

Society under Sustainable Developments Prospective in District of Elbasan, Albania

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Abstract: *The purpose of this proposed session is to introduce the status of sustainable development in my country Albania, bringing in attention sustainable development and society in a very symbolic district of the Country, the Elbasan district. Under the Global Millenniums Goals, the society across the world is ambitiously exercising principles of sustainable development, linking economy, society and environment toward a better wellbeing for future generations. Sustainable development principles require societal actions beyond borders of states, political and economy sectors, as well as of the generations and societal diversities. What is the Albanian contribution with regards to the Earth Summit Challenges, while it is fully integrating in the regional and global processes under the freedoms of market economy? Through my paper I will introduce the status of sustainable development in my country Albania, bringing in attention sustainable development and society in a very symbolic district of the Country, the Elbasan district, pointing out local societies both as contributors and beneficiaries in the process. I will present district natural and human resources under the sustainable prospective, while a lot of work needs to be done in order to prevent the very critical environmental condition along the city or periphery due to former metallurgy activity in the district. The role of society is indispensable in the process, while bottom up initiatives must push local and central governments to design and implement budgets fostering a sustainable development.*

Key words: *society, sustainable development, environment*

Introduction

The sustainable development is regarded as the model which will determine the future rhythm of development by harmonizing components of economy, society and environment in order to build a society of wellbeing in global dimensions. Such conceptualization requires also the generations' communication and harmony for using resources, human and nature creativity in a prospective way. (Brundtland Commission, 1987) 'SD: it's about development which meets the present needs without compromising future generations capacity to answer their needs. The term SD began to have a great acceptance during the 80s, in 1987 after its appearance in "Our Common Future" known also as Brundt Land Report, which signaled the urgent need for re dimensioning our way of life and government.

Are there in Elbasan district territory the resources and opportunities to develop under such rhythm and indicators according to regional and European development example? In order to answer this question I will deal with the resources and conditions of the district territory space, economic development and environment state for coming to the conclusion that Elbasan district territory can be developed according to the sustainable development model by aiding thus its society groups' wellbeing.

Its geographical position, human and natural resources along with its historical and cultural heritage make Elbasan one of the most important cities in Albania. Numerous information sources present the city with high development rhythm and as an important strategic, administrative, military and economic center of Central Albania.

Knowing the fact that cities serve as centers of economic development, cultural creativity, technological innovation, human progress and social services improvement, it's worth observing Elbasan city case and its

¹ The Report of Brundtland Commission deal with sustainable development and the changes politics needed for achieving that.

mission as a city. This fact is highlighted also if we would consider global development pre requisites, having cities playing the role of linkage and communication node for different economic, political and societal actors in regional and global dimensions.

Let me describe in a summary and in a measurable way Elbasan district indicators with regards to its position, territorial dimensions, limitations and its location as a linking bridge for other country areas or across the national border.

The city is located at the center of Albania, surrounded by Tirana district and Dibra district in the north, Korca district in the east, Berat district in the south and Fieri district in the southeast. Its territorial administrative organization included four counties: Elbasan, Librazhd, Gramsh and Peqin, 7 municipalities, 43 communes and 398 villages (Lika, 2009.)²

The district is extended in a territory of 271, 80 kemp from which 2600 acres make Elbasan municipality administrative territory where 760 acres are situated inside the existing limitation line (Elbasan Municipality, 2006 pp 56)

Below, through the following indicators I will show some evidence that Elbasan has all the necessary natural and human resources along with opportunities to direct its territory development, economy, society and environment according to sustainable development principles.

Elbasan historically has been an important strategic center. Being located at the intersection of North-South and East-West national roads, the city has served as an important transition point and as a stopping place, being mentioned as an urban, military and Episcopal center. After Agnatic way became impossible for travel because of pagan invasion, the city is not mentioned anymore and was destructed during Slavic and Bulgarian invasion somewhere between the VI-VII centuries.

Because of its positioning in Central Albania, Elbasan constitutes a bridge between north and south, east and west of Albania. Located at a distance of only 70 km from the most important cities in Albania, as Tirana and Durres, it constitutes an important node of the national road and railway network which is under construction linking Tirana-Durres-Elbasan.

Having a flat and partly hilly terrain with an average altitude of 440 m Elbasan is considered as a city with great natural, territorial, cultural and historical resources and thus with an important role nationally.

According to the International Panel of Climate Change projections, referring to the strong linkage between climate change, water and agriculture, changes in quantity and quality of water will affect food sources, their stability, access and use. Climate change will modify also the functioning and course of the current water infrastructure.

What about water resources and infrastructure in Elbasan district?

