

# **Education and socio-economic development of Durres during the Albanian process of transition**

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## **Abstract**

The purpose of this paper is to describe some of the critical social-economic development transformations in Durrës as one of the most economically important cities of Albania.

Since the fall of communism, Durrës is overcoming a critical economic situation, which has had an adverse impact on its social indicators.

Actually, after two decades, the process of urbanization is still facing challenges all over the country. The quality of environmental development has improved recently but implementation leave much to be desired. Durrës underwent an uncontrolled urban development, where illegal buildings were constructed in previously green areas.

In this paper the transition process will be analyze through a thorough overview of the sectors and the areas that are problematic. It will try to identify in which conditions are this sectors, which potential do they have, and which pose a threat and what kind of threat. A good starting point in understanding the actual development, is also the analyze of the hot areas of Durrës that might need intervention.

It is very important to approach these issues and to establish a new strategy for a sustainable development, so that Durrës can place itself on the right way of becoming a competitive European center.

## **Introduction**

Durres District is located between 41° and 36' to 41° and 15' northern geographic latitude, and 19° and 15' to 19° and 38' eastern geographic longitude. In its western coastline, the district of Durres is washed by the waters of the Adriatic Sea. In the northern coastline it is reflected by bays and capes. Among the distinguished ones are Brryli of Currila, Kallmi, Porto-Romano, Bishti i Palles, Lalzi Bay and Rodoni Cape (Group of authors 2000). Towards the south appears the flat beach of Durres, stretching uninterrupted to the border with Kavaja district. Exactly on the border between these two types of coastlines, in a strategic and very important geographic position in the social-economic context, is situated the city of Durres.

The land borders to the east and northeast include the districts of Tirana and Kruja, while in south and southeast the district borders Kavaja.

Durres has an important strategic position. It is, as military strategists have called it, "the Adriatic Gate in the Balkans". Having served constantly as a link of sea routes connecting our country with the Balkanic, Mediterranean, European spaces and further, Durres has played consistently an important role in the regional geopolitical developments.

Since antiquity, due to its geographical position, Durres has been an important focal point of sea and land routes binding the country with the Balkan, Mediterranean and European areas. Its important geopolitical and strategic position has attracted the major powers of all eras, and this has affected the population, urbanization and development of socio-economic life, turning thus Durres into one of the main urban centers of the East Adriatic.

### **Demographic features and social development**

Durres is one of the most ancient cities in the whole historical-cultural space of the Adriatic, one of the main centers of the formation of social and economic unity, of the linguistic and cultural unification of Arbanon.

Durres population has grown largely in the ancient times. The fact that in Durres was coined currency with symbols and figures of kings known from the Apennines to the Black Sea, shows that it was a city with a considerable number of population. Considering that Durres Amphitheatre (the largest institution of the time) had 15,000 to 20,000 seats, it appears that the city should have had almost 30,000 inhabitants.

Durres belongs to the cities with an ancient history, but nowadays there are only a few lodging places of the civil tradition remaining, such as those near the city wall built by Emperor Anastasios (Quarter 1), in the Stan quarter, or here and there somewhere else. These are homes with garrets and belong to the period of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Rural housing in general are like those of central Albania, i.e. mostly one-storeyed (Group of authors 2000).

Only in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, due to the revival of economic and cultural life, the population of Durres reached over 6000 people.

The period of years 1923-1944 was characterized by a high index of external migration and mortality, especially infant mortality, as a result of epidemics. Consequently, the population of Durres grew slowly.

After 1945, the city of Durres, as the whole country, was involved in a process of major economic, political and social change, and demographic indicators were affected by this, leading to a uniform distribution of the population, increasing the influence of the active population etc..

