Albania 2030 Manifesto, an Example for Adapting Advanced National Spatial Planning Instruments for Developing Countries

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Abstract For many years, one of the biggest challenges of Albania has been the consideration of urban planning as a management tool for controlling the development, in order to achieve territorial, social and economic cohesions. The transition from a centrally planned economy, where everything was controlled by the government, towards decentralization and market economy caused many consequences, among which uncontrolled and fragmented urban development, loss of agricultural land due to urbanization, concentration of population and dense urbanization in the major cities, abandonment of western lowland and eastern parts of the country etc. Thus, Albania 2030 Manifesto tried to build against the vacuum that is created by the lack of tradition on national spatial development policies. It aimed to offer a method of spatial planning and guidance for the government in drafting the national spatial plan. The method followed for achieving such, was by using case studies, as well as an action research method involving several focus groups and discussion platforms, in order to create a model for spatial planning, which goes beyond the traditional linear model of producing a controlled future, and which allows for flexibility, complexity and change to occur within the system. The research work aimed at initiating a change also in the “mind-frame” of creating a process, which is open and allows for the incorporation of change due to greater dynamic global forces, as well as self-organizing autonomous local actions to be inspired. Albania 2030 Manifesto aimed at creating a method, which allows for multi-actors, levels and factors to be incorporated in the process, as well as to offer guidance on the cartographic language, that can be used to represent the spatial vision.

Keywords Spatial Planning, Spatial Visioning, National Planning Policies, Sustainable Development, Regionalization, Development Corridors, Polycentrism, Economic Growth

Note: The paper below is a summary of the main analysis and findings of the research work, which dates on 2014. Later on 2015, the Government of Albania took the initiative to develop the first National Spatial Plan, which applied partly the methodology developed by Albania 2030 Manifesto. The National Spatial Plan was also named “Shqipëria 2030”, and it has become now an official planning document for Albania. The full publication with further findings and data on the “Albania 2030 Manifesto” research, can be found online on: https://issuu.com/erandajanku/docs/albania_2030_manifesto_erandajanku

1. Introduction- Spatial Planning Evolution in Albania

Planning is a discipline which has evolved from the necessity of mankind to control future development. Due to their historic, geographical, demographic and cultural paths of development countries in time have formed different planning doctrines. However, the growing complexity of the world has brought drastic changes to the way we live and societies organize themselves. According to Roo and Boelens we live in a world of discontinuous change, constantly in flow and “out of equilibrium” which open new opportunities for autonomous and self-organizing mechanisms. Development nowadays is more complex, comprising a greater array of levels, actors, factors crossing beyond traditional borders and institutional jurisdictions (Roo & Boelens, 2016). These changes are becoming a challenge also for “planning” and “planners” who need to find new ways outside of the “controlled future paradigm” which has been the foundations of the discipline (Allen, 2016). The challenge is evident in all planning systems and doctrines, from the more consolidated such as the Dutch planning doctrine to the less consolidated systems in developing countries. Even the most sophisticated systems

now are starting to be seen as a constraint to fostering innovation in light of current technological, spatial, and climate changes.

Meanwhile, post-socialist countries in South-East Europe, in their transition from centralized modes of governance towards democratic ones, and as part of their “Europeanization” objectives, are going through important reforms also in their planning system (Cotella & Berisha, 2016). The term Europeanization in this case is seen as an emulation of spatial planning systems from the more developed north-west European states in the domestic institutional and ideological scape. In a similar position is also Albania. After the fall of the dictatorial regime in the early 1990s the country inherited a highly centralized, top-down and high degree of control paradigm in urban planning (Ruijsink, Duka, & Toto, 2012). A system with the fall of the dictatorial structures became disentangled in the very first instant of the Albanian democracy, unable to cope with the high dynamics of transition and population demands (Toto, 2012). The collapse of the “urban planning” system is evident only by mentioning the number of informal buildings in the country which goes over 400, 000 (Ministria e Zhvillimit Urban, 2014).

