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Potentials and Development of Krutje Rural Areas

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Abstract

This article explores the crucial role of regional geographic studies in addressing both global and local development challenges, with a specific focus on the Administrative Unit of Krutje in the Lushnje District, Albania. Although regional studies in Albania are underway, limited financial support continues to hinder their scope and pace. Through an innovative, multidisciplinary approach, this research examines the complex interrelations among Krutje’s villages—analyzing natural resources, settlement patterns, and socio-economic dynamics.

The study highlights Krutje’s strategic geographical position, its Mediterranean climate, soil fertility, and agricultural potential, along with pressing challenges such as water scarcity, poor wastewater management, and environmental degradation. Demographic analysis reveals population trends, migration patterns, and socio-cultural transformations, shedding light on educational infrastructure, professional profiles, and evolving community structures.

Drawing on regional geographic theory and available data from INSTAT and local institutions, this research applies comparative and analogical methods to interpret fragmented and sometimes contradictory statistics. Despite data limitations, the study provides a detailed profile of the region’s development potential and vulnerabilities.

The findings aim to contribute to the field of regional geography in Albania while offering practical recommendations for sustainable development, environmental stewardship, and the preservation of cultural identity. In doing so, the research supports the broader goals of reconnecting communities with their land, managing demographic shifts, and ensuring the long-term vitality of Krutje’s landscape and society

Keywords: Regional Geography; sustainable development; Krutje (Lushnje, Albania); socio-economic Dynamics; agriculture development

I. Introduction

Addressing the major challenges faced by global and Albanian development today requires the essential support of regional geographic studies. These studies, through complex analyses of various natural and socio-economic factors at different regional levels, offer a comprehensive view that is critical for proper guidance and the prevention of undesirable outcomes.

Although work on regional studies has begun, the lack of sufficient financial support has hindered their progress, preventing them from moving forward at the urgent pace required.

This article focuses on a regional study of the Administrative Unit Krutje in Lushnje and brings an innovative approach in examining the interconnections and interactions between different villages of Administrative Unit

of Krutje, including its natural offerings, settlement patterns, and the use of natural resources. Moreover, it highlights the current state of the region and anticipates future trends.

This research will explore several key areas such as:

1. The advantages of Krutje's position related to natural and socio-economic factors, with an emphasis on their impact in its development;
2. Natural and social potentials of the area, focusing on the social, economic and environment development;
3. Demographic and population-related concerns, including fluctuations in population size, gender distribution, age demographics, professional profiles, educational infrastructure, and trends that may affect these variables in the future.

This study draws on recent theoretical literature related to regional geography and the factors that differentiate regions. It also considers existing research on regional geographic issues within Albania, which, despite being limited, have provided valuable insights for identifying local challenges.

We also utilized data from INSTAT's statistical yearbooks and local agencies in Lushnje and the Administrative Unit Krutje center. While these data are often incomplete, fragmented, and sometimes contradictory, they have been crucial in developing our analysis. To overcome these gaps, we applied methods such as comparison and analogy to interpret the available information.

While our findings offer valuable insights into regional geographic issues, we recognize that more work is needed to address gaps in the available statistical data. Nevertheless, we believe this study contributes to the growing field of regional geographic research in Albania and has practical implications for the region's development and environmental protection.

This research aims to help solve urgent contemporary challenges, such as preserving traditions, maintaining the community's connection to their land, and promoting sustainable development in the region. While this study has its limitations, we are committed to addressing these in future research.

II. Study area

Krutje Municipality, located in the Lushnje District, is predominantly agricultural and has a population of approximately 10,000 inhabitants, living in its eleven villages: Kadiaj, Krutje e Poshtme, Krutje e Sipërme, Lifaj, Fier i Ri, Rrupaj, Gjaze, Trrez, Ngurrëz e Vogël, and Ngurrëz e Madhe. In the last two decades, especially after the decline of communist regime in 1990, this Administrative Unit (Ad.Unit) has undergone significant changes reflected by several infrastructural investments and interventions aimed at enhancing public services and economic development (Guga, 2018).

Krutje Municipality is predominantly characterized by its flat rural landscape, situated in a strategic geographical location. It is bordered to the east by the village of Fiershegan, to the south by the Fier District, to the west by the village of Bubullimë, and to the north by the city of Lushnja. The municipality is approximately 5 kilometers away from the national road, enhancing its connectivity to broader transport networks.

