

CHAPTER THREE

CONCEPT PLAN



3.1 INTRODUCTION

3.1.1 Summary

The purpose of this chapter is to summarise the seven ideas on which the plan is based.

- Develop North Albania as a cohesive, strong region. Do not allow the economic potential of Albania to be over-centralized (in Tirana-Durres).
- Create a 'Polycentric Urban Region' across the border with Montenegro, linking the urban economies of Shkoder, Lezhe, Podgorica, Bar and Ulqin into a framework for regional economic growth and the expansion of the population.
- Create a regional corridor from Kosova to the port of Bar. Recognize the location potential of the intersection of the Kosova-Bar route and the Lezhe-Shkoder-Podgorica route: (i.e. Bushat)
- Extend the Montenegro Riviera southwards on the adjacent Albanian coast by building a Ulqin-Velipoje bridge across the Buna river.
- Rationalise the physical and economic structure of the 'Remote Mountainous Area'. Manage the reduction of the population, whilst upgrading the quality of life.
- Stabilise the population of the towns of Puke, Kurbin and Mirdita districts, so that an increasing regional product is able to deliver maximum benefits per capita.
- Protect agricultural land, and limit housing in the villages and countryside of the 'urban region' to those families who are authentically part of the rural economy

These propositions are discussed below in more detail. They are presented diagrammatically in Figure 3.1.

3.1.2 A Successful Urban Region and 'The Border Effect'

The areas in Shkoder region with the greatest income all lie in the western belt of communes near the Montenegrin border, and as one goes further east, income in general tends to decline.

The highest incomes in this belt are in the south-west corner, (Velipoje, Barbullush, Bushat and Dajc communes,) from Leke 301 to 467 per day per capita. The next richest area is in the north-west, comprising almost all of Malesi e Madhe, where incomes are between Leke 165 to 300 per day per capita. However, in the northern and eastern parts of Shkoder district and in Puke district, incomes fall below Leke 130 per day per capita.

The spatial pattern of farm income is broadly similar, with the highest farm income in the border region and lowest in the north eastern portion of Shkoder region and Puke. The spatial pattern of social assistance also mirrors the east-west divide, except that, Tamare, at the northern end of Malesi e Madhe, has high dependency, contradicting the data showing high income.

In general, however, there is evidence implying a "border effect" on the economic vitality of the region. The interpretation of the causation is not easy to make, of course.

3.1.3 The 'Tirana Effect'

Regarding the Lezhe region, the income per capita is highest in Lezhe district and lowest in Kurbin, with Mirdita a little higher than Kurbin. The least poverty is likewise in Lezhe. The percentage of families relying on social assistance is lowest around Lezhe, Rubik, and Rreshen (up to 5%). But there is a blackspot in Kurbin, with Lac and Mamurras (up to 63%) and Milot and Fushe-Kuce (up to 40%.) The mountainous hinterland north and east of the Milot-Rubik-Burrel road is similarly impoverished. This compares to the proportion of people on social assistance in Shkodra of 28.5% in Malesi e Madhe of 26.3% and Puka of 39.8%.

This pattern is at first sight surprising in that the Lezhe-Tirana route has had no effect in terms of economic regeneration of Kurbin. The unemployment rate in Kurbin, (principally the towns of Lac, Mamurras and Milot,) is 44%, whilst in Lezhe it is 13.3% and Mirdite 26.0%, (although self-employment in subsistence agriculture may mask reality somewhat.)

Recent history may be no guide to the future and caution is certainly needed. However, it does seem that the "Border effect" is stronger than the "Tirana effect". There are two basic policy alternatives. If *money should follow need*, then we would spend most in (a) the mountains of the east, (Ungrej, Kacinar, Orosh, Selite and Fan in Lezhe, plus all of Puke district and the northern half of Shkoder district; and (b) in the coastal strip of Kurbin along the Tirana road.

On the other hand, if *money should follow opportunity*, then we should focus on the Lezhe-Shkoder plain and the areas from there south or west to the border.