Thus, very soon the country went from one extreme (excessive control, even of everyday life aspects of people) to the next extreme (total freedom of movement, development and economy). The “shock therapy”, commonly applied in most “eastern bloc” countries (Aliaj, Shutina, & Dharmo, Between Energy and the Vacuum: Co-PLAN and Urban Planning in Albania, 2010), combined with the weak and unexperienced governmental structures in the early democratic years resulted in a complex and sophisticated informal system which did not only express itself in the urban sector but also in economic development, social development and many other aspects of life (Aliaj, 2008). The turbulent transition of spatial planning in Albania has been marked by two main parallel initiatives such as the decentralization process and the “spatial planning legislation” changes.

The decentralization process started in 1992 when the first local elections were held for municipalities. At the time, 373 municipalities and communes were formed, where municipalities were usually in urban settlements and communes represented the rural settlements. After political decentralization, the second phase of the process comprised fiscal decentralization (Shutina, Aliaj, & Toto, 2012). In 2000, another change was made in the administrative governance setting by introducing 12 districts (Qarks) which were second tier level of local governance (Aliaj, 2008). The aim was to serve as coordination between the municipalities and communes with the central government. However, the high territorial fragmentation, with 75% of municipalities having less than 5000 inhabitants, combined with the low level of capacities, produced the opposite result (Ministria e Ceshkjeve Vendore, 2014). Therefore, in 2013 a new initiative was started with the aim of consolidating local level

government, thus from 373 local authorities they were merged in 61 larger municipalities. However, this critical juncture was not utilized in full, living the role of the “district” even more unclear and neither forming any regional governance structures.

Meanwhile, in terms of “urban planning”, the process has been marked by three main legal changes. The first law on “Urban Planning” was approved in 1992, which was a mere adaptation of the old communist legal instruments to the new situation. However, its implementation was very weak, also due to the territorial and social dynamics at the time (Aliaj, Shutina, & Dharmo, 2010). Although, most of the main cities revised their old plans according to the new law, their implementation was very difficult. After a few years of complete ambiguity and absence of planning, and with the drastic increase of informal development, in 1998 the legislation was revised bringing new tools to accommodate for the new conditions. Nevertheless, even in this case planning remained strongly an urban issue with a strong control paradigm. A positive move was also the introduction of “strategic planning” however, the failure to address informal development and the change in property rights from state owned towards private property was the main pitfall of the system (Toto, 2012).

In 2009, it was decided to switch from a physical and rigid “urban planning process towards an integrated, comprehensive and strategic approach emulating the spatial planning approaches in north-west Europe. The aim was not to amend existing legislation but to create a whole new system. In 2009, law 109/111 “On Territorial Planning” was approved and would enter into implementation only in 2009. This was done with the idea of using the 2-year period in preparing the different levels of government to adapt to the new system (Toto, 2012). However, for several reasons the new system never managed to become fully functional. A combination of loss of political priority with the continues amendments of the law and its bylaws as well as the low capacities at the local and central government led to a malfunctioning of the planning system (Toto, 2012). The change of governments in 2013 put planning back into the political agenda. The law was reviewed and its bylaws were re-drafted and using the momentum of the revision of the plan the government also decided to open the process for drafting the General Territorial National Plan (Ministria e Zhvillimit Urban, 2014).

The latter marks a historic moment in terms of spatial planning in Albania, as it is the first document (of its kind) to be drafted. Although, the legislation advocates for a spatial planning approach it is the way that the legislation will be interpreted and accepted in wider societal settings that will allow changing the maid-frame and the doctrine of planning. However, considering the little experience in general in terms of spatial planning, and specifically of the “newly” created Ministry of Urban Development, there is a great risk of misinterpreting the process and being stuck with a document that has no real use. This can also be seen in the

declarations and public appearances of the Prime minister and the Minister of Urban Development with regard to the national spatial plan where the bottom line has been that this plan will put control on the territory and the future. Thus, there is a certain ambiguity surrounding the national spatial plan with regard to the form, process and approach it should take. Meanwhile, as mentioned in the beginning, the dynamic changes occurring worldwide are challenging spatial planning even in the most sophisticated systems, let alone a fragile and embryonic spatial planning system such as the Albanian one. However, this is also an opportunity, to leapfrog in spatial planning approach by producing an innovative and context base process which responds to local demands but also allows for the incorporation of the global dynamism and challenges.