The climate of Krutje Municipality is predominantly Mediterranean, which is evidenced by significant diurnal temperature variations and distinct seasonal shifts. January averages a temperature of 6.2°C, while July usually has an increase, averaging 25-30°C. Recorded temperature extremes in the region range from a minimum of 3°C to a maximum of 33°C, highlighting the range of climatic conditions experienced throughout the year. Precipitation in Krutje is primarily concentrated in the autumn months, with an annual average of approximately 880 mm. The occurrence of snowfall is infrequent, typically limited to one event per year, wherein the accumulation does not generally exceed 5 cm, and rapid melt occurs post-deposition. Hail events are rare as well, averaging twice annually, and are more prevalent during the autumn period. Additionally, the region is susceptible to episodes of intense rainfall that are capable of initiating flooding incidents. Frost occurrences are recorded for approximately twenty days each year, primarily spanning from November to February.

The region has an aggregate of around 3360 hours of sunshine annually, with many episodes of prolonged drought, which affects the agriculture and the production. The prevailing wind patterns are marked by frequent gusts, predominantly originating from the southwest, with notable cold winds emanating from the east. Storm events are particularly common in September. These climate characteristics have crucial implications for agricultural practices and the overall socioeconomic landscape of Krutje Municipality.

Water Resources of Krutje Municipality are not very good to support people everyday activities and especially agriculture and livestock. The main water resource for the Municipality is a stream which has seasonal flow regime, becoming significantly reduced in volume during the summer months, but that is also a risk for flooding, particularly during intense rainfall events of spring. Historical records indicate that substantial flooding incidents have occurred on two occasions since the 1950s; the most recent of these events took place in 2000, resulting in substantial inundation across an area of approximately 5 km². Groundwater quality within the municipality has been evaluated as suboptimal, with a predominant classification of salinity affecting its usability. Consequently, the local population often depends on external sources for their drinking water needs. Wastewater management strategies in the region are not very adequate and mostly consist of channeling effluents into septic systems or direct discharge into the streams. This is very concerning regarding public health and environment issues.

Soil Composition and Agriculture: Krutje Municipality is rich in gray-brown types of soil, which are a result of the drainage of marshlands in the area and land reclamation efforts of the communist regime in the late 1950s beginning of 1960s. Most of the municipality's land is used for agricultural purposes and is characterized by a substantial humus content that enhances its fertility and facilitates the cultivation of a large variety of crops. The nutrient-rich composition of these soils supports various cultivation activities, which are integral to sustaining agricultural productivity within the region.

Vegetation: Natural vegetation comprises around 20% of Krutje Municipality's land area, primarily characterized by oak and Mediterranean shrub. Among the most spread and important species in this vegetative matrix are: hornbeam (*Carpinus betulus*) and thana (*Spartium junceum*). The forests are rare in the area and significant portions of them have undergone degradation due to land reclamation activities. In order to address these ecological challenges, some successful reforestation initiatives have been undertaken, facilitating the regeneration of approximately 10% of previously deforested areas (Guga, 2018). These efforts are critical for restoring native biodiversity and supporting local ecosystems.

III. Main challenges of Krutje Municipality's population

III.1. Early population and characteristics of the Indigenous Inhabitants of Myzeqe

The indigenous inhabitants of Myzeqe are called Lalë, residing along both banks of the former Devoll River, which once flowed through the central region of early settlements. These villages are first documented in the 1431 Turkish census. Some of the villages identified in this early records are: Zhelizhan, Krutja (also known as Hirvati/Shakuj), Këmishtaj, Kamicishte, Karavasta, Libofshë, and Barbunjë. The ancient riverbed extended as far as Barbunjë and Karavasta, ultimately emptying into the Adriatic Sea.

The area was locally referred to as Dheri i Bute (Soft Soil), and its inhabitants were collectively known as the "Lalë." The Lalët are distinguished from other populations in the Myzeqe region by several unique cultural traits. These include their distinctive clothing (referred to as mammere), their manner of speaking and singing, and the flax takie—a traditional Albanian woolen hat shaped like a cone, which is unique to the region. The Lalet are also renowned for their deep-rooted agricultural practices and their passionate commitment to farming. According to the 2002 census data, the population of Krutje Municipality is estimated to be around 10,200 inhabitants, marking a significant increase from the 8,969 inhabitants recorded in 2002. This population escalation is indicative of a consistent upward trend, with figures rising to 8,984 in 2003 and reaching 9,127 in 2009, ultimately culminating in the 10,200 mark by 2010. Krutje, as part of the Myzeqeja region, has

historically contended with pervasive poverty, a legacy stemming from periods of foreign occupation and enduring socio-economic stagnation.

In the last census of 2023, there is a drastic decrease in the population number, which shows the tendency for emigration of the population from rural areas, especially of the young people.