3.1.4 Evidence-Based Policy

The fundamental policy debate is about money, need and opportunity. A synthesis might be achieved by differentiating policy in space. In those areas which are failing, population relocation should be facilitated and economic development pursued so that gross income and work force come into a better balance. However, in areas that are succeeding, the population

should be increased by in-migration and economic development pursued more vigorously than in failing areas, because these areas have a more robust base on which to build.

On the basis of this insight, we would argue that (a) the dynamic of a Lezhe-Shkoder-Montenegro corridor will work better than a Lezhe-Tirana corridor; and (b) a movement of the population from the arc of mountains (north Shkoder-Puke-east/south Lezhe) inwards to a Lezhe-Shkoder-Montenegro core zone will maximize the potential for economic development.

If there were a long term desire to create a self-sustaining regional economy then strong regional management could enable an economic surplus in a successful “core” area to provide capital by cross-subsidy to help the failing areas to recover.

This vision of a “resource cascade” suggests that our second policy option (“Money should follow opportunity”) is the wisest course of action in the coming years, because the region must create a surplus in order to spend it.

3.2 THE FIRST IDEA: BALANCE OF REGIONS

It is popular to speak of a ‘*Europe of Regions*’, and of ‘*Cross-Border Regions*’. Both ideas offer a challenge to the older idea of a ‘*Europe of Fatherlands*’, (i.e. nation-states.)

Associated with this new ideology of regionalism, is the idea of ‘*regional balance*’. In Albania, there are four effective regions, namely North, Central, South and East Albania. Many economic regions in Europe cross borders, (even where political coordination lags behind economic realities.) In the case of the North Albania region, economic development impetus requires *certain forms* of integration with major parts of Montenegro and Kosovo.

In this chapter, we propose that (a) Shkoder-Lezhe and Podgorica-Bar are integrated economically to form a polycentric urban region, which we call ‘PodShkod’; (b) the Kosova ‘Diamond’, (Peja -Gjakova-Prizren-Prishtina-Mitrovice) is integrated economically with Kukes-Tropoja-Bajram Curri; and (c) the remote mountainous region which lies between these two nodal urban regions is structured like a bi-polar magnet. This is the basis of our strategic proposal.

However, the main point here is that this region should be *balanced* with Central Albania. We regard this as the Tirana-Durres-Rogozhina-Elbasan quadrilateral. Regional balance will optimise the overall use of resources and reduce the costs of local congestion. In Albania, the foreseeable problem is excessive focus on the Central Region in the coming decades, leading to the weakening of North Albania, (and particularly Shkoder, of course.)

The tactical aim should be to encourage internal cohesion within adjacent regions. The most obvious single problem is the effort to connect Kosovo to Tirana much better than to Shkoder. This will congest the centre but threaten the balance between the centre and the north, with the result that national resources will be less effectively used.

3.3 THE SECOND IDEA: URBAN REGIONS AS THE MAIN ENGINE OF GROWTH

3.3.1 Markets as the Main Driver of a Regional Plan

The fundamental goal, (on which much else depends,) is to strengthen the regional economy. This will involve increasing employment, improving the quality of jobs, increasing “value-added” by economic activity and thus increasing profits, wages and salaries. We discuss this at greater length in the chapter on “Economic Development”. For the time being however, we observe that the most helpful thing a Regional Spatial Strategy could do, is to *maximize the effective size of markets*.

By the term “markets”, we refer to (a) labour and skills; (b) land and property; (c) capital; (d) suppliers of goods, and producer services; and (e) customers: in other words, the supply of inputs and the purchase of outputs.

We use the term “effective markets”. This means that the different geographical and economic segments must be *effectively integrated* by (a) transportation; (b) electronic communications and (c) public and private sector organizational networks and processes.

3.3.2 Polycentric Urban Regions

At the beginning of the twenty-first century, it is far easier to market a region than a city. In fact, most successful cities are highly integrated into urban regions. Shkodra and Lezha are far too small and remote to be effectively marketed as individual cities. One could hope to synthesise them with the economy of Greater Tirana, but that is too far away, (particularly for Shkodra.)