Thus the aim of the ALBANIA 2030 Manifesto was to offer a method of spatial planning and guidance for the government in drafting the national spatial plan. By using case studies, as well as an action research method involving several focus groups and discussion platforms to create a model for a spatial planning which goes beyond the traditional linear model of producing a controlled future and allows for flexibility, complexity and change to occur within the system. Thus to initiate a change also in the “mind-frame” of creating a process which is open and allows for the incorporation of change due to greater dynamic global forces as well as self-organizing autonomous local actions to be inspired. To create a method which allows for multi-actors, levels and factors to be incorporated in the process as well as to offer a guidance on the cartographic language that can be used to represent the spatial vision.

2. Planning Cultures and Approaches on National Spatial Plans

As mentioned above, the first methodological aspect for developing a national spatial plan is related to the approach that planning should take. In order to do so, two case studies have been selected incorporating the Netherlands and Italy. The reason for choosing these two countries comes from the fact that the Netherlands is well known for its sophisticated system and the strong national spatial planning whereas Italy represents a planning culture which is based on “urbanism”, with a weak planning at the national level, however undergoing some interesting processes in the last decades also due to “Europeanization”. Therefore, building on two contrasting examples and the relative theoretical discussions on planning approach allows to create a framework for deducting lessons and contextualizing these discussions in the Albanian setting. The case studies have been developed through literature review as well as different study visits and interviews with the relevant actors in the respective countries.

However, before describing the two case studies, it is important to underline two main concepts such as planning

culture and planning doctrine. According to Faludi and Van der Valk planning doctrine can be defined as a set of interrelated and durable notions about the spatial arrangements within an area and the appropriate development strategy and guidelines about the ways both are to be handled (Faludi & Van der Valk, 1994). Thus planning doctrine can be said to have two interrelated dimensions, such as the principle of spatial organisation and planning principles. Meanwhile, according to Vettoretto spatial planning culture can be defined as (...) the way in which in some historical moments a (situated national, regional or urban) society has institutionalized planning practices and discourses. In other words, values, ways of defining problems, rules, instruments, evaluation criteria, professional/expert roles and knowledge, and the relations between institutions and actors, and among State, planners and civil society (Vettoretto, 2009, p. 189). Both concepts hint at the idea that spatial planning “doctrine” and “culture” are socially constructed, hence it is important, when considering case studies and their transferability in other settings to carefully take into consideration local cultural and societal aspects.

The Netherlands have a long history of national spatial planning, with the first document being drafted in the 1950s. The nature and approach is strategic, offering a vision of the desired spatial arrangements in the future and general guidelines in achieving them, thus not a blueprint plan (Needham, 2007, p. 121). In addition, the Dutch spatial planning culture has its foundation on strong processes of consensus building, finding compromises and building cooperation between different stakeholders, experts, governmental sectors as well as different levels of governance (Evers, Tennekes, & Joost, 2016). The Dutch system has been quite astute in changing the national spatial plan according to different needs and social dynamics, internal and external (EU) pressures, thus showing for a continuous but open planning doctrine. Nevertheless, there is still criticism with regard to the spatial planning approach (Allen, 2016).

