

## ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION: THE CHALLENGES OF THE RURAL POPULATION IN THE REGION OF GJIROKASTRA

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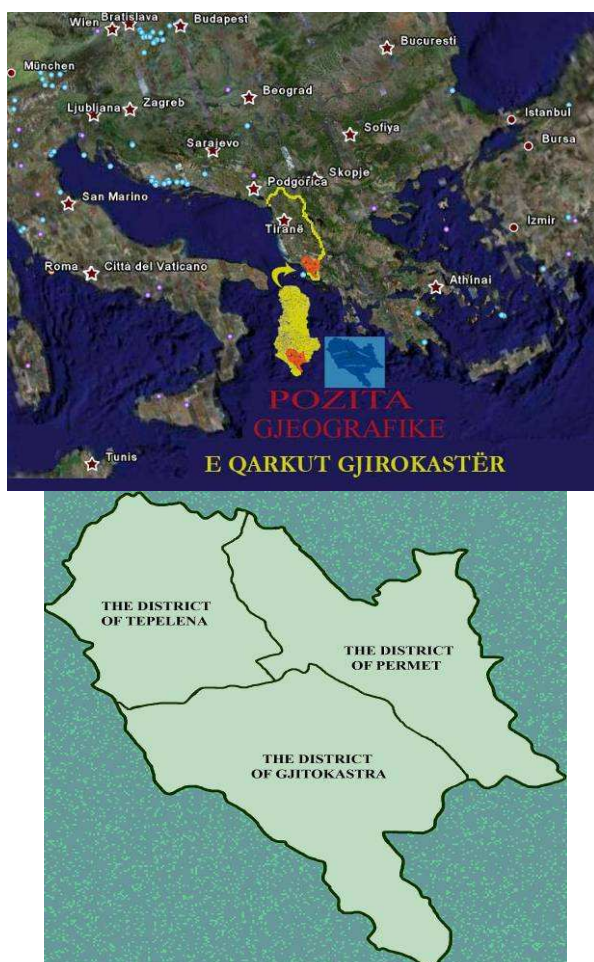
*Education is a great power of the Gjirokastra District's rural society. In this article is done a big effort treating economic development after the communist period, an important part of which is education. Within these time limits are combined with concerning issues that affect toward opportunities of the period after the fall of the communist system. This is evident from the allowed documents of the previous years as well as from analyses of different point of views. Having in consideration wide diapason of this object i have aimed to analyze topics of educative changes under the influence of the past and of the present and the important role of social economic factors. This paper is referred to extensive scientific literature and work of new researchers in this area, where the most important part of it is covered by researching work of local researchers Education is very important for farm families of Gjirokastra District to increase incomes and raise living standards and meet the needs for agro-agricultural products. However is noticed the decrease of interest for agriculture and an increase of interest to non-agricultural jobs. It is exactly the role of education that encourages people to leave the farm by completing the socio-economic goals. A concerning problem are the secret escapes that bring digression of social environment. The damage of school networks, decreasing number of enrolled pupils vanish the necessity for education as a condition for the increase of cultural level of rural family life. The school dropout tendencies, is bringing heavy social deformations on the cultural level of rural families, and make possible advancing of illiteracy level in rural areas, as a regressive step in the cultural level of rural families. Rural community of Gjirokastra District should do great attempts in order to create a social environment in rural areas, where to be evaluated the role of school as the main tool for the development of cultural level of families.*

**Keywords:** urban civilisation, economic assesment, rural sector, social cohesion, geographical concept

Socio-economic developments during transition period, as elsewhere in Albania even in Gjirokastra District expended variety of environmental

problems. Rural population of Gjirokastra region was faced with strong challenges in socio-economic fields, especially in the field of environmental education. In this situation, increasing of the people awareness level for an effective rapport with environment is the fundamental factor in sustainable rural development and the effectiveness of the rural life framework of Gjirokastra Region. Influence that have rural environment on the cultural evolution within rural area is really big, as it creates a certain cultural ecology. Obviously, only achieved economic development within the real possibilities of the rural environment can bring the progress of life quality. Actually, the most concerning problem is the environmental uncertainty, due to the lack of environmental culture throughout the Gjirokastra Region community. Environmental challenges are quite complex since the problems facing rural communities are diverse. This diversity of problems must necessarily be solved with dignity by educative system, by teacher to pupils to next generations and whole rural community. Environmental information about all elements of physical environment enables people to make the right decisions and set priorities for the future.