Large losses during the war and low rate of population growth after 1945 caused the state to pursue, in the framework of socio-political changes, special demographic policies across the whole country. They intended primarily to reproduce the population and to have a rapid expansion of it. Such a process was accompanied by immediate effects on demographic development in the country and in the city of Durres. It was a special characteristic that due to this planning, the population increased rapidly from a five-year period to another. This was the result of a very high fertility caused by the lack of family planning, as well as by the action of laws against the abortion. Other factors had also an important influence: such as the revival of marriages, which had naturally decreased during the war, the systematic decreasing in the level of deaths as a result of improved health status of population, increasing of the number of health and hygienic-sanitary institutions, eradication of infectious diseases such as malaria, tuberculosis, etc.; the immigration's detention and the restriction of movement of domestic population from rural

to urban areas. This movement was limited and it was administratively controlled by the state.

Consequently the population of the city in the 1945-60s period rose to 52,100 inhabitants. This growth was affected by the positive migrative balance as a result of the industrial development and transformation of Durres in one of the most important centers of communications in the country.

The economic development of the city of Durres, especially the development of mechanical industry, of light industry and of construction, made necessary the maintaining of high rates of overall population growth, which was achieved through absorption of the population (mainly as manpower) from the surrounding towns and villages. The population growth during 1945-1990 was largely the result of a natural growth, which is defined by high levels of fertility and the reduction in mortality and, to a lesser extent, by the positive migratory balance.

In the period 1960-90, the population increased by 122,500 inhabitants, also favored by the expansion of arable area of 7200 ha, as a result of drying the swamp (1960-1975).

After the nineties, the population has increased very rapidly due to the population's free movement, mainly from northern and northeastern areas. Consequently, the population of the city in the period 1990-2000 increased by 126,288 inhabitants, while during the period 2000-2009 it has grown by 80,124 people. The latter figure is related to reasons of recent minimizing migratory movements within the country (INSTAT Durres 2000, 2009).

Migratory movements of population are as old as the history of humanity (Doka, Draçi and Yzeiri, 2001). They constitute

an important factor in the demographic developments of population.

Internal migration of Albanians has always been an integral part of demographic developments in Albania. After 1990 it constituted, along with foreign immigration, the most distinctive feature in the country's whole demographic transformation (Doka, 2006).

General migration of the last decade 1990-2000 was greater than migration in the period 1969-1989, with a difference of 59,722 inhabitants.

After 1990, with the political, economic and social changes of the actual system, spatial movement of the population was highly liberalized. Durres was positioned as one of the main reception areas of population, by coping with the consequences of massive arrivals of migrants from across the country. This is related to the city's favorable position in terms of geographic, economic and geostrategic location.

### **Features of social-cultural life**

Durres offers a rich historical and cultural heritage, which starts about 26 centuries ago. The oldest testimony to this is the Amphitheatre of Durres, built in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century BC, with a capacity of 15-20 thousand seats.

Durres is one of the most ancient mosaics' places. Its best known mosaic, defined also as the most ancient in Europe, is *Bukuroshja e Durresit* (Durres Beauty), discovered in March 1918. It is in an elliptic form, elaborated with a special technique, with

colorful river stones, combined with stunning colors and it has a great artistic value.

Downtown there is the *theater "Aleksander Moisiu"*, which includes the theaters of drama, burlesque and children, with artistic shows of different categories and genres. Especially important is the Palace of Culture (*Pallati i Kulturës*), where a series of cultural and artistic events take place regularly. Within the institutions of culture and art take place about 41 shows yearly, with 13 of them being theatric performances and 28 concerts.

Other important historical-cultural monuments in the city of Durres are:

*Karl Topia's Tower*, formerly residence of Prince Karl Topia, who gave to the city a political autonomy. He called himself "Prince of Arberia". Venice knew him as "The Lord of Arberia in Durres coastal areas", while Pope, in 1374, recognized him with the title, "Grand Count of Arberia".

*The Turkish Wall*, built by the Ottomans after 1501, turning the city into a military garrison. Along this wall was built the tower with the clock, inside the quarter "Kala" - the Medieval Hammam, while outside, in the quarter "Varosh", the well of Tophane.