Meanwhile, Italy represents the opposite case, a country with a strong culture of “urbanism” (Commission of the European Communities, 1997), focused primarily at the local level and with no spatial planning at the national level (Vettoretto, 2009). The planning culture had no strategic focus. However, over the last two decades, spurred also by “Europeanization”, a spatial turn has been noted in Italy, primarily at the regional level (Cotella & Rivolin, 2012). Although, there is still no National plan, the regional level has made important steps forwards with regard to strategic spatial planning. The regional plans play an important role in coordinating national and local levels as well as the sectorial policies. Thus, opening a process of slow change towards the “European Spatial planning” approach (Cotella & Rivolin, 2012).

As it can be seen both countries planning doctrines have been influenced by larger discourses occurring at the

supra-national level. The concept of “fuzzy planning” coined by Allmendinger and Hauton, to describe spatial planning changes in the UK, has taken a major acceptance also in other countries and EU spatial development policy discourse (Haughton, Allmendinger, Counsell, & Vigar, 2009). The notion of “fuzzy” is interpreted and argued as: ‘Hard boundaries’ of plans and strategies do not sit well with more networked forms of space and governance. It is sometimes necessary to create ambiguity through fuzzy boundaries to enable flexible policy responses or to mask politically sensitive proposals (Allmendinger & Haughton, 2010). The argument is that new innovative spatial planning is requiring actors to acknowledge that they must work within multiple spaces, and increasingly in a flexible and task-specific manner. According to Luukkonen, this is based on “post-territorial” conceptualizations, therefore seeing territories as networks and depoliticized (Luukkonen, 2015), thus planning needs to adapt to change, move away from linear processes of understanding space, incorporate for complexity and multi-actors. Therefore, the conclusion from these case studies and the general discourse on spatial planning approach is the new “soft spaces-fuzzy boundaries” approach that needs to be incorporated in the traditional “controlled future” approach, therefore, the two processes are not exclusive of each other (Purkharthofer, 2016).

3. Cartographic Representation in Spatial Planning

Spatial visions are an important tool and an integral part of the spatial planning process (Ache, 2011). Their conceptualization through images is very important in communicating the main message of the planning process. It is common that most spatial planning strategies take various forms described as spatial visions, development perspectives, guiding principles and so on, depending on the planning culture and approach in a given context or country (Duhr, 2007). In addition, spatial images are an integral part of strategic and spatial planning, considering icons, maps, alternative readings and diagrams, which are essential on the planning, and communicative process. These images are important to support verbal statements of policies, statistical facts, etc., as well as directly express policies, thus through their communicative power and clarity they may “contribute more to achieving certain political goals” (Duhr, 2007). However, when considering the spatial planning approach, it is important that images do also reflect the latter and the conceptualization of planning.

Therefore, while working in a context of “fuzzy planning and soft spaces” spatial images become a very important tool in conveying the message as well as generating a general consensus around it. Hence, the level of abstraction, detail and the use of symbols and colors become very important. In devising a model for expressing spatial images in the Albanian context while using a spatial planning approach,

two main models were taken in consideration. The first refers to the 1960s model of “The Image of the city” by Kevin Lynch, who distinguishes five main components of expressing spatial images in an abstract and clear way. Lynch’s model is based on paths, districts, nodes, landmarks and edges (Lynch, 1960). Although, a model primarily applied at the urban level, its simplicity is a strong element in adapting it also for larger scale spatial visions. Meanwhile, a more elaborated model was developed in the 1980s by Roger Brunet. The “choremes” introduce rigor and consistency in the process of unveiling hidden spatial structures and their basic components. According to Duhr, without seeking a highly specialized language that is accessible only to the professionals or insiders, the chorématique tries to establish some basic reading rules of spatial structures (Duhr, 2007). Both these models have been used as a basis for producing the spatial vision in the Albania 2030 Manifesto.

4. Main Spatial Challenges in Albania

In order to establish a spatial vision for the development of Albania, using new innovative processes it is important beforehand to understand some of the main challenges that the country is facing in terms of spatial planning and spatial development. These challenges, after making spatial analysis with the use of GIS and literature review, were consulted and discussed in various milieus such as institutional, professional, academic as well as through a workshop with a large group of students in order to set a priority of challenges as well as afterwards to define possible proposals.