*Map 1: Geographical position of Gjirokastra Region (A. Sinani)*



The process of emancipation of the rural population of the region is developed rapidly. Rural community loves culture and is widely involved in the mainstream of education and urbanization. After 1990 school buildings and school facilities were heavy damaged. Rural schools were not sufficient for the education of students enrolled in them and the number of teachers was decreased progressively.

In addition, reducing the number of pupils enrolled the lack of qualified teachers and the dropout trend brought distortions of the structure of education, damaging the cultural level of the rural population (Mazniku & Canaj, 2008).

*Elements of material and spiritual culture* are always subject of continuous changes in different rates and scales. In this context, environmental culture helps rural area residents find ways to adapt to natural and social environment and to exploit them in the interests of rural society. Environmental education plays an important role in solving of various problems, teach residents of rural communities to know how to act and think in their society, and for a sustainable development of space.

*Throughout history*, the rural population of Gjirokastra Region has changed partly environmental conditions in the best rural life and its work. In rural area the impact of natural conditions on the use of space, production activities and ways of life is permanent and more significant than in urban space.

*Traditionally*, the natural environment of rural area of Gjirokastra Region has provided economic development and the materials used in economic activities. Media and local television warn in particularly the issues that something should be done about these problems that threaten the risk of life quality destruction. Yet many rural community members look around their environment without taking care about these problems. Perhaps this is because people still are not aware that these problems affect not only the residents in psycho physiologic terms, but also on the environment and rural welfare. We forget they are a part of nature and our welfare depends essentially on a healthy environment. *Education and awareness* of rural population in the sustainable development of Gjirokastra Region is the most important part of geography environmental education. This is a renewable way to create a sustainable social system through learning, educational organizations and other processes between students, teachers, professors, parents and regional associations. *Education* serves as a key element for improving environmental sustainability. System and environmental education is a fundamental tool for links to the lowest level of education by bringing together environmental values to rural society. Considerations that education is the greatest power of rural society have seen as positive the impact of environmental which bring sustainability to today's generations and those to come. Environmental achievements and the quality of teaching are primary issues in this regard. But unfortunately the education system and the quality of education in rural district is not in the proper level. Many students are leaving obligatory school system. This creates an unfavorable situation that if not taken quick and effective measures, will be worsen significantly and would pose an obstacle to environmental awareness. Illiteracy rate is a serious social blight that has negative consequences on culture of remote rural families (mainly in remote district).

### Problems that are connected with water pollution and human beings activities

Environmental education has a direct impact on human health. The main challenge is the priority of education about water supply and sanitation. This is essential to respect the basic human values. Although the space of the region is very rich with qualitative, curative, and high purity water resources the supplying with continuous running water of rural and urban areas that fits to the hygiene standards is far from the international level of standards.

Seen firstly from educational point of view, illegal interferences in the water supply network represent one of the main obstacles. Quality of drinking water does not reach parameters due to mismanagement of existing water resources.

This issue and high level of network damages affect on the issue that needs of the population does not meet the desired level. This is a situation with negative environmental impact but even in networks of drinking water supply.

Overcoming of this situation is one important condition for ensuring the health of population and a sustainable development of the region. Cessation of illegal interference in the network is provided a better supply and protection toward the health of residents.

Private individuals, to meet their needs (e.g. for drinking, irrigation, industry, tourism). Have drilled wells in rural and urban areas. These spontaneous interventions have affected negatively water resources and misbalance Hydro technical area. The use of extensive alluvial deposits, for the production of inert materials, for construction purposes, brings serious consequences, undermining the equilibrium profile of rivers, reducing their base erosion and damages the bridges or other structures near the river beds. Inappropriate use of gravel in river beds and water movement slows down in periods of intense rainfall, causes erosion of soft shores and flood agricultural land. Control toward the use of river gravel is provided to prevent further environmental damage in this area. In the rural area of Gjirokastra Region to every resident of rural area belongs an average 300 l / day. About 38.78% of the villages of the region supplied with water through local water supplies, but nobody disinfected it. Medical institutions in the region involved in water monitoring, do the surveillance of water supplies and the physical and chemical analysis and bacteriological water, which result in standards allowed for consumption. The river system is Drinos Vjosa has the risk of sewage that flow into them without being processed, so it is necessary to build a plant for processing them.