*Museum of Popular Culture*, inaugurated in 1982 within the environments of a characteristic Durres home belonging to the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. There are exposed original craft items produced by the masters of Durres and its surroundings, a rich collection of folk costumes belonging to the region of central Albania, and works of wool, silk, cotton, horn, copper and stone.

*The Museum of Martyrs* was inaugurated in 1969, but it has been continuously enriched. It is situated on the second floor of

the Martyrs Complex Funeral of the former District of Durrës. Within the hall are exposed trophy weapons relicts of World War II, personal items etc.

*The Archaeological Museum* displays the ancient culture and tradition of the city, although it was damaged during 1997. Nowadays it is placed in a new building, with an old architectural style, adapted also to the contemporary style. There have been transferred all the archaeological objects (about 2000 objects), settled and very well systemized in the inner and outer environments of the building.

The objects of worship have been built since antiquity. They represent objects of interest not only for their style and construction techniques, but also for the architecture inherited from the past.

Dyrrachium was known since early periods as the city where very interesting games were organized. Well-known athletes of the city participated in the Greek Olympiads. In the city of Durrës operate about 11 sports facilities, of which two football stadiums, two pools complexes, three football fields, a sports hall, a rifle shooting butt, gym etc..

One of the round towers of Durrës Fortress, restored, maintained and open to visitors, is what today is known as the Castle of Durrës or the Venetian Tower. It conveys important values of the city's history and culture.

In the south of the city lies *Taulantia Avenue*, with a length of 1 km to the coast, offering recreational facilities, with green spaces and fresh air.

## **General characteristics of economic development**

Durres has all the natural and human conditions for a comprehensive economic development, but the performance of its economic development has been jarring. Thus, from antiquity to the Ottoman invasion in 1501, it was an important economic center. During the Ottoman rule, the economy was devastated, and it began to restore itself by the end of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, after becoming again the most important harborage of the Western Balkans.

In the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, some consulates of foreign states and several stores, warehouses, inns and agencies were opened.

In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, Durres represented a small Oriental downtown, with handicrafts production prevailing. The port played an important role in the city's economic life, as through it were carried out marine exports and imports. The city had commercial and economic links with the Adriatic-Mediterranean basin, as well as with the Central Europe. Through the port of Durres was exported grain to the ports of Venice, Trieste and Dalmatia. In Austria and Egypt were sent live animals. Also beans, linseed, animal corns etc. were shipped. Imports consisted of industrial and agricultural products, and raw materials: zinc, tin, tin, etc.. (Hoti, 2003).

During the years 1945-1990 in Durres were carried out many projects on hydro-sanitary network, while factories and plants of alimentary, mechanical, and chemical industry were built beside the marine yard, a set of social-cultural objects etc.. A significant development received the transport system, making of

Durres one of the major railway and automotive shipping centers in the country. It represented the first stationary city in the eastern Adriatic coast, and it is one of the largest trading ports in the Balkans, providing a link with the West. Through it passes over 85% of the goods entering and leaving the country through maritime ways.

Building of Tirana-Durres motorway, the 8<sup>th</sup> Corridor, Durres-Kukes-Pristine highway, the expansion and modernization of Shkoder-Durres-Vlore road etc. give to Durres a more important role in the network of national and international traffic. The proximity to the capital city, the main markets, the major centers of public service, and the Rinas airport constitute important elements for the development of the region.

In particular there is a growing construction sector. Nowadays in the district of Durres are being built dozens of multi-story-building, especially in the beach area (Hoti, 2003).

After the nineties, a radical change of constitutional order in all elements of its infrastructure led to new orientations of economic strategy especially in the sector of services. In this context, in the Durres region during the transition period, especially during the years 1990-1998, the spending in road infrastructure and education was minimal. After 1998, the investments began to grow.

