

# Urban Planning Strategy of Albanian Municipalities

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**Abstract:** *Strategic planning is a management tool that determines the direction in which an organization is moving, and how it will get there. [1] Albanian Government went through a process of Territorial reforms, reconstructing the whole administration, reinforcing municipalities and raising their capacity, especially in terms of urban planning and managing resources. At this stage, it was clear that the traditional Urban Planning, as a way to control and regulate the development of towns and cities, had failed to address the challenges of rapid urbanization, informality and environment vulnerability spread especially on western lowlands of Albania. This text will try to explain the method, the analyze and the challenges to perceive a new Planning Strategy for Kurbin Municipality inside a larger territory, by using patterns of communication as tools to interpret the existing situation and setting a vision for the future.*

**Keywords:** urban planning, Planning Strategy, Landscapes, communication

## 1. Introduction

In July 2015, Albanian Government, after the implementation of Territorial Reform, took the initiative to support 26 new municipalities to prepare General Territorial Plans, under a common new political, legislative and administrative frame, with Kurbin as one of those municipalities. This process, though new in terms of planning practice for Albania, is normally regulated, with procedure made of three basic stages, and 5 important documents, besides maps as visual representation of objectives and decisions of the process.

- 1) ANALISE of Existing Situation; Evaluation of actual situation, documents, territorial scanning, database, etc.
- 2) Territorial STRATEGY; Definition of basic systems, action plan, pilot projects, etc.
- 3) PROJECT made of two documents: (i) GTP Report – land use, infrastructure, etc. (ii) GTP Regulation – norms and standards, boundaries of systems, etc.
- 4) STRATEGIC ENVIRONMENT EVALUATION – a document that starts at the beginning, in parallel with other documents, taking into consideration all findings and decisions on sustainable criteria.

Compiling the document of Territorial Development Strategy, is the most important part of GTP, aiming a sustainable and planned development of the territory, with strong emphasis on long term and multidimensional vision of urban issues and preservation of natural resources[2]. A strategic plan is founded on a vision and continues long after the initial groundwork is set. It's a common sense tool that sets a clear path for the future, while also allowing for your vision to mature and change as time passes. Successful Strategic planning seeks the answers to three fundamental questions [3]:

- Where are we now?
- Where do we want to go?
- How do we get there?

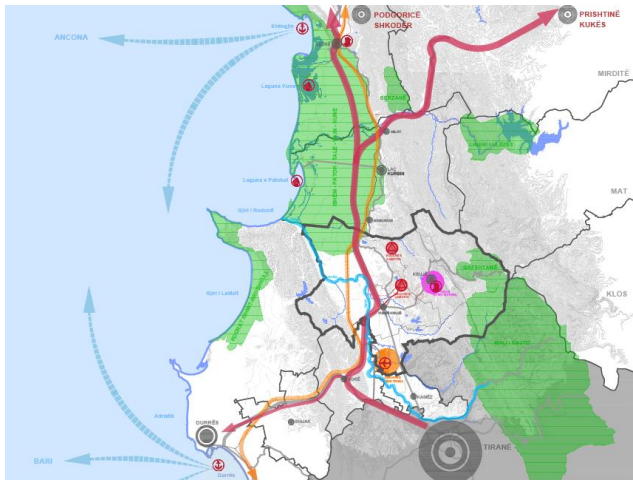
## 2. Planning Strategy for Territorial Development

Planning Strategy recognizes the needs of local systems and the crisis of traditional method of development. In terms of communication, it is paramount to consider new ways of connection, away from traditional patterns, following metabolic flows of territory, transforming the strategy into a working model, like a matrix of links between nodes of territorial value [4]. Strategic planning, while redesigning infrastructure networks may turn empty urban areas in new development opportunities; the spatial configuration of an infrastructure node can determine essential conditions; and bring new socioeconomic dynamics into play.

### 2.1 Kurbin Municipality

Even though a new Municipality in the modern contest of Territorial Reform, Kurbin is an old region, with a proud population set on traditions and history, with a land of dramatic contrasts between rock and water, sea and snowy mountains. It stands in the middle of a conceptual lot, with Lezha in the north and Kruja south. Unfortunately human activity has created stress on the environment, with fields being flooded every winter and the presence of a most sensitive sites for Albania, in terms of dangerous substances stocks.

The *Urban System* is characterized by a permanent abandonment of the hinterland, the hilly part of Kurbin, which used to be historic and cultural heart of the land, favoring larger, urbanized centers, closer to flat ground and lines of communication. This has caused informal settlements sprawled from the hills to the seaside, to the expense of agricultural land, a lack of basic infrastructure and a burden on draining system of underwater regions.