*The main sources of pollution are:*

- Increasing amount of polluted waters as the result of uncontrolled urban growth.
- Inappropriate concentration of fertilizers and pesticides by agriculture.
- Spontaneous interferences in water supply pipelines.
- Lack of water purification with chlorine in public water supplies.
- Spills from septic tanks near the water wells in the villages and watershed of Vjosa and Drino.
- Increase of wells in fields of the area.
- High level of pollution of wells and increase of amounts of nitrates in the waters of natyral resources, due to the lack of technical and sanitary conditions.
- High bacteriological loads( from 2 to 5 Escherichia Coli) in 21% of village water supplies.

*Photo 1. Cones of mountainous storages used inefficiently by residents (A. Sinani)*



### Problems connected with soil pollution

Ground water assets of the region play an important role in socio economical development. Assessment and rational use of these assets could create great opportunities for regional economic development. But uncontrolled and unplanned use of clay and raw materials had lead to damages of agricultural lands and also to the damage of environment.

Irrational use of inert materials from persons and private construction firm since 1990 has damaged the beds of rivers, land and water ecosystems, has stimulated land erosion and decreased continuously agricultural fund. Use of chemical fertilizers, pesticides, herbicides and insecticides has steadfastly stability of agro system, structure and damaged fertility of the land. Rural community primary task is to protect the soil from erosion and illegal constructions, which are significantly, lowering its funds and curb the illegal settlement in the urban agricultural land.

### Problems related to the biodiversity protection

Inappropriate deforestation, excessive grazing, hunting and fishing, etc, have favored the soil erosion and damage of biodiversity. These are examples of mismanagement of natural resources in Gjirokastra Region. During the transition period is increased volume and use of forests for firewood and material, since opportunities for residents to use other sources of heat have been limited. Annual balance between natural growth and consumption of wooden materials for burning, natural damages (floods, snow and avalanches, etc.) and human (logging abusive, deforestation, excessive grazing etc.) is negative in favor of cutting, endangering seriously the forest potential.

Awareness to protect animal biodiversity in the rural area of district is immediate. Cutting, burning and excessive grazing have consistently brought more than 20% of vegetation covering surface, especially Mediterranean pine forest with its massifs of Wide Mountain, Libohova's, Valare's and Tepelena's hills. Illegal use of this plant floor (600-1000m), mainly to rural areas is damaged by human intervention and used for firewood, fodder for cattle in the winter season, building material etc.

Most of the district area is rich in rare species exposed to abusive actions and hunting without criteria. Wild Fauna in the district of Gjirokastra is more susceptible to hunting without criteria. Damage to the fauna in the district of Gjirokastra has come from habitat destruction, massif deforestation, burning

of forests and pastures which are the main shelter of wild fauna and wide use of pesticides.

Socio-economic environment and ecology of the rural area in Gjirokastra Region offers potential opportunities for development-oriented forms of sustainable pasture and livestock. The most harmful economic action to pastures is uncontrolled burning during the summer months, which disappeared valuable medicines, seeds and promotes erosion flame. Significant impact on the environment have reducing of green space, interruption of natural biological communication due to division of green surfaces into small parts, the discharge of raw waste into the environment, etc.. Falls and collapses, favored by the misuse of land, and natural vegetation, cause damages of natural environment and human activity.

### Problems related with supporting of cultural and natural tourism offer

Environment and landscape of the district, among rural heritage values favor the development of different types of tourism. In terms of geographical interest is focused in adapting human activities on environment and sources offered from it.

Adapting to the characteristics of the environment is today's main concern of a geographer in two aspects: to protect against the damaging effects of natural factors (particularly climate) and for a rational use of natural resources to realize a complex sustainable and efficient development, in tourist aspect.