4.1. The Technical Institutional Challenge

As previously mentioned the spatial planning system in Albania is relatively new and yet to be institutionalized. This is an important “critical juncture” as the actions taken now will affect the way that the planning “doctrine” and “culture” will be developed in the future (Cotella & Berisha, 2016). Thus the way the legislation is interpreted and afterwards implemented through the drafting of spatial plans is a key element. However, it is no new concept that to make spatial plans one needs integrated and reliable data as well as institutional capacities to make use of them and turn them into strategic plans. The later, as previously shown are relatively low both at the central as well as the local level. In addition, the absence of regional governance is still a challenge which needs to be resolved also in light of possible EU integration processes (Ministria e Zhvillimit Urban, 2014). The parallel reforms in spatial planning and territorial administration need also to be associated with training in better spatial planning and territorial management. Meanwhile, the availability of data is a key problem (Ministria e Zhvillimit Urban, 2014). After the fall of communism little attention has been paid to the way data are gathered, the update of information and their periodic review.

Even in cases where data are available, they are mostly collected for statistical purposes and not for planning purposes. Absence of data is evident in certain key sectors such as agricultural and rural development, environmental issues and climate change, transport flows, tourism and social development issues. In addition, the availability of these data in spatial terms, hence their integration in GIS platforms is relatively low, therefore becoming a big challenge if one is to take the traditional approach in spatial planning.

4.2. The Urban Development Challenge

Albania's urban development after the 1990s has been associated with a strong link to informality and absence of planning. Thus the self-organizing role of individuals has been a key in structuring development in the main cities, especially in their peripheries. The freedom of movement, inspired many people to move from remote peripheral and isolated areas towards the main cities in the western plain. Thus, the growth of cities such as Tirana, the capital, has been dynamic and very fast creating a typical mono-centric country, where almost half of the population is settled in the central region. The consequences are devastating both for the receiving as well as the sending regions (INSTAT, 2012). The brain drain has also created a high differentiation in capacities between the "center" and the "periphery". In addition, the movement has also been associated with a strong impact in "real estate markets". Especially in peripheral regions numbers of vacant houses are very high. Other cities show signs of shrinkage and find it difficult to manage the process.

4.3. The Economic/Regional Development Challenge

In terms of economic development and population, according to the last census Albania has a population of around 2.8M people (INSTAT, 2016). Compared to the previous two censuses, 1991 and 2001 it can be said that there is a reduction in population, primarily due to immigration outside of the country (INSTAT, 2012). The latter shows also the economic situation of the country and the high degree of regional disparities. Although, reforms have been put in place and for a certain time the country was one of the fastest growing economies in Europe, regional disparities are high (Commission of the European Communities, 2016). Based on the WEF report on global competitiveness Albania is categorized as an efficiency driven economy, with little innovation and technological capacity (World Economic Forum, 2016). Unemployment rates are relatively high and especially problematic when it comes to youth employment. The latter drives youth in search of employment go outside of the country. In addition, it can be said that the informality of the economy is another problem as a relative large portion of the economy is still informal (World Economic Forum, 2016). Meanwhile, the

hyper concentration of population and the economy in the center, has led to under-population in the hinterland of the country (INSTAT, 2016). This poses a great challenge not only in terms of economic development, but also for institutional capacities. The relatively low availability of talented workers is a challenge also for local institutions in guiding and governing the territory (Commission of the European Communities, 2016). In addition, the two main sectors in rural development are facing big challenges of restructuring. The average farm size is 1.2ha which does not allow for an efficient use of land (Ministria e Bujqesis, Zhvillimit Rural dhe Administrimit te Ujërave, 2014). Whilst rural tourism, has a great potential, its combination with environmental resources and ecosystem services still is in a very embryonic phase.