Elbasan territory is rich with water resources. The water surface constitutes 650 acres, including natural lakes; 84 lakes in Dumrea and Klos area and reservoirs constitute 342 acres including 46 reservoirs as for example Tregor, Kullollas (Perrenjas), Gjocaj (Peqin) reservoirs etc (Elbasan District Council, 2009 pp 6)

The irrigating capacity of these reservoirs and lakes is 11,983 acres which is very important to the economic development of this district and more specifically to the sector of agriculture. Some of the irrigating canals are those of Naum Panxhi, Solova and Ferrasi (Elbasan District Council, 2009 pp5)

EU policies consider water resources as a factor for economic development and society well being. Water is one of the most valuable resources, fundamental to life and health, but also to the growth of many economic sectors such as agriculture, manufacturing and energy production. The sustainable management of water is crucial in the efforts to eliminate poverty, since poor people's lives are closely linked to access to water and its multiple uses and functions. Water also has strong implications for regional relations, peace and security. Clearly, policies have to be strengthened to improve water access, quality and efficiency "(EU Communication)

² All statistic data mentioned are important to view Elbasan district.

Also Elbasan district is known for its groundwater sources which provide Elbasan city with its potable water, Krasta, Mengel and Griqan sources.

Devoll and Shkumbin rivers which traverse Elbasan district territory are an important natural resource but also an opportunity and potential in environmental terms. These rivers form geographical landscape rich with forests, water resources (Elbasan Municipality, 2006 pp 24)

Other natural resources are forests resources which constitute a surface of 35520 acres from which 2751 acres are made of meadows and pastures (Elbasan District Council, 2009 pp10).

The abundant forest resources in Elbasan District territory can be considered as an important source of timber for bio fuels and other renewable energies, for light and heat systems, home furniture etc. Practices and energy policies at a global level favor these kinds of initiatives and experiences.

The future transition to second generation bio fuels produced from lignocelluloses biomass, waste material or other non-food feedstock depends on the advancement of R&D over the next few years and on investments that are currently being made, as well as on the continuation of bio fuel policy packages that have set up ambitious mandates for the production of second-generation bio fuel.³

This argument is a defensible one in Elbasan mountainous areas where electricity transmission infrastructure is frequently under climate factor threatening. Whereas bio fuel can be used very well by transport vehicles in the city and fuel points along national road which link Elbasan with Tirana, Rogozhina, Qafethana and Korca.

In this entire surface are found different trees and plants as for example pine, oak, gorse etc. Fauna and flora are characterized by its diversity. Flora is distinguished by numerous medicinal plants as rosemary, sage, gorse, hibiscus, levanter etc.

Also in Elbasan district can be found different animal species including wild ones, as for example wolf, fox, wild cat, deer, weasel, badger etc. Different aquatic species are trout, barbell which are in danger of extinction.

Human resources, population are considered as foundational asset for every area (Simon, 1977)

Elbasan has all the possible human resources for building sustainable development models. It has a considerable number of inhabitants, a dynamic population, and young, educated and trained, diverse in ethnicity, religious beliefs. All these provide sufficient indicators for ensuring Elbasan territory a sustainable development from an economic, social and environment perspective. Elbasan is one of the biggest cities in the country. Referring to data from period 1989-2004 Elbasan has had 123,209 habitants (Albania census, 2001)

According to statistical data from 2009, Elbasan district has had a total population of 282,383 habitants from whom 120,549 are active population, 82921 are self employed and 37,625 are unemployed. 57% of the total district population is rural (Lika, 2009 pp 35)

Migration from rural areas to urban areas and vice versa has increased population. It's worth mentioning that migration consisted of a rural migration, mainly after the 90s. This migration is directly connected with the economic and industrial development of Elbasan city, construction of Metallurgy Factory (1960) creating thus a lot of opportunities for employment and improvement of living conditions, better social services etc.

Like all areas in Albania, Elbasan district too was not spared by emigration phenomenon. This phenomenon affected 25% of population of the age group 14-30 years old. The difficult economic conditions and the desire for a better life made Elbasan inhabitants look towards Italy, Greece, Germany, and Belgium etc.

³ OECD/Fa(2011) Studies on environmental innovation

It's easy to read Elbasan district social profile through unemployment data. There is a discrepancy between municipality data and Labor office data with regards to employment rate; however we can say that at district level unemployment reaches to 160,000 people or 28% of active population.

In Elbasan city, 37625 people are unemployed, mostly of age group between 25-65 years old and where 25% are between 18-25 years old(Lika, 2009 pp35)

Based on socio-economic studies of 2004 salaries (57%) and pensions (39%) are the main resources for most of the families in Elbasan city.

We should also mention those numerous families which benefit from economic assistance, around 30% of the total.

