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Human Centered Design to enhance inclusive tourism by improving elderly mobility in the post pandemic era.

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Abstract- *This contribution aims to analyse the current situation of Lezha region to propose possible intervention opportunities to enhance local and not local tourism. Starting with the current trend of ageing society and its relative tourism consequences and following with the mobility infrastructures analysis, then the most important key areas of intervention of Lezha region are presented: Cultural heritage, Naturalistic areas, seaside and mountain tourism. Finally, a new approach called Human Centered Design (HCD) approach is presented as possible tool to lead the transformation from a mobility car-centred system to a multi modal mobility system. Aim of this approach is to rethink the entire mobility to be more inclusive, by enlarging the possible cohort of users, and consequently to make tourism more accessible especially for frail people like elderly.*

Keywords: HCD – elderly mobility – elderly tourism – smart mobility

Introduction- Ageing world and Tourism-

All over the world, people today manage to live longer than in previous years. In fact, nowadays the vast majority of the people can reach their sixties and beyond and it is possible to affirm that any part of the world is experiencing growth in both the size and the proportion of older persons in the population. According to WHO, by 2030, 1 in 6 people in the world will be aged 60 years or over and by 2050, the same elderly population will double reaching a forecasted estimation of 2.1 billion (Ageing and health, 2022). This is mainly due to several factors: the aging of the baby boomer generation; the extended longevity, the decreased birth rate as well as a period of relative peace all over the world (Fatima and Moridpour, 2019).

The ageing world trend is influencing several fields and tourism is surely one of them. This is proved by the steady increasing percentage of elderly tourists,

who already make up a significant segment of the hospitality and tourism market (Bai et al., 2001, Lohmann and Danielsson, 2001, Schröder and Widmann, 2007).

Furthermore, the tourism industry has recognized this market potential for a number of years, and tourism policy makers as well as industry practitioners have been focusing on developing competitive business and marketing strategies to target elderly tourists (Bai et al., 2001, Sedgley et al., 2011).

Regarding the Albanian situation, the country has already started to experience the effect of ageing population. Especially in the last two decades, the average age has been risen for both the elderly increase together with the reduction of children and young adults (INSTAT, 2015). Nevertheless, while a great development on tourism is happening, especially in the seaside of the country, not so much has been done to accommodate needs and

necessity of elderly and in particular of elderly tourism.

This contribution illustrates the strategic economy resources of Lezha region and proposing several guidelines to enhance tourism considering an inclusive approach towards elderly mobility and tourism.

Lezha region morphology and strategic infrastructures

Lezhë County is one of the 12 counties of Albania situated in the northern region of Albania. It is characterized by 479 km², 65.633 inhabitants, and it is divided in three districts, Kurbin, Lezhe and Mirdite, 5 municipalities and 16 communes.

The morphology of the territory is characterized by several landscapes such as the Mirdita highlands in the northeast area, the seaside beaches such as Rana hedhun, Shëngjin and Kune beach along the coast as well as plan areas such as the Zadrime plain and the Kune-Vain-Tale lagoons.

Together with its morphological reality, Lezha presents several strategic areas regarding Cultural Heritage such as the national Scanderbeg Memorial, the national museum of Albania and the Lezha castle.

Furthermore, as a County, Lezha has a strategic position because it represents an important junction of national and international mobility: to the east Shëngjin is only 240 km far from Bari (IT); to the north it is only 97 km from Podgorica (MN); to the west it is 225 km from Pristina (XZ) and to 300 km from Skopje (MC); to the south it is only 64 km from Tirana (AL).

Mobility development

Considering all these aspects and the high potential that Lezha region has for the tourism all the economic development of the region has been calibrated to increase the amount of hospitality facilities together with the extension of the rural and urban roads.

According to the Regional development plan (UNDP Albania 2005) several initiatives were proposed in order to facilitate the economy mainly related to tourism. In particular, several new road connections to the seaside area were proposed such as two new highway (Zejmen-Skenkoll, Laç-Patok,) a new connection between the airport of Gjader and the highway, as well as new segment Selitë - Lake of Lura to enhance the mountains tourism.

At the moment from our field analysis and research is clearly visible that a lot of investment, mainly from the private sector are focussing on tourism, with a huge quantity of new facilities that are under construction.

Nevertheless, the infrastructures development is happening mainly in the private sector and as a consequence only roads are developed reducing or even cancelling the public transportation development. Considering the high potential of the region for tourism, the necessity of the administration to extend the tourism business outside of the summer and the future and more and more growing elderly tourism a new approach is needed.