4.4. The Accessibility Challenge

In terms of transport and accessibility, Albania is relatively well connected. The Tirana airport offers good connections to most European countries, while the port of Durrës is the main gate to Italy for goods. However, other airports (not opened yet) and the three other ports are not working to their full potential. The development of roads has been the main priority of the Albanian government of the past two decades with the highlight being the Durrës – Prishtinë – Nish highway. Meanwhile, the situation with railways is the opposite. Very little investment and poor management has created a devastating situation for the railway system (Ministria e Transportit dhe Infrastruktures, 2016). In addition, the country is not connected by railways with any other countries, although connection to Montenegro and FYROM lack respectively 7km and 15km to be achieved (Ministria e Transportit dhe Infrastruktures, 2016).

4.5. The Environmental Challenge

In terms of environment it can be said that although reforms have been continuous the situation in the ground remains problematic. Environment it is one of the sectors where 'acquis' has been transposed the most, however, the low level of investment has led to great challenges especially in water and air pollution. The informal and rapid urban development has had devastating impacts on waters (especially rivers) (Ministria e Mjedisit, 2015). Meanwhile, deforestation and coastal erosion are also problematic. In addition, Albania has a network of national parks, which are under risk. The services offered in these parks are inexistent, thus the income generated is very small, leading afterwards to problems of management and challenges in increasing ecosystem services. In addition, Albania, as part of the process of joining the EU needs also to adapt to the Natura 2000 designations and the Birds and Habitats directive (Ministria e Mjedisit, 2015). Their low accessibility and supporting infrastructure is also weak. Meanwhile, climate change is a great threat especially for the western plain,

where rising sea levels and the intake of land by sea is an eminent threat (UNDP; Ministry of Environment, 2016).

5. Main Proposals of Albania 2030

In drafting a vision for Albania 2030 certain criteria were used such as being realistic, inspiring and creativity, intermediary between soft spaces and “hard” planning. The after the development of three main scenarios, they were tested in different settings with different actors. These focus groups allowed to draft the vision as well as set some principles of spatial development which would form the backbone of actions and policies in the future. The vision is not a closed process and a scenario of a “controlled” future, however it gives the main direction and aspirations which can afterwards be taken by actors in different areas and by using their creativity promote development. The four main pillars for development are also based on the European spatial development perspective (which is also a legal requirement in Albania (Kuvendi i Shqipërisë, 2014)), the Territorial Cohesion (Commission of the European Communities, 2008), the Territorial Agenda of the EU 2020 (Territorial Agenda of the European Union 2020) and the ESPON study on the Europe 2050 vision (ESPON, 2013). Although four main priorities are selected, they are built on each other thus forming the basis for an integrated and well-coordinated form of action.

5.1. Regions and Regional Development

Regional development is hindered by two main factors such as the absence of “regional governance” and the high regional disparities between the center and the periphery. In this sense, 6 regions are proposed based on the Co-Plan study. The aim is not only to foster further decentralization and support this process but also increase local capacities in spatial planning and coordination of policies. The regions undoubtedly play an important role also in economic development, thus it is imperative to further develop this level of governance. In addition, Albania shows weakness in terms of attracting EU funding through the different territorial cooperation initiatives. Therefore, regions play an important role also in this sense. Based on the notion of multi-level governance, the role of the regions can be further enhanced also by serving as intermediators in terms of cross-border development and planning.

The aim is not only to create an additional level of governance by substituting the “confused” district level with new authorities, but also through regionalization to foster economic development and the reduction of regional disparities. In this sense, using and enhancing regional identities is seen as a key element in their further development. The regional identities are based on their main potentials such as historic or cultural heritage, environmental assets, agricultural production, tourism development etc. The

idea is that regional specialization in certain areas can also help with the fostering rural development. Promoting regional agricultural clusters and tourism clusters is seen as a key action for development and specialization. Lastly, it is important also to promote internal polycentrism within the regions itself.