As for the Gjirokastra Region, natural resources are varied. A part of property, as are construction materials, has been under an intense use, with serious consequences for the environment and tourism. Rural spaces of Gjirokastra Region are a valuable tourist asset, for the domestic regional and national and international market, alike. This property also presents particular interest because of the positioning of the region into a region with traditional tourist corridors and near major tourist movement. However, until now the region's tourism assets are not used efficiently. Rural communities are still not aware of the importance of the development of this sector. In addition, the quality of the environment and landscaping, construction and the presence of waste are obstacles for the development of tourism. It is important authenticity of historical cultural objects and their protection against misuses of economical benefits from them, raising the values of monuments and possibilities of using their resort.

Cultural geographical rich offer (material and spiritual heritage, archeological sites, castles, museums and museum areas, characteristic buildings, cultural institutions and sports, etc.) enables the use of tourist revenue growth relevant to rural communities of the region. Natural geographical offer is present in all forms of relief: mountains, fields, valleys, caves, gorges, canyons, etc. They are appropriate for strolling-tourism landscape, sports, ecotourism etc. Geological natural monuments have unique value as a resource for scientific information varied. These geo monuments must be preserved and managed with great care to support and develop the best traditions of the tourist district, after offering great opportunities for development of tourism, industry and socio-economic life of the country's southern region. Also is necessary to be minimized negative impacts of tourism in terms of environmental, economic and socio-cultural developments.

## Problems related to environmental quality and rural landscape of the region

Some environmental characteristics of the region are: degraded terrains, mainly on slopes as the result of deforestation and agricultural over use, urban environmental degradation, especially in overcrowded areas, reduction of green areas, uncontrolled interventions in infrastructure, degradation of esthetic landscape elements etc.

*Rural landscapes* of the region have three main functions: social, economic and ecological. Physical processes and chemical degradations have a big impact on the quality of environment and landscape. In order to achieve a sustainable economic, social-cultural and ecological development, importance should be given to evaluating process of the environmental impacts of any activity.

For a positive perspective, have a great importance the combination of integrated and sustainable rural development with urban development, since cities are active centers for people, agro businesses, small non agricultural industries, markets of agricultural and livestock products etc as a prove of awareness of inhabitants of this region to return to inherited cultural values and further development of them Environmental organizations should promote activities in the service of maintaining a clean landscape. Important role in these activities have school students at any level, with active participation and demonstration of cleaning facilities. Concrete initiatives are needed for community awareness and support from state structures propaganda campaign, concrete actions and funding for the landscape.

## Demographic pressures and threatening in Gjirokastra Region

Demographic movements during transition period have increased the pressure on natural resources, especially on fertilised lands, forests and pastures.

Major evacuations and uncontrolled population movements from rural to urban areas of the region have brought increasing of illegal construction in areas of agricultural areas and damage of environment.

The key factors that lead to the break of balance environment- human being are economic activities and demographic processes, when these are conducted in accordance with principles of ecological science.

The main challenge of rural community of Gjirokastra Region is to avoid destruction of environment when extension and expansion of population is done in rural areas close to the towns of the region where the demands are greater:

- ❖ Is necessary an intelligent use of environment, which is expensive and complicated by different nature of environment, from which many residents have to learn more.
- ❖ Environmental should be closely related with the culture of rural society.
- ❖ Rural community should be known with long terms plannings for the use of physical environment.

## Environmental values and new models of behaviour in rural society of the Region

Environmental Education is the process that makes society aware of the environment and gives the opportunity to gain knowledge, values, experience and act individually and collectively to solve environmental problems. They are focused in particular on aspects of environmental protection and on a sustainable development and include a wide range of educative environmental materials. Information should have a general character, to fit with urban schools as well as rural areas, allowing teachers to adapt the materials according to the nature of the region.

Values and new models serve to the involvement of other stakeholders and the community in organizing of extracurricular activities. Specific information constitutes a source of information and knowledge environment of the district, the current situation and ways to protect and its well use. According to environmental specialists in the region, environmental education aims to transmit love and care for nature.