**Figure 1:** Position and Connectivity –Planning Strategy of Kurbin Municipality

## 2.2 Strategic Approach

Some types of problems cannot be resolved locally. Local development management, without defining strategic horizons, can cause municipalities to miss out on very important development opportunities. The Strategy should conceive of new ways of organizing space in relation to strategic territorial repositioning [5]. Its reading and interpretation in its entirety implies seeking the right planning scale that includes a territorial space with homogeneous characteristics, which often exceeds local administrative boundaries. Focusing on the "Wider Areas", the analysis extends to a wider territory than the territorial boundaries of the municipality, including local border units [6]. In the case of this study, the territory of the municipalities of Lezha, Kurbin and Krujë represents a functional and spatial homogeneity, although there are no specific local situations.

The Strategic Vision is considered as a conceptual approach of a "territorial perspective", based on the "social and economic ambitions" of the local community. It is about building a new urban policy in greater harmony with economic logic. The process should foresee the construction of a territorial perspective as a shift from the socio-economic ambitions to projects and interventions [7].

## 2.3 Understanding the Territory

The overall strategic proposal of this study relies on the notion of homogeneity in diversity. It is based on two main hypotheses:

- (i) The possibility to be considered as a homogeneous value of the territory stretching from Tirana to Lezha, although with different functional solutions proposed in perspective;
- (ii) A new development model, by interpreting five different systems and understanding the possibility of interaction between different environmental bands, as the real source of integration and synergy.

*Landscape* is a term used here in its strategic design sense as a unit of territory characterized by homogeneous conditions in terms of: (i) geographic, morphological and spatial

characteristics; (ii) human settlements and main land uses; (iii) pragmatic perspective and administration of transformations[8].The "Larger Territory" and Kurbin particularly can be translated in 5 *landscapes*, from west to east:

- (i) **Coastline**- Land with no clear boundaries from the sea, great potential for tourism and large parts protected as national parks.
- (ii) **Agriculture** - Fertile area under great pressure of informal urbanization.
- (iii) **Infrastructure corridor** - Highway and Railway connecting North with South
- (iv) **Urban "Crown"** -Nodes of settlements along arteries of communication
- (v) **Mountain region** - East part, historic heart of the region

The Spatial Vision of the Wide Area is based on functional integration between five landscaping systems [9] to obtain these advantages:

- Possible ecological integration between the coastal and mountainous territories, through the environmental corridors comprised of river axes;
- Complementary integration between the urban functions of the historic system and functions encountered in the vicinity of the new infrastructure system.
- Interaction can be created between natural protected areas (on the seashore and in the mountainous area) and their possible use for economic purposes, through integrated forms of natural tourism.
- The different role that needs to be given to different parts of the system, without overlapping and duplication, but with complementary specialization

Two concepts get introduced in this stage of the thinking, as means of strategic approach to the territory:

- (i) **"Orange Corridor"**, seen as a strategic link of five systems permits a fast *road connection* from the interior to the coast;
- (ii) **"Green corridor"**, by contrast, is seen as a soft natural link of five systems, which permits an *ecological connection* between coast and mountainous area.

**Table 2:** Matrix of land use

	Orange corridor	Green corridor
Coastline	Sea and sun	Eco tourism
Agriculture landscape	Agricultural services	Agro tourism
Infrastructure corridor	Joints	Overpass/Underpass
Urban "crown"	Services-Economy	Touristic services
Mountains	Access to the hinterland	Hiking

The connection and product from intercrossing Landscapes with Corridors is explained in *Table 2*. This Matrix becomes geographic guide to the next phase, by giving a spatial equation to the planning phase and a recognizable pattern connected and derived from the very terrain morphology applicable on a large scale [10] that fits perfectly to Kurbin Municipality.



**Figure 2:** Landscapes and corridors –Planning Strategy of Kurbin Municipality

### 3. Conclusions

Strategic Planning will accomplish results, as long as they are involving urban initiatives of larger scale, considering alternative scenarios of development, evaluating effects and possibilities, and highlighting the most important territorial perspectives.

In terms of communication, it is paramount to consider new ways of connection, away from traditional patterns, following metabolic flows of territory, geographic morphology and landscape. Therefore, communication in itself becomes a clear method and strong concept generator.

Understanding territorial morphology links the success of Planning with highlighting nodes of activity and settling qualitative interconnections between them.

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