural and urbanistic features. One of the main elements in this respect is to create an itinerary which connects the historical parts of the city. Designed with a high quality of streetscape this itinerary can be a promotor and serve as a catalyst for their preservation and development. Lastly urban development policies focus also on the governance side. The idea is to create platforms where the public, citizens and other stakeholders can engage with each other in order to collaborate for the future development of the city. Besides community planning, a platform of e-governance which gives better access to the public in decision making has been proposed.

**Tourism** / Tourism has been identified as one of the main economic drivers for the municipality based on its high potentials to offer a high variety of activities within a confined territory. The integration of the different types of tourism into one coherent scheme is the key in this aspects. The creation of different thematic touristic itineraries is one of the small scale high impact interventions proposed. These itineraries connect the natural, historic/cultural and water potentials in the territory. The people of Shkodra are seen as a key element and success factor in the development of a sustainable tourism within the municipality. Ecotourism is seen as a potential in the northern part of the municipality. Lastly, it is also important that these activities are also connected together with a clear and well

defined branding strategy. Another soft measure in this respect is also to improve the signs in the city and the municipality in order to better orient citizens and tourists regarding the different elements and itineraries.

**Environment and Flooding** / The biggest environmental challenge in Shkodra is flooding. This is expected to even exacerbate in future years. Initially the plan proposes to draft a detailed plan of water management and to create centers that manage emergencies and provide safety in case of flooding. These centers also are meeting point for evacuations in case of emergency. The latter should be complemented with the requalifying of the river riparian areas through vegetation. Other important environmental policies include creating and promoting green connections (corridors) and local parks. Waste management is also another important factor while the improvement of sewage system is the largest challenge.

**Infrastructure and Mobility** / In terms of improving connectivity and accessibility from a regional to a local level a series of new roads are proposed such as the road connecting Shkoder to Theth, the road connecting Shiroke- Montenegro and the new “by-pass”. The existing by-pass has been envisioned closed to the lake of Shkodra and it is supposed to act also as a dam for the protection from flooding. However, it was argued that this bypass neither provides protection from flooding and neither does it solve any traffic issues. In fact, the way the project has





Fig12 / the Waterfrot of Shkodra  
source / the authors



Fig13 / Interventions for Addressing Flooding  
source / the authors

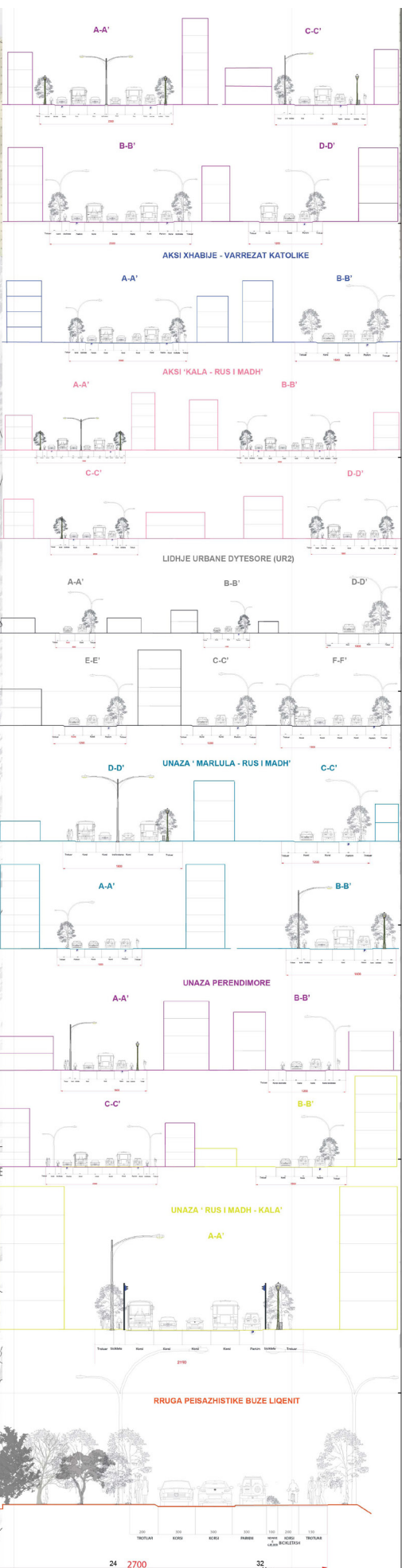
evolved through years it has become one of the biggest environmental and socio-economic problems in the city. The plan proposes a new by-pass on the eastern side of the city. This will avoid all traffic going into the city and does not create any environmental problems. Meanwhile

the current investment in the by-pass should be slowly transformed into a semi-natural space which partly serves as a dam and partly as a public area. Besides infrastructural improvements the plan also proposes a network of multi-modal stations which will help the city and the









municipality to improve mobility in the territory. Lastly, a strong focus has also been placed in improving cycling routes and upscaling them from a city level towards a municipality and region level routes.

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