The question is whether this plan could create a large urban region by synthesizing the local economy of several areas. This is what the idea of “polycentricity” is about.

3.3.3 ‘PodShkod’: A Cross-Border Polycentric Urban Region

This plan envisages a cross-border development context, in which Podgorica, Shkodra and Lezha form a development corridor by the year 2020. There are many other such projects in Europe, such as Dublin -

Belfast, Vienna-Bratislava, Copenhagen-Malmö or Bayonne-San Sebastian.

However, in this case, we envisage a “loop form” which ties Podgorica and Shkodra (a) on the north of Lake Shkodra via Koplik, Bajze, and Tuzi and (b) on the south by Velipoje, Ulqin, Bar and Veli Pazar. The international airport is near Podgorica and Tuzi. The port at Bar has connections across the Adriatic and Mediterranean as a whole and Ulqin lies on a tourism Riviera with an established international reputation.

The Velipoje-Ulqin route may not be provided in the early stages, of course. However, the Shkoder - Ulqin/Bar route exists already via Muriqan and Vladimir. We also note that the Velipazar-Bar road tunnel should be completed this year. This loop, (which requires considerable but not excessive investment,) resembles the “Delta Metropolis” in the Netherlands, which used to be called “Randstad Holland”. This is a big urban loop with the so-called “Green Heart” in the middle, rather like Lake Shkoder will be in the middle of PodShkod.

3.3.4 The Koplik Suburban Growth Corridor

Lastly, we mention that a 15 km long suburban expansion ‘corridor’ has arisen informally on the north side of Lake Shkoder along the Shkoder-Podgorica road as far as Koplik, (but as yet not further.) By comparison, the development between Shkoder and Lezhe is minimal.

This presents three problems: (a) pollution of the lake due to lack of urban infrastructure; (b) consequences for agriculture due to loss of land; and (c) disruption on the main road, due to bad management of road space and direct frontage access. On the other hand, things have not yet gone so far that the position cannot be, (to some degree,) recovered.

This urbanization process is the main dynamic change in the region. It implies powerful socio-economic magnetism at work, which can be seen somewhat also in Tuzi across the border.

The density of this corridor is too low to allow an adequate infrastructure or road access system to be created. But nor can the housing be demolished. The best approach will be to increase the density, legalize the development and fund roads and infrastructure.

3.3.5 Marketing “Pluses”

This PodShkod polycentric system, could have several strong features.

- A population of 750,000 persons within the plan period, (expected to rise to a million by the middle of the century.)
- An international airport

- An international port for passenger liners, ferries and container ships
- A potential urban transit route providing public transport between the main business centres
- Two universities
- An established tourism Riviera with a strong international reputation
- Arguably the most extraordinary natural landscape in Europe, and
- Strong linkage into transnational corridors

If PodShkod were systematically and skillfully developed for twenty years, it could become competitive in the international investment location market, (which Shkodra or Lezha alone will never be.)

3.4 THE THIRD IDEA: THE KOSOVA-PODSHKOD LINKAGE

3.4.1 The Kukes-Fan i Vogel-Durres Link

A road link from Milot (via Rubik and the Fan i Vogel valley) to Kukes has been proposed. This would connect Durres to Prizren. It will probably draw further the centre of economic gravity to the middle Albania and isolate Shkodra. This will be a bad thing for North Albania, (and on a broad view also for the country as a whole.)

At the time of writing this report, the consultants have found it difficult to discover official government policy, or to predict what decisions will eventually be implemented. The Fan i Vogel route is said by some people to be a firm commitment, but others say it will not be carried forward, whilst the National Transport Plan (of March 2005) does not incorporate (or even mention) it.

We cannot therefore make a definitive statement, and we feel the question should be left open in the text of this report. However, our *general advice* overall would be to decide the matter in the context of a regional plan (or preferably a national plan) which *links settlement growth, economic development strategy and highway planning together in an integrated multi-sectoral strategy*. Our fear is that the government may regard the matter as a pure and abstract highway planning task. This is a rather crude perspective to adopt, and is quite likely to lead to a false conclusion.