Level of education and professional qualification affects economic development, health and wellbeing of a country or region. Whereas policies built for orienting and developing society education and professional qualification bring forth direct social and economic benefits. Elbasan district benefits from inherited values for orienting education and professional qualification towards promoting contemporary models. It's worth mentioning here its long education tradition, having the first high school "Normalja" in Albania dating from 1909. Elbasan city education level is represented by a large number of kindergartens, around 17 public kindergartens and 4 private kindergartens (Elbasan Municipality, 2006 pp 45), elementary schools, high schools and "Aleksander Xhuvani" University.

There are 55 high schools, 32 of them in Elbasan County, 12 in Librazhd, 2 in Peqin and 9 in Gramsh. At a district level those enrolled at elementary schools are 64446 from which 37025 enrolled in Elbasan County and those enrolled at high schools are 16999 from which 11595 in Elbasan County.

The considerable numbers of young people who study at Elbasan University offer a great potential for developing the area according to a sustainable development model. The University Education is represented by 7 Faculties having 18 branches and offering to students 19 different diplomas. According to existing statistics related to university education in Elbasan the number of students for the academic year 2004-2005 were 7982 students (Elbasan Municipality, 2006 pp 54)

As for the demographic components of students, 80% of them are females from which 37 % from rural areas. 39% of them are students from Elbasan and the other part is originally from different cities, as Berat, Fier, Lushnje, Vlore, Gramsh, Librazhd etc. The considerable number of educated females is a premise for a sustainable development model.

This high number of educated females will be tomorrow the administrators of Elbasan territory resources. Meanwhile, according to relevant literature, woman participation in every aspect of life is an indicator of sustainable development model. (SD and Gender Issues) with optimistic indicators about education in Elbasan city, there are also some issues related to school infrastructure improvement, education quality etc.

Tourism as a great opportunity for Elbasan sustainable development

As highlighted above Elbasan territory has considerable natural and human resources for tourism. Elbasan has been built in an antic historic site, intersection of communication roads. In many countries, the cultural and historical environment has increasingly been recognized as an important contributor to enhancement of the urban environment and regeneration initiatives through its catalytic role in revitalizing a city economy as well as reinforcing a sense of place and community.

The area has great tourist values as for example Krasta wooded hill located only 1.5 km from Elbasan, Gjinar village with an altitude of 1300 m and its beautiful forests, a spa area only 7 km from Elbasan in Tregan commune, Belshi area 40 km from Elbasan distinguished by its lakes, Byshek area which is a tourism point with cold water only 2 km from Elbasan with high tourism assets. (Elbasan Municipality 2006,pp56) It's worth mentioning also the olive grove north and northwest of the city close to Manazderie and Zaranika streams and pine forests in areas around Elbasan play their role in Elbasan city microclimate.

Because of its history and economic, social and cultural relations, Elbasan district offers all possible opportunities to orient development according to sustainable historical, cultural and social diversity tourism.

Relevant literature puts forth the fact that historical and cultural heritage can be transformed to a source of economic benefit and wellbeing by developing and supporting sustainable historical and cultural tourism. Based on this scientific argument and unique and abundant Elbasan resources this can be a potential model of development for the city or area.

Thus Elbasan district economy is supported by three main pillars:

- Agriculture
- Heavy industry
- Trade (transport, services)

Agriculture role

Elbasan district has a surface of 277189 acres, which 73284 acres of agricultural surface from which 63035 acres is arable land, 4761 is fruit plantation, 1528 acres is vineyards and 3968 is olive grove(Elbasan District Council, 2009 pp18) Around 50% of the planted surface is occupied by cereals. The good climate favors several crops as citrus, vegetables, walnut, and chestnut.

After 1991, with the system reforming of that same year and market economy freedom the private sector started to develop and the agricultural structure was profoundly changed with the creation of small private farms. The privatization process made 28796 gained the status of private farmers. As for the animal farming there are 980000 animals from which, 140.000 sheep, 140.300 pigs, 612.500 poultry(Elbasan District Council,2009) etc.

Industry

Main branches of Industry development are:

- heavy industry
- processing industry
- light food industry

The heavy industry in Elbasan county is represented by Metallurgy factory which is a steel factory owned by Kurum producing 8-20 mm diameter steel for construction purposes. The production is realized through electric furnaces with a daily capacity of 300 ton a day, and is destined to country needs and exports. During 1990-1991 in the factory were employed around 16 000 employees (Elbasan Municipality, 2006 pp52)

Since 1988 Ferrochrome factory uses electric furnaces for melting chrome mineral. The factory was given by concession to Dario Albania Company for 30 years.

Also, part of the industrial zone is a Thermo Central (TEC) which can be reactivated for electricity production.