Also after 1990, a fundamental role in the economic development played the city's foreign trade (mainly imports), which was carried out through the port of Durres, serving as a bridge between west and east.

During the transition period, more than 90% of the country's overseas trade was done with neighboring countries such as Italy, Greece, Macedonia, Montenegro, Turkey etc..

Today, in the city of Durres the internal trade (wholesale and retail) is also developing. It gives impulses to economic development and provides income for the population, but, in turn, it impacts on environmental pollution via multiple waste, noise, insects etc..

As for exports, a range of important medicinal plants, various spices, vegetables and especially fish (fresh and canned) are of special importance. A key role in the economy of Durres is played by the seaport and ferry terminal (Group of authors, 2000).

Tourism occupies a special place in the economy of the district of Durres, especially the coastal one. Beaches stretch until 10.5 km long, with a fine sand, accompanied with coniferous forests and necessary infrastructure. They are visited regularly by local and foreign visitors, especially during the summer season (Hoti, 2003).

The difficult economic situation and the numerous wars prevented the development of tourism until the year 1945. In Durres beach there were 15 villas and 73 rooms and a hotel with 28 rooms.

After Khrushchev's visit to Albania in 1959, grew the number of tourists especially from the former Soviet Union. This resulted to the expansion of Durres beach as the main holiday center in Albania. Beside the former villas were built simple beach cabins, which operated until the early '90s. It was built also the tourist hotel "Adriatic" - the only one that could be used also by foreign tourists in the beach (Doka, 1996).

Durres Beach is the largest along the Adriatic coast. It is characterized by a fine sand, warm water and healthy climate. Along the coast are built luxury hotels, restaurants, bars, quality taverns. There are also sports complexes and facilities for recreation and entertainment for all ages and categories of tourists.

After 1990, the institutions of the county and district of Durres have boosted the tourism sector through development of policies, investment in infrastructure and services, research, evaluation, and promotion and valorization of natural, historical, and cultural opportunities.

The city has grown, but urban and architectural traces of earlier periods continue to exist. Characteristic of modern city remains the “Commercial Street” (Rruga Tregtare), built in 1927, after the earthquake of 1926. The architecture of buildings is of Italian style of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Today, in addition to residential buildings and recreational facilities and entertainment, the city has also good streets, squares and avenues.

The coastline from the Bay of Durres to the Bay of Lalzi in the north provides historical monuments, such as the Castle of Skanderbeg and that of Ishmi.

Durres actually counts 96 hotels with 1740 rooms and 3491 beds. They are mostly frequented by foreign customers, whose number in 2009 was 15,486. During the year 2009 entered the port of Durres 440,225 passengers and 152,147 cars (INSTAT Durres, 2009).

## **Landscape, environment and prospects for sustainable development**

A dominant element of the landscape of Durres in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries was the swamp (Keneta), formed on the basis of the lagoon with the same name. As a result of a long evolution of the double tombola of Durres, initially was created a sea inlet, which became a lagoon and later, in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries, it was transformed into the swamp of Durres.

Landscape has evolved, too, as a result of human activity to meet essential needs, such as construction of residential areas, roads, opening of new agricultural land, forestation, improving the agricultural systems, construction of irrigation and drainage systems, exploitation of forests etc..

The setting as a priority of the development of heavy industry during 45 years of the previous system had consequences for the environment. In the district of Durres heavy industry was represented by the Chemical Enterprise (it produced pesticides, rubber, plastic materials), the Bricks Factory, etc.. These caused major environmental pollution and health problems for humans and other living things.

Meanwhile significant investments in areas such as water supply, wastewater treatment and urban waste, processing and recycling of industrial waste, etc. were neglected. Application of old technologies, without the use of necessary cleaning installations, has led to increased emissions of toxic gases and vapors, smut and dust, moisture, noise and mechanical vibrations in the working and residing environment.

After 1990, the changing of political and economic system, population's free movement etc., contributed to the transformation of landscape of Durrës district. The density of population in unit per surface increased especially in Porto-Romano, with people coming mainly from the northeastern Albania. The building areas were expanded and new buildings became prevailing throughout the whole district. The landscape is so humanized, that it is hard to find parts where no human hand has operated.

Green area gets reduced every passing day and it is being replaced by high buildings. The coast has undergone major changes as a result of numerous buildings for housing, tourism etc..

Many objects went out of use, affecting the degradation of the landscape especially in Shkozë and Porto-Romano (PPC, 2005).

Gradually, with the increasing population, the forest and marshy areas are being reduced, while residential areas and streets are expanding.

Population's growth and expansion of the residential area has led to increased demand for roads, telephone lines, water supply, health centers, educational, cultural, sports, green spaces for recreation and entertainment etc..

Competition in the circumstances of free market economy led also to the closure of a number of industries with serious consequences on the environment, such as the chemical enterprise in Porto-Romano - one of the most problematic not only for the district of Durrës, but also in the Balkans. This enterprise has a range of hazardous chemicals such as lindane, dieldrin, chromium salts, beta isomers – HCH. Upon termination of

employment, the chemicals were left adrift and distributed everywhere, while water and soil were pollute.

The large population located in the area is completely exposed to the chemical pollution that comes directly from the land, water and air, and indirectly, from agricultural products and livestock.

Polluted are the industrial areas of Shkozet, where many industrial buildings are already abandoned; in Manza, where there are coal mines in the area of the beach, in Currila and Durres Bay, where there is a lot of construction and urban waste; in the Port of Durres, where there was a batch of iron remaining resembling an outdoor machine-shop.

All these areas are problematic for the population. They also weaken the attractive power of Durres, this beautiful and ancient city.

The green area of Durres is reduced and significantly damaged. Specialized institutions, non-governmental organizations, environmental organizations should maximally engage for the rehabilitation of the damaged areas, the expansion of green space, the creating of a clean environment, and for a sustainable development perspective.

Emergency measures should be taken to:

- solving problems created in Porto Romano, Spitalla and in the coastal zone, related to the chemical pollution, illegal urban constructions etc.;
- Reduction of pollution load generated in the urban area of Durres;

- drafting a plan to arrange settlements within the yellow line border, defining the area for construction, social and cultural facilities, etc..;
- establishment of a plant in Porto Romano area aimed at systematization of sewage, after operating as a natural filter that strongly reduces the effects of any sudden increase of urban origin polluting substances, helping to preserve the area's biodiversity through the establishment of a new environment to the flora and fauna.

## **Conclusions**

Changing of the system after 1991 and consequently the overcoming of the system's centralized economy and the application of the principles of market economy and free initiative led to many changes in the economic conditions of Durres. It represents today one of the major economic centers in the country, an important nucleus of trade, tourism, public services, and above all of transport.

Also a result of the changing political and economic system was the free movement of population, which played an essential role in the evolution of landscape in the region of Durres. During this period is to be noticed a significant downsizing and an abuse on green space. Beside this, the city's yellow line was largely expanded and the number of dwellings in any part of the Durres area grew up, which led to the reduction of the arable area. The current landscape is so humanized, that it is hard to find any spots that not affected by the human beings' activity.

However, after the year 2000 and on, a series of activities has been carried out and a range of policies has been pursued to improve the environmental quality and protection, to reduce the major environmental pollution caused by the urbanization process, due to greater population density and concentration of industrial activities, trade, telecommunications etc.. In this context, measures should be taken for the development of road infrastructure, improvement of public services, sanitation systems especially in problematic areas of Durrës, such as Shkozë, marsh (Keneta) and Porto Romano, and for the increasing of green space not only in residential areas, but especially along the coast, which has undergone major deforestation after the nineties because of the expansion of building area.

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