3.4.2 The Proposed Linkage

There is a proposal to connect Kosovo to PodShkod on the route Gjakova-Bajram Curri-Fierze-North Side of the Lake – Koman-Vau i Dejes-Bushat. This needs more detailed study than it has yet received. However, at this stage, we believe the Fierze-Koman link may be open to serious objections on topographical and

environmental grounds. (But we recommend more study.)

Most likely the preferred linkage option will be a hybrid alignment as follows:

- Major road from Kukes to Bushat via Puke and Vau i Dejes. This is the proposal in the National Transport Plan of March 2005.
- Major road from Gjakova-Tropoje-Bajram Curri-Fierze, joining the Kukes road near Fushe Arrez. This will help integrate the Tropoja region with the Kosova economy and with 'PodShkod'.
- Modest improvements to the existing major road Peje-Podgorica via Kolazin. This will provide a second linkage between Kosova and PodShkod.
- Secondary road from Milot via Gjegjan and Poshqesh joining the major Kukes road near Fushe-Arrez.

Further, we also recommend the Fierze-Koman ferry is retained and developed, but probably only as a passenger ferry, with some additional landing stages.

3.4.3 The Potential of the Vau i Dejes area as a 'Gateway' to Kosovo

The Kosova Corridor enters the Shkodra-Lezha plain at Vau i Dejes, which can be regarded as a 'gateway' location. The local roads from both Shkodra and Lezha intersect here.

If the large agricultural plain can be protected from building development, (as this plan proposes,) then a considerable agriculture, livestock, food-processing and wine industry could be created. To the north, west and east, there may be chances to reactivate hydropower as well as mineral extraction and enrichment in the longer term. The railway line (which connects Vau i Dejes to the urban region) could be upgraded to allow commuting within 'PodShkod' as well as freight shipment.

3.4.4 Development Potential of the Bushat Area

The potential connection from Kosova to Bar implies a desire line from Vau i Dejes to Velipoje and then to Bar on a new Velipoje-Ulqin route. This route would cross the Shkodra-Lezhe road in the vicinity of Bushat. This would then become a location with considerable potential. Bushat offers the opportunity to create an 'Inland Port' or 'Logistic Hub' where flows from Kosova could divide: west to Bar and east to Durres. From such a logistic hub, other business could spin off.

3.5 THE FOURTH IDEA: EXTENDING THE COASTAL TOURISM BELT SOUTHWARDS

3.5.1 The Potential of Velipoje as an extension of the Ulqin Riviera

The Kosova-Bar route would entail a bridge across the River Buna some way north of Velipoje. Velipoje is the nearest seaside resort to Kosova, and this would allow it to develop as an extension of the Montenegro Riviera as well.

However, it must be frankly said that Velipoje is far below the standard of Ulqin, and will in current circumstances fail badly in international markets. Albania must upgrade its 'act' in important ways.