As for the processing industry some of the factories are:

- Cement factory with a production of 300,000 ton per year, for country needs and export.
- Tobacco factory which has a joint activity with the Greek state.

Elbasan has also several factories which store and process nutrition products.

In Elbasan there is also a cold storage place with a capacity of 3000 tone, which is considered as one of the most modern in the country. Among services there are electricity furniture, water furniture, urban waste removal etc.

The transition to market economy has been accompanied with the reorganization of economy sectors and as a result numerous small private enterprises have been created. In the private sector small business, individual or family business is predominant and during the last 4 years there has been a duplication of small businesses.

Big businesses numbers during 2000-2004 have also shown a slight and slow increase. Elbasan has established very good commercial relations with Kosovo, Macedonia, Greece, Italy by exporting wood, furniture, clothes, medicinal plants (Elbasan Municipality, 2006 pp53-54)

Thus, from what has been mentioned above Elbasan has great resources as a result of its cultural and education heritage as for example a developed economy, a trade based on tourism, agriculture, abundant natural resources contributing to heavy industry development.

Of great importance for Elbasan economy is the organization and coordination of local government units since they lack capacities for offering services for all citizens. For this purpose more qualified staff is needed for improving the quality of services offered to citizens. It's obvious the lack of city guides or map, or studies which would be helpful in exploiting the natural assets of Elbasan. Most politics remains local, even as the actors and processes shaping them are increasingly globalized.

Knowing in depth a city with all its issues it is somehow difficult if we take on consideration the continual process of change and transformation which never ends. The complexity consists mainly in the necessity to provide solutions to citizen's needs and requirements which are continuously increasing and also creating sustainable relations with the land, resources, and environment.

The change of political system was accompanied by changes everywhere in Albania, which brought urban transformation with regards to land and space management, danger for the environment itself as a result of the immediate increase of population provoking thus multiple social and economic problems, high rate of unemployment, lack of infrastructure and social services, pollution etc.

Thus, Elbasan city has its own challenges. Environment in Elbasan city is an important issue because of high pollution in the area.

It is well known that the biggest pollution is Metallurgy Factory which dates from 1960 and has harmful consequences on people's health.

Monitoring of air quality at former Metallurgy Factory indicates that air pollution is twice polluted compared to city area. Filters installed in the factory have not improved the situation.

A huge concern for air inhalation quality is the irrespirable dust (PM10), which turns into a hazardous element for people's health. Through wind and other atmospheric agents not only the irrespirable dust is transported, but also reduce visibility and increase dirtiness in buildings; it also is deposited in people's respiratory ways becoming one of the lung cancer causes.

Another polluting factor for Elbasan city is urban waste gathered in a landfill no more than one km away from the city. The landfill does not meet regulation and its requirements.

A very concerning issue becomes the mismanagement of waste, through throwing and burning them in the dumpster area, causing an increase of the smoke and smell for all the residents near the collecting area.

Waste management has potential impacts on human health and ecosystems. There are also concerns about the treatment and disposal capacity of existing facilities, and on the location and social acceptance of new facilities. The economic, environmental and social impact of waste is relevant in regions also because waste disposal is usually managed at the local level.

Urban transport affects considerably air pollution and according to District Environment Agency 18000 vehicle are responsible for high percentage of harmful emission.

The water is in a considerable pollution level. The water pollution underground and in the surface is more evident near the Shkumbin River, where industrial wastes and wastewater are discharged.

In the given context it is necessary the expansion of the green areas.

Other environmental challenges are different phenomena like landslide, erosion and unsanctioned deforestation.

One of the sustainability challenges is the harmonization between economic sectors and environment. Proper sustained efficient usage of the natural resources, cultural resources, educational ones and the creation of domestic and foreign investment opportunities can result in creation of new jobs possibilities, environment tourism promotion; things that Elbasan city is lacking but can benefit of.

The above mentioned can be the economic prosperities foundations of Elbasan, therefore is important the combination and development of some elements under the public- private sectors. There are several mechanisms for co-coordinating public policies in decentralized contexts and reinforcing capacity at different levels of government. These instruments are more or less binding, flexible and formal. It is important to underline that each "co-ordination mechanism" can in practice help bridge different gaps and one specific challenge may require the combination of several tools, environment, agriculture, tourism, cultural heritages(Charity, 2011), which are very evident in Elbasan district.

Other elements for improvement are: public space management by responding adequately to the citizen's needs and requirements, socio-economic conditions, unemployment rate decreasing, environment, better social services through increased capacities of the local units and/or education system improvement. Still these objectives are the challenges that the community of Elbasan deals. It is in the citizens greatest interest to have equal and fair access to public services (roads, water and sewage systems), cleaner environment, better health, job opportunities, increased incomes and last but not least a better life.

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