III.2. Migration Patterns and Their Impact on Development

The movement of populations significantly influences the distribution of people across regions. Migration can be assessed through indices that reflect the balance between individuals who move into a particular area and those who leave. A positive migration trend occurs when the influx of newcomers exceeds the outflow, while a negative trend arises when more people leave than arrive.

Up until the 1990s, the migration pattern in Krutja was predominantly positive, contributing to population growth. However, following the 1990s, the natural population movement shifted towards large-scale displacement. This migration primarily took two directions:

1. Urban areas, particularly Tirana and Durrës.
2. International destinations, including Italy, Greece, and the United States.

Concurrently, Krutja also saw an influx of residents from surrounding villages and highland areas.

The data from 2005 reveals a significant peak in out-migration, with the number of people leaving the region reaching its highest point. Upon reviewing the migration table, it is evident that out-migration dominated during this period.

Several factors contributed to this migration trend, including:

- Low economic conditions in the region.
- The emergence of smaller, nuclear families and the separation of children from their parents.
- The pursuit of a better quality of life, both within Albania and abroad.

The migration of population and the effects in development

- Part of migration of population is the movement which brings the population general distribution.
- The index which shows this movement is the migration which shows the difference between the people who come and the ones who leaves one certain place or district. This trend can be positive when is dominated by people who come, and negative when it is dominated by people who leave.
- Up until to 90s the migration of Krutje had been a positive one and this helped in the increasing of population.
- After the 90s the natural movement of population is characterized by a relatively mass displacement and it is directed mainly in 2 directions:
 - In the direction of tis cities such as Tirana and Durres.
 - Abroad such as, Italy, Greece, The USA etc.
- This movement is so accompanied with by arrival in Krutje municipality from next by villages, and highlands.
- From the table we notice that 2005 is the year which shows the most departed number of people. If we look at the table again we see that the majority is that of departed.

The causes are numerous:

- The low economic levels

- Creation of small families (nuclear families) separation of the children from their parents
- Desire for a better life.

III.3. Ethnic structure and cultural communities

- The population of Krutja is mainly homogeneous. This means that in the framework of different ethnicities.
- Albanian population occupies the most part of the area. In Albania minorities account for only 2% of the population (including Romanians vllehet etc.).

III.4. Religious structure of the population

•The residents, of Krutje are indigenous. Before a century the whole area consisted of Orthodox religion, while in the last decades as a result of demographic movement there are 2% of Muslim Religion people. We must say that people of the two religions get on very well and have complete harmony between them. It characteries found not only in this region but also in Albania. The proof is that there have been many marriages with different religions. It is to be reminded that the opening of the Orthodox school in Krutje was no coincidence or luck. It was opened 20th September 1892. It was part of the strategy of the Turkish Empire which did not-dispel the center of the Greek patriarchate from Istanbul after the fall of Constantinople (1453) by leaving Greece free to open schools everywhere they were orthodox people in Balkans including Albania. Understandably, Greece was the most favored of the empire but the sultans have calculated the role of the third as a counterclaim to neutralize national movements.

Object of cult in Krutje are two:

The church of St Koll known as one of the oldest in the area, and the new church of Saint Kozma.

- From the data collected St Koll church is older than that of Krutja e Poshtme St Koll church and the one of St Maria in Bishtqethëm. The cult object is located in the north of the old river or as people a call it in late centuries the sun of the village. It is said that the river changed its flow between 1285-1300. So there has been some facts that it was built there about 1300s.
- The new church of St Kozma, was discovered in 1946 lay Kozma Pupi, a farmer from Krutja e Siperme. The churches were discovered in 1991. The St Koll church has been closed since 1993.

III.5. Demo- Social and economic development of Krutje Municipality

In recent is years there have been many increasing area with greenhouses, vineyards and fruit trees. The houses are surrounded by yards. In some villages people are creating mini farms. The surfaces of the yards have changed through time. Before the liberation of Albania, the yards bigger in order to meet the needs of extended families. In socialist area the land was not private the yard area was smaller.

- With the establishment of the democratic the yard area began to get bigger constantly bigger according to the needs.
- The main part of a yard is the gate the fence, the huts, the flower gardens and the garden. The gates are at the entrance of the house. Many families use two gates one for pedestrians and the other for vehicles.
- Here are some small buildings (or huts) which serve as housing for animals, livestock, pasture or other items the farmers use daily.
- Characteristic of Krutje are the alleys will two parts along them. The bigger the flower beds, the bigger. the caring. Another characteristic are the wells which are an integral part of almost every house.
- There is fresh drinkable water in every village even in the most remote villages even this municipality so the wells are used for animals or irrigation. There is wastewater for white and black so water this way the yards remain clean and immunes to the spread of different contagious diseases.

IV. Agriculture development in Krutje municipality after 1990s

The transition process (after 90s caused changes that were oriented towards market economy.