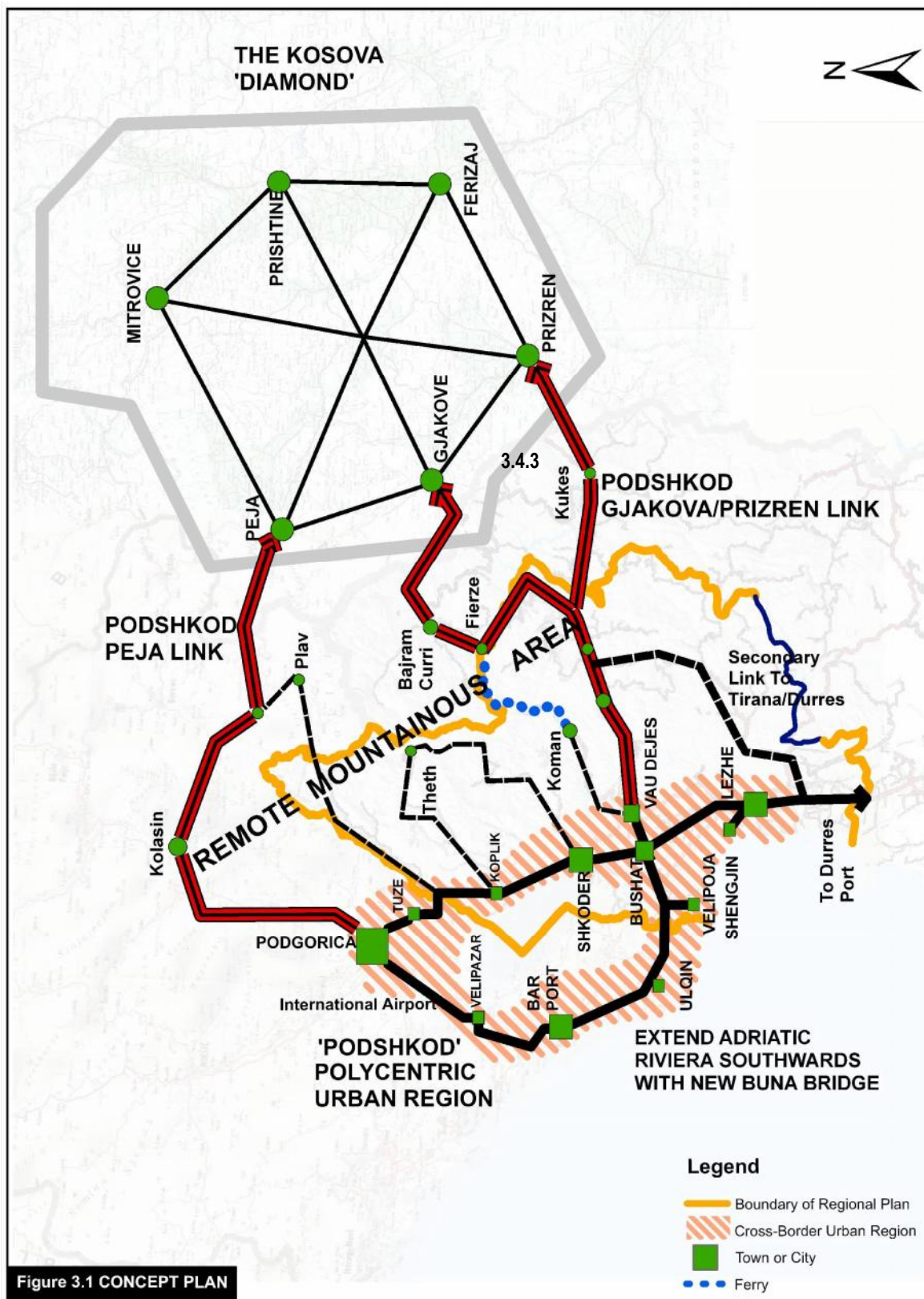
3.5.2 Linking Shengjin to a new 'Tourism Coast'

Shengjin also has tourism potential. It lies on the same 'riviera' as Velipoje, but the ecological sensitivity of the coastal environment suggests that a road between the two towns would be damaging. A small road for a minibus service with a long-distance footpath would be an acceptable measure, however. It would promote the tourism-based economy whilst not damaging the environment.

The Shengjin port does not have a future in general competition with Bar and Durres. However, the more focused roles of (a) a tourism-based yachting marina and (b) a specialized fishing port may be feasible. A small ship-repair sector could be well as a fish products created as industry.

3.5.3 The Coast South of Lezhe

This coastal zone in Kurbin district has potential, but at this time is unattractive. The environment is degraded and unattractive. (The main English language Guide Book warns visitors to avoid it.) There is quite a lot of illegal development of questionable attractiveness. It is unlikely to attract investment from serious international tourism companies unless and until an attractive environmental standard has been created. This would entail ten or twenty years of sustained environmental management and upgrading. During this time, there should be no illegal development.



3.6 THE FIFTH IDEA: MANAGING CHANGE IN REMOTE MOUNTAINOUS AREAS

3.6.1 Liabilities and Assets

The liabilities of the remoter areas are their extremely mountainous terrain; poor roads and low accessibility; small, scattered villages with dispersed houses; deficient education and health services; low incomes and lack of economic opportunity; leading to poverty, deprivation and high out-migration.

The assets of the areas are their great physical beauty; 'folk' or vernacular architecture; wild life and other natural phenomena with associated extraordinary potential for specialist tourism; handcrafts, possibly including development of the great dress-making tradition; potential for agricultural production of a low volume/high value type; wood and forest products; extractive industry, refining and quarrying; and possibly hydro-power, (including export from the region to some degree.)

3.6.2 Managing the Population Decline

As the chapter on demography shows, outmigration has caused the population to reduce. This has also been accompanied by economic decline and growing difficulties with social and physical infrastructure. These trends are likely to continue, and the tasks of the plan (in this respect) are threefold.

- Firstly, to retain the population lost in the remote areas within the Shkoder-Lezhe region by facilitating its relocation to the 'urban region', (and providing serviced housing land.)
- Boosting the economy of the remote area, so that (as population reduces) the income per capita improves to the point where 'quality of life' in remote areas is as attractive as that in the urban region.
- Improving access to both jobs and services in remote areas by concentrating the population in locations which are close to jobs and services, and allowing truly inaccessible villages to decline and eventually cease to exist. (This would allow resource allocation to be more realistic and effective.)

3.6.3 Spatial Structure of Villages

In order to achieve improved access, we have designed a strategy for spatial change, which has four component tasks.

- **Define 'Exploitable Economic Asset Zones'.**

We have defined zones in which exploitable economic assets, (such as tourism assets, commercial forests and agriculture,) are principally focused.

- **Define a 'Settlement Strategy'.**

We have conceptualized four village types, namely:

(a) *Rural Economic Nodes*

Employment centres will be to a great extent located here, particularly if access by larger vehicles is important. These villages should be relatively close to the urban areas or to major roads. These villages would normally also be 'Key Service Villages': see below.

(b) *Key Service Villages*

Services such as shops, schools, health centres etc will be focussed here. If possible, the location should be central to each group or 'cluster' of villages.

(c) *Support Villages*

These villages will have no function beyond their boundaries, and are not expected to grow in population.

(d) *Declining Villages*

These villages are expected to decline, due to their low accessibility and weak economy. Public finance would not be directed to them, except for temporary, humanitarian or emergency purposes.

- **Define 'Village Clusters'**

The Rural Economic Nodes, Key Villages and Supporting Villages would be clustered or grouped together. Each such cluster should be at the heart of an Economic Asset Zone. Their development policy would be planned and managed as an integrated whole.

- **Define Road and Transport Policy on the basis of the Settlement Strategy**

The standard of construction and maintenance of rural roads would be defined in accordance with the settlement system. There would be four levels

(a) *Economic Node Access Road*

This would lead from the urban area (or from a national road) to a Rural Economic Node. It would be a well-maintained, surfaced road of 5m or more, designed to provide safe standards for

medium-sized lorries in average winter conditions.

(b) *Key Village Access Road*

This would lead from an Economic Node to one or several Key Villages. It would ideally connect to an Economic Node in both directions. It would be a well-maintained, surfaced road of 3m or more, designed to provide safe standards for small lorries and mini buses. It would be kept open in all but emergency winter conditions.

(c) *Internal Cluster Roads*

These roads would connect Supporting Villages to Key Villages (or Economic Nodes.) They could be surfaced, but more generally, they will be unsurfaced 3m roads. They should be maintained annually to a good standard. They would be safe for mini-buses, vans, and four-wheel drive vehicles. However, they may be unpassable in winter, except on foot or horse. Stretches longer than 5km should be kept open in winter for vehicles.

(d) *Emergency Standard Roads and Abandoned Roads*

These roads, (accessing Declining Villages,) would receive limited maintenance until the settlements (which they accessed) were abandoned. Then the road itself would be abandoned. The emergency standard might allow only for foot or horse traffic, with provision of shelters for use in severe weather.

3.7 THE SIXTH IDEA: STABILISE THE TOWNS OF THE SOUTH AND EAST

3.7.1 Linking to Tirana- Durres?

As we mentioned above, the Kurbin, Miredita and Puka districts (and their towns such as as Milot, Lac, Rubik and Rreshen. Puke and Fushe-Arrez,) have the greatest economic difficulties to overcome.

A question arises about the economic connection to Greater Tirana (or Tirana-Durres) The road to Tirana could be considered as the spine of a possible economic corridor. This would cause the position of Lezhe as the outermost city of the Greater Tirana economy to be acknowledged and strengthened. But it would probably make the other themes described here unworkable within the next twenty years, at least.

An improved Milot-Prizren road would become part of a Tirana-Kosova link, reducing the relevance of the Shkodra/Bar-Kosova interaction. If this idea succeeded, we would expect Lezhe to grow faster than Shkodra, and the potential Montenegro synergy would not get off the ground. Shkodra would continue to be economically isolated and continue to fail, whilst

a new engine for the growth of Tirana would have been created.

If major roads are built between a strong economic region and a weak one, then the road will not immediately help to spread the energy to the weak region. But rather it will fuel the decline of the weak region, until the congestion costs in the strong region have choked its further improvement.

This is a national question. However, our judgement is that the national interest requires Lezhe to look northwards to Shkodra, not southwards to Tirana, implying that the Tirana-Durres region and the North Albania region (as distinct entities) should be articulated from each other. In this context, we believe that the idea of a major new road through Miredita would be a misjudgement. A lower standard of road would, however, give net benefits to the remote areas.

3.7.2 A Zone of “No Growth” Improvement on the South

This would imply that Milot, Lac, Mamurras, Rubik, Rreshen, Puke and Fushe-Arrez should be towns seen as stable (not expanding,) as regards population. Between Lezhe and Fushe-Kruje (as the northern limit of the Greater Tirana economy) would be a no growth belt, or an ‘interface’ between north and central Albania.

This is *not* to say that there would or should be no *improvement to the economy* in these very depressed towns: that is quite another topic.

The point is to increase the regional product, but not increase the population, so that product per capita leads to an improving quality of life. The plan should take care not to direct population to areas of high unemployment. The plan envisages therefore that the recent trend to net population growth is not facilitated in these towns but rather in the ‘Polycentric Urban Region’ described above. It is here that we think the economic opportunities will be easier to deliver.

3.8 THE SEVENTH IDEA: PROTECT AGRICULTURAL ASSETS AND APPLY A POLICY ON URBAN HOUSING IN THE RURAL REGION

Rural housing policy is often a problematic issue in regional planning, and particularly the matter of ‘urban-generated rural housing’. This means housing for workers in the urban economy who build houses in rural villages or rural areas which are generally dependent on agriculture.

The problem is that this land is needed for agriculture. Such housing is often so scattered that a few urban families can waste a major economic asset. They do this because the land is cheap, and they do not have to pay true costs. However, the result is pollution of

ground water which is drawn from wells. Access to schools and other facilities (such as public transport) is hard to organize, and the labour market is very dispersed.

The policy intention in this plan is to limit housing in villages and countryside to families with an economic reason for living there, and to provide serviced land in towns and cities for urban workers. The policy would stop people building in unauthorized places, and provide only 10% of the total regional land supply in villages. The question of how this policy can be implemented in reality is discussed in chapter 12 on Implementation.

3.9 CONCLUSION

This chapter has summarized the fundamental ideas on which the plan is conceived. The next two chapters (4 and 5) develop the figures on population growth and its location as well as the consequent need for urban land. It will then be possible to work out the plan itself, and several studies of particular topics which the plan encompasses, such as infrastructure, environment, finance and so on.