“The impact of human activities has been and is more or less violent, so it's time to stop this trend towards destruction” - say the environmental specialists in the region. According to them, anyone must be aware that survival depends directly on the natural environment of human behavior. Providing opportunities and awareness are basic equipments that can help people to feel responsible for their property, the environment. The use of nature is seen already not only as expression of the ability to benefit as much as possible to increase welfare, but also as a big responsibility that goes parallel to obtain goods. According to specialists in the region, environmental problems are based in the community and the negative impact of man on nature, to acknowledge and change the way of life and attitude towards the environment that brings risks and long-term consequences for all indicators of life. The reaction of common people towards environmental problems is different and many time not the same. They note the degradation of natural values and short-term and long-term consequences of this degradation.

Operation of civil society and community involvement in solving environmental problems in Albania should be more active and should start since in early ages and include different age groups of society. Specialists said that awareness about environmental problems and their impact on the level of living, as well as public involvement in decision-making is a long process that does not automatically accomplished with violence, with payment or by copying it.

But meanwhile, as elsewhere in our county is felt the necessity of awareness of citizens not to damage the environment, but to protect are necessary clear policies.

“All these require a better education environment” - say specialists. Education today is not simply an issue of human rights, but it is seen as a prerequisite for sustainable development.

In view of environmental problems facing the region today, which are a result of uncontrolled development and degrading the environment, environmental education is seen as a priority, as a key tool for good governance of natural resources. Environment and its protection should not be considered as belonging to terms “state” and “others”, but the community as well as the impact is universal. Environmental education is a permanent and continuous process, starting from early childhood to adult education and generations that goes beyond formal education. As a result, should be stored on our common values mutual respect between people, nations and



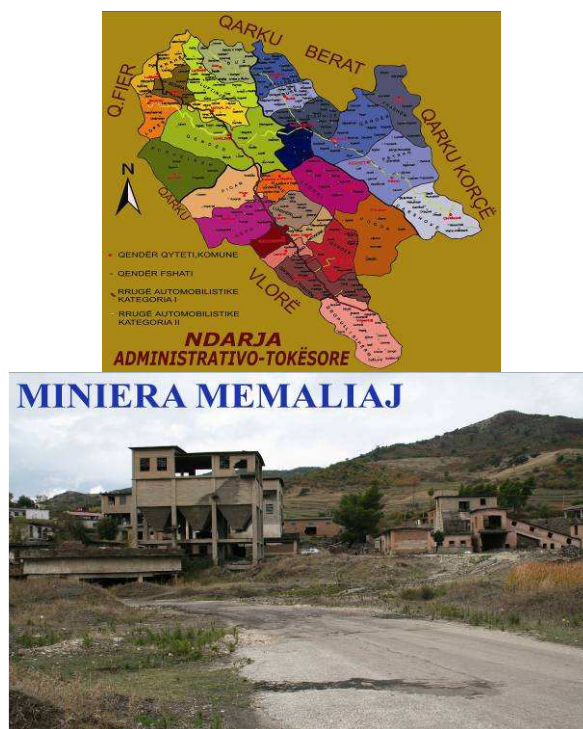
generations, equity and environmental balance changes affecting the view of students and teachers, to make life in the region safer, healthier and more prosperous, thus enhancing the quality of our lives. Environmental education develops and reinforces the capacity of individuals, groups, communities, organizations and countries to try and elect it on bases of what is best for sustainable development in harmony with the environment of the region. Report environmental action-inaction is constantly changing and restoring natural stability is the responsibility of actors operating in the rural area of district. Avoiding of conflicts, is done using environment forms of intervention, as are central institutions, local organizations and NGOs, businesses and communities.

The issue of saving the environment requires proper behaviors and proper economic activities under the concept of a sustainable development, which constitutes theoretical basis of long term development of economy and society as it is underlying rational exploitation of natural resources. The essence of a sustainable development is in treating the environment as common functional elements of community, outside of which development can not be accomplished. Sustainable development is of multi sector interests and requires the integration of economic, social, community, protection of various ecosystem's value and wealth, promote consistency in the development of alternative sources, strengthening the ecological sensitivity of the population, organizations and institutions, etc. Environment as a concept and limit of time requires participation of active participation of communities and stakeholders operating in the rural area, the preservation and generation of resources, understanding and well using its constituent components, respecting the rules of economic action