Institutional conditions were created and practically the reconstruction property phase began. Which was a must for entrepreneurs. The entrepreneurial functions of a great number of foreign enterprises(farms) are managed by the owners. They invest their own capital and Combine the factors of production. What they earn is considered as an award for the work done the risk and the invested capital (where the land is part of it)

In the farms where it is impossible to be managed by the owner it is the manager appointed who deals with them.

- In many ambitious economic investments with big capitals or even in family farms where there hasn't been invested too much there is an effort to their programmed to apply in order get new technological tools and products and find new markets.
- In most of them these efforts have resulted positive. Many farm owners, owning those kind of farms dare to face the danger of being successful or not in their investments. Many of them made solid profits and this brought development of their family farms. If we have a look in the past there were no conditions of entrepreneurship. It was the government which chose the staff and not the so called manager or leader.
- It is known that the greater the freedom, the greater the effectiveness of the decision-making. If the people in the past, who were leaders of economically entities had some entrepreneurial ideas for their implementation had to respect some organization. (for taking into account the advice of the workers). On the other hand, there was a tendency for this small private.

IV.1. Green vegetables in plastic and glass greenhouses

Also in this municipality is distinguished for its economic units with fruit trees according to the classes of the land used.

- Fruit trees (apple trees, pear trees, plump trees, figs, nuts, olives, citrus, vineyards, seedling, nursery.
- Residents of this area are also good at livestock and its breeding such as milk, eggs, honey, wool.
- They breed any kind of livestock sheep, goats, cows, pigs and birds.
- With the production obtained from these animals and trees they produce: cheese, butter, raki (a traditional Albanian drink, similar to vodka) wine, olive oil, cottage cheese.
- There are many investments done in Krutje and this thanks to different foundations and the good cooperation between the municipality and the government.

There is one thing that the consumer wants: The increasing of the agricultural and livestock production quality and this is obtained through a specialty The controls and checks these productions are grown and produced in normal conditions.

- To achieve good performance and products should frequently use chemical fertilizers. They should also cooperate with field specialist (agronomists).
- Based on date, analysis we conclude that:

1. Agricultural field structure in Krutje municipality has undergone important changes in fruit trees, vineyards, olive trees, Citrus Fruit specials. The tendency towards these trees cultures is related to the level of commercialization

2. The land surface for each person in this municipality is smaller even though it is bigger in relation to the other districts and the possibility in further growth are impossible.

3. The potential land surface used is about 3700-3800 ha and it has a decreasing tendency because of the urban development on the other hand and abandoned lands of the other because the production abstained is to low.

The effects of each previous factors on the form dimension (size) for each district are not the same. It should be noted that this size is not real. The calculation of this index is based on the official date for the agricultural land that each municipality possesses numerous surveys are carries out be different institutions indicate that the real form size is the one that is planted and the farmers agree to work Apart from surveys, daily observations are made by MBU.

- Minimum size and the high level of fragmentation of agricultural farms such as the main of agricultural organization are the obstructing factors for the

IV.2. Agroindustry and crafts

In Krutje municipality agro-industry and crafts are not developed enough.

Numerous fresh products are sold directly in the market or some businesses take it directly where it is produced. There are no workshops. Peasants process on their own according to their needs. Even the craft is not too much developed in this municipality. There is a craft workshop set up producing photo frames which are exported to Italy. Even livestock products are sold fresh and raw. Only small part is processed in one or two dairies in the village of Ngurrëz e Madhe. Nowadays many farmers have been raising an orchard, viticulture and olive groves. The phenomenon of orchard has an important role and it is subsidized by the government. This help comes from Agriculture Ministry and other organizations offering affordable grants. Thanks to this subsidy the planted areas with fruit trees are doubled.

Fruit is marketed fresh there is no processing workshop. So, every small agricultural farm in Krutje operates as a manufacturer of its own agricultural and livestock production.

Conclusions:

1. Krutje's regional geography reflects a dynamic interplay between natural, historical, and socio-economic factors that have shaped its development trajectory.
2. The legacy of the communist era, especially the agricultural cooperative system, continues to influence the region's identity and land use patterns.
3. Post-1990 transitions brought significant demographic shifts, including out-migration and aging populations, leading to socio-economic challenges and spatial reconfiguration.
4. Environmental pressures, including soil degradation and declining agricultural productivity, highlight the need for sustainable land and resource management.
5. Krutje retains development potential, particularly through integrated regional planning, community engagement, and the revitalization of traditional economic activities.
6. A place-based approach to territorial development is essential, recognizing the unique assets and needs of regions like Krutje within Albania's broader national strategy.

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