5.2. Polycentrism and Growth Poles

In order to shake the strong dominance of the center compared to the periphery it is important to create a polycentric spatial structure in the country. By this is not meant a simple “re-distribution” policy by taking from the center to invest in the periphery. Instead, the aim is to promote growth poles which compete with each other within a greater complementary national structure. The role of growth poles is also important in promoting regional development.

The growth poles and polycentrism are based on the regional identities and divided between hubs and gateways. In this sense, by hub it is referred to the effective center, where the main services are based and which serves as an international gate to the Western Europe. On this perspective Tirana represents the international hub of the country. The gateways refer to the connection and relations between two or more countries conditioned by the geographic factors. At this point the polycentric regions of Kukës-Dibra, Pogradec-Korça, Durrës-Kavaja, and Vlora-Gjirokastra-Saranda represent the 5 regional gateways of the country. The network refers to a set of living centers, which complement each other and form functional economic areas, within the country, or on a cross border region. The two other polycentric regions of Shkodra- Lezha and Vlora-Fier-Berat represent the national-regional networks of Albania.

5.3. Development Corridors and Free Economic Areas

The promotion of regional development as well as the polycentric structure needs a strong infrastructural backbone. Using a Transfer Oriented Development perspective national corridors are also seen as potentials for enabling possible development corridors. These corridors need to support further regional development and specialization thus they are divided in 5 main typologies. The Metropolitan Corridor (Durrës- Tirana- Elbasan) forms the core for a service and innovation base economy. Also due to locational and labor factors it has a great potential in becoming one of the strongest metropolitan corridors in the Balkan region. Meanwhile to support agricultural clusters, the Agro-Business Corridors can play an important role not only for the regional economic development, but also at a national importance. There are two agro-business corridors in Albania, both located on the south passing along Lushnja-Fieri-Ballsh-Vlora, the richest agricultural land of the country and the second going through the richest fruit

farming areas and the biggest orchards of Albania, Përrenjas-Qafthanë-Pogradec-Maliq-Korça-Bilisht. Meanwhile, the Housing and Furniture Industry Corridor passes along Kruja-Fushë-Kruja-Ishëm-Laç-Lezha-Velipoja, representing an agglomeration of small and medium size business, which are located there because of the proximity to the raw materials and the growing market, especially on the northern informal extensions of the metropolis. Meanwhile in terms of tourism development the Adriatic/Ionian Sea Tourism corridors represent the most important coastal areas of the country, where tourism is the economic driver.

In addition, these development corridors, and the growth poles are further enhanced by promoting free economic areas, which would also serve for a better territorial and cross border cooperation. There are outlined 7 main areas mostly located on the space between the strategic border cities on the cross border regions (Shkodra-Podgorica, Kukës-Prizren-Gjakova, Pogradec-Ohrid, Korça-Thessaloniki, Gjirokastër-Ioannina, Durrës-Bari, Vlora-Bari-Brindisi). These will be areas of easy-access regarding infrastructure, facilitated development permission and with stimulating fiscal regimes. Lastly, there are also considered 7 economic areas/ industrial parks, including: Shkodra, Koplik, Shëngjini, Lezha, Spitall in Durrës, Elbasan and Vlora; the 3 main airports, two national (Kukës, Saranda) and 1 international (Tirana); and 4 main sea ports (Shëngjin, Durrës, Vlora and Saranda), each of which has a specialization according to the regional and national needs.

5.4. Natural Potentials and Green Corridors

In Albania there are 54 listed protected areas categorized into 6 main groups such as (i) Strict Nature Reserve; (ii) National Park; (iii) Nature Monument; (iv) Managed Nature Reserve; (v) Protected Landscape; (vi) Protected Area of Managed Resources. In addition, there are also 25 ecological emerald areas, which are designated in light of Albania's preparation for EU Accession and possible future sites of Natura 2000. Tripling the surface of protected green areas in Albania is very important also in terms of achieving EU objectives.

Nevertheless, it is important to note that not only is important to increase the "surface" per se, but also to give an economic rationale by adding ecosystem services in order to guarantee their sustainable management and protection. In this sense, 6 national and cross border green itineraries are identified such as Alps Itinerary, Skanderbeg Itinerary, Via Egnatia Itinerary, Bektashi Itinerary, Ionian Riviera Itinerary, Ali Pasha Itinerary. These, reflect not only green potentials but also the cultural and historic landscape of the areas. They serve as a tool for fostering regional development in a sustainable manner and promoting tourism. In addition, there are also other smaller landscape potentials and historic national routes, which can be found on within the specific regions or specific area. Combining in a network agricultural lands, existing protected and emerald areas, with new green extensions and corridors, aiming to create a

national green network, which cures the existing ecological problems, improves quality of life and helps branding a future Albania of high standards.

6. Conclusions

Albania needs to move ahead, away from the inherited spatial development framework of the centralized economy, which unfortunately promoted the culture of self-isolation and self-reliance. Therefore, the country must reposition itself towards a new society, which is open, complementary and competitive towards regional and global markets. Spatial planning can play a great role in this sense, thus promoting a vision which offers a path of development and allows different actors to become engaged and work for common objectives, without having a controlled future traditional planning.

As it was analyzed, Albania, after the approval of the spatial planning legislation in 2014 is in a critical juncture, very important for establishing a new planning doctrine and culture. Therefore, as part of the institutionalization of the new spatial planning in Albania, the approach in the General National Plan is very important. In this sense, based also on theoretical debates about the role and the approach of planning this paper offers a possible and innovative methodology within the current legal framework for the development of the national spatial plan.

The later offers a combination between "soft spaces- fuzzy boundaries" planning and the more traditional roots of "controlled future". In this sense the national spatial plan needs to be strategic of nature, generate consensus, visionary and realistic. It needs to leave room for local and autonomous actors to become part of the process and use their creativity in achieving common challenges. Also, the approach advocated in this paper is that of a planning doctrine which is open to changes and pressures spanning from global perspective to the local one.

Some of the main recommendations for the general spatial plan in Albania include:

- The data gap in Albania can be overcome through "action research" and different consultations with different actors. Meanwhile, after the approval of the plan, it is necessary to immediately start with a general platform which will ensure the collection of data, their integration into a unified GIS system, the monitoring and further revisions of the plan
- The priorities set need to be an intermediary between "hard planning" such as infrastructural lines of national and international importance combined with soft measures which promote development and allow the creativity of local and regional actors to become part of the process
- It is important to further advance the territorial administrative reform by creating regional authorities. A basis of criteria for the regional reform has been

described in the paper, with the aim not only of creating a regional authority but also a structure which will further enhance regional development and reduction of regional disparities.

- It is important to create a polycentric spatial structure and offer tools that will enable the later. It is not the duty of the national spatial plan to give directions on the number of housing that should go on each municipality, but it is its duty to promote centers and offer a platform where they compete with each other.
- Creating a network of green spaces, combined with a networked infrastructural system which offers access to them and enables economic development and ecosystem service enhancement.

In addition to this, the case of Albania is similar to developments in most countries in the region. Therefore, the

paper shows firstly the role that academia and spatial planning research can have on institutionalizing new spatial planning systems which are context based and reflect the local conditions. Emulation of spatial planning systems of more developed countries it is not a solution, in fact it is a facade which can create further problems in the future. Therefore, it is important to contextualize the spatial planning approaches. Meanwhile, General National Plans offer a great opportunity for the coordination of different development processes. However, they should not be guided by a linear process of a controlled future instead they should enable the start of an open process of mutual learning and co-evolution. In addition, special care needs to be placed also on the graphic representation of spatial visions which need to reflect the principles of spatial planning and be strategic in manner.

Map 1. From left to right: Connectivity before '90s and Connectivity according to Albania 2030 Vision.

Map 2. Synthesis of main findings: Main Economic and Polycentric Areas / Regions and their potentials

Map 3. Albania 2030 Spatial Vision

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