Fig.1/ Proposed scenarios in the Shengjin-Lezha segment. Source /Author

HCD to foster a more inclusive and viable tourism.

To transform tourism from seasonal to annual and to enlarge the target user, one possible approach is the Human Centered Design which it has proven to be effective in designing service and product especially for frail categories such as elderly people (Petrocchi F. 2022).

Considering the post-pandemic perspective, which has led to the redefinition of urban and suburban mobility, this contribution suggests considering the current and more and more growing trend of ageing society to foster an alternative mobility infrastructure different from the auto-centric model currently used.

In fact, although the mobility car system offers a great flexibility and comfort for current tourists on the other hand the same system also creates many problems including: long queues of traffic to reach the seaside resorts and tourist resorts, the large consumption of land for parking and car services, issues connected with pollution and terrain contamination. Furthermore, with the increase of the ageing sector, many people will not be longer able to reach those places if not properly designed to address elderly issues.

For this reason, it is needed an inclusive and multi-modal mobility, able to connect Lezha region with national and international routes, not only by car but also with public transport such as bus, ships, or trains. By increasing the possibility of being chosen to move from and to Leza is a strategic target, in the long run, to foster a more inclusive and

profitable mobility.

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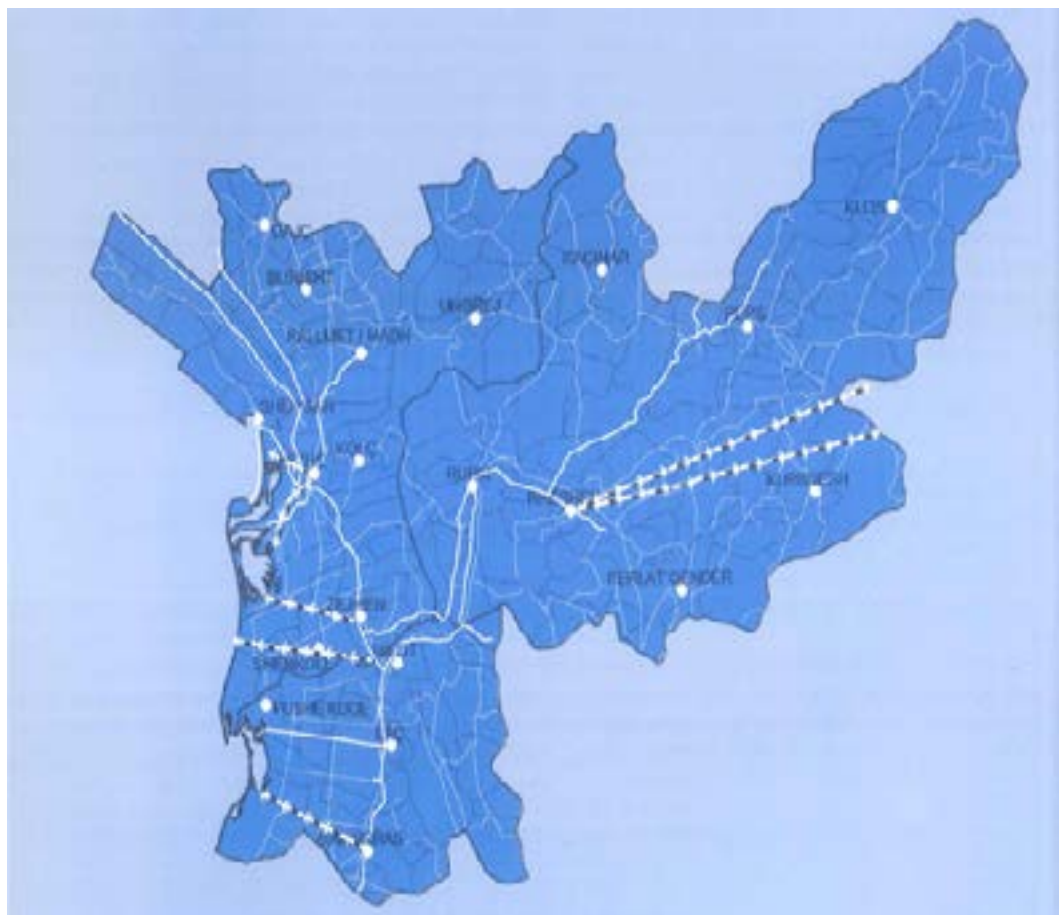


Fig.2 / Mobility Infrastructures. Source/ Regional development plan (UNDP Albania 2005).



Fig.2 / Lezha City View . Source/ Author