

**To return or not to return after graduation?
(Youth migration in the Region of Kukes and the impact of the
Durrës – Kukes road)**

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Abstract:

The Kukes region is one of the poorest regions in Albania. Over the past 20 years a lot of people have left their homes and have moved to other cities or abroad. Over recent times, students do not want to return home after graduation. The long distance between Tirana and the Kukes region is mentioned as one of the main reasons. The basic questions raised in this paper are: What do young people think about their return home after finishing their studies? What are the reasons that inspire young people to live in Tirana? What will be the impact of the geographic proximity to Tirana in young people's desire to return home? It is without a doubt that the new Durrës-Kukes road will be a 'gateway' for the young of the Kukes Region, to explore their opportunities in employment, education, entertainment and more.

Introduction:

The Kukes region lies in the northeastern part of Albania and includes three districts: Kukes, Has and Tropoja, with a population of 111,393 inhabitants (data taken from the Kukes Regional Council). It consists of three municipalities, 21 communes, 187 villages (89 villages in the Kukes District, 30 in Has District and 68 in Tropoja).

A wide range of socio-economic issues disturb the life of the inhabitants in this region, such as: poverty, unemployment, lack of investments, quality of educational system, quality of medical services offered under developed infrastructure. (For more information, refer to The Development Strategy of the Kukes Region).

All these socio-economic problems were accompanied with another phenomenon, the migration of the population in other cities or abroad, especially youth generations. From 1989 to 2001, 25% of the population moved from the Kukes Region (SZHQK, 2004: 36).

The Kukes Region is compounded by a relatively young population. The average age of the population is 26.9 years old, 54% of the population is under 25 years old. (SZHQK, 2004: 38).

Living in this area, where there were no investments, medical services or education services offered lack of quality, etc., invoking the families to pack their bags and leave this region in search of a better future, especially for their children.

In the Development Strategy for the Kukes Region it is stated that “The most important recourses in the region are its inhabitants;” (SZHQK, 2004: 10), and these recourses were departing. We all know the consequences of the migration of the population in the development of this region. Among the inhabitants that left the Kukes region were doctors, teachers and educated people that had given an important contribution in offering qualitative services to this region, also simple, hard working people and the youth who were the future of this region. Not only the cities, but especially the villages, were abandoned and as a result and their infrastructure and development were aggravated continuously.

“Why stay? There is nothing for me here. I do not have a job and I do not have running water! We have just each other and this is not enough for me right now.” – Student from Kukes Region (SZHQK, 2004: 40).

This statement made me think that another problem of this area is the lack of willingness of young people, who complete studies, to return home. Geographical

distance between Tirana and the Kukes district is seen as one of the main reasons for the migration of the population, also for other social problems that plague the residents of this area.

Through this article and from direct interviews with young people from this region, I aim to show the impact that the Durres-Kukes road will have towards their desires to return home.

Methodology

For the accomplishment of this article are used some concrete methods of social research. Firstly, data has been gathered from the local institutions of the Kukes Region, such as the Regional Counsel and the Kukes Prefecture. Secondly, 100 interviews are administered, 50 of them with students from themKukes Region that are involved in university studies in Tirana, and the other 50 interviews with youth that live in the Kukes district. Thirdly, direct observations, a method facilitated by the fact of being an inhabitant of one of the districts of the Kukes Region.

From data analyzes the sample results as follows:

Age	Female	Male	Total
18 – 24 year	26	30	56
25 – 30 year	24	20	44
Total	50	50	100

Results and Discussions

The respondents that are attending university studies in Tirana were asked: If they have a desire to stay in Tirana after finishing their studies? From data analyzes 55% of the respondents responded positively. The respondents that answered maybe (35%) or no (10%) were mostly students on their first years of their studies.

The reasons mentioned by the respondents that attracted them to stay in Tirana are as follows:

- Job possibilities;
- Career and professional growth;
- Entertainment possibilities;
- Old mentality;
- Life conditions in the Kukes Region;

The job market in the Kukes Region continues to be poor by resulting in high levels of unemployment in this region. The public job market is focused mostly on offering services and the production sector has not been developed after the closure of factories after 1990. The private sector is small and undeveloped and mostly includes fields such as building industries, transport, marketing, etc. (Këshilli Qarkut, 2006: 48-49). Lack of job opportunities is considered as one of the main factors that induce youth to leave their birthplace.

Most of the respondents state that in their birthplace it is very difficult to advance in their professional growth and qualifications. One of the respondents that works in a Bank in Kukes city stated: *“The only opportunity for being promoted is to be engaged in politics and to be lucky enough that the political party that you support will be the one that governs”*. The interviewees state that if they are lucky enough to find a job, the only thing they have to do is to keep the job, and not to show how professional they are and to aim for higher positions.

The respondents think that living in their birthplace is difficult because of the old mentality, opinions and rumors that cause them frustrations and violates their freedom. Much more than boys, girls suffer more the weight of the old mentality and rumors. According to them, in their birthplace people like to talk about the others more than tend to their own business. *“Eat your bread and talk to the others”* stated a respondent. It is better to live in Tirana where no one knows you and vice versa.

Social and cultural life in the Kukes Region almost does not exist. The possibilities to be entertained in this region are reduced in having coffee in the city bars and for the youth that live in the villages, social and cultural life is even more difficult. For girls the problem is even greater. In Tirana and another big city offer more opportunities for youth, which attracts them with the idea of living there.

What will be the impact of the Durres-Kukes road in young people’s desire to return home?

The long geographical distance between the Kukes Region and other areas in Albania, especially with Tirana, has played a special role in the migration of the population. Usually this long distance is seen by the inhabitants as the reason for the lack of development, investments and opportunities in this region. It was a great sacrifice to travel six hours along the dangerous roads, which are even more dangerous during the winter months. The long curving road through the mountains was not an adventure to be taken for fun. Mostly, the people of this region used to travel to Tirana if they had something very important to do there, such as attending a funeral, keeping a medical appointment, to accompany their children to the university, etc. Even nowadays there are people from this region that have never been to another place other than their birthplace.

I think all capital cities around the world are somewhat raised on a pedestal compared to other smaller cities, but the pedestal of the Albanian capital, Tirana, is much more unique and much more visible. I think this is

because the majority of cities in Albania are not very developed compared to the capital city, Tirana and opportunities for a better life are not many. Most alternatives of opportunity and development of each area of life are centered in the capital. I think in the case of residents of the District of Kukes, Tirana is not simply mounted on a pedestal but it has become a myth over the years. A special role in this process has played the geographical remoteness of the Kukes Region with Tirana.

Tirana has been put on a pedestal for many reasons not new to us. For example: it is the capital of the country; the most important institutions are settled there; the most important economic, social and cultural activities take place in Tirana; the possibilities for a better life; a well paid job; qualitative education for children; qualitative medical services, etc.

The Durres-Kukes road has regenerated the rhythm of the life in this region and in all the northeastern part of Albania. The expectations of the inhabitants for a better future are raised.

Young people who go to study in Tirana and face the significant differences between their region of birth and the city of Tirana. They face the opportunities offered in the capital, with various conditions of life, which are certainly very tempting to young age, especially compared with the few opportunities that are available in their hometown.

Many of the young, after becoming familiar with the opportunities that are available in Tirana do not have much desire to return home after graduation. In the daily opinion of the people, young people who have returned after graduation are seen as persons that were incapable of coping with an independent life in Tirana, or they think that they have had a very strong reason to return "in this place forgotten by God" as some say.

But the Durres – Kukes road has raised the expectations of residents for the development of this area, which will bring young people in their home. What do the interviewees think about the impact of the new road in the desire of the young to return after graduation?

The respondents were asked what they think that the building of the Durres-Kukes road will bring for the region? From the interviews and the direct observations, the respondents think that the building of the Durres-Kukes road will have a positive impact in the development of the region, especially on the desire of youth to return to their birthplace. According to the respondents, the road will bring:

1. Growth of investments from the government and private sector in the region.
2. Development of the mountain tourism and local businesses.
3. Improvement of the quality of the offered services, especially medical and educational.
4. Reduction on the time and costs spent to travel to Tirana or Kosovo.
5. Strengthening of the family relationships.
6. Growth of the population density.
7. Return of the youth.

Return of the youth.

It is not a new phenomenon for the inhabitants of the Kukes Region the fact that their children, who are studying in Tirana, are not so enthusiastic to return in their birthplace. Most of them tend to find a job and live in Tirana, I am one of them. All of the difficulties that are to be faced by the inhabitants of this region are harsher on the shoulders of the youth who, are in the first phases of their life of building their future. They are full of dreams and wishes, which have as many possibilities to be realized in their birthplace.

The respondents think that being close to Tirana will impact also the desire of youth that are studying or migrating to return in their birthtown to live. According to the respondents that are studying in Tirana, they are not so sure that this will happen, at least for the generation that is raised with the idea of a far away Tirana. A respondent, student in Tirana says: *“Maybe our generation and all that have grown up with the dream to live in Tirana will not have a greater*

desire to return, but I believe that the other generations, the ones that will be raised with another idea of Tirana, with another knowledge about Tirana, will not have the same desire to live in Tirana”.

Another respondent stated: *“If the geographic proximity to Tirana and Kosovo will bring the development that the residents of the District of Kukes expect, then it is certain that the youth will have more desire to return to their homeland. Why not return when the reasons that keep them away from the home will not exist anymore?”*

Based on the answers of the respondents that live in Kukes, including those who aspire to study at the University of Tirana in the near future, they were more enthusiastic for new highway construction and the opportunities that the change may bring. As one interviewee said: *“Tirana attracts us because where we live is not developed but if the new road will bring the opportunities and development that we expect, then why not return home!”*

In Conclusion, for sure the Durres-Kukes road will help the Kukes region to keep up with modern times, change the mentality of its inhabitants and make their transition into the modern world, faster and smoother and better, in a living standard stand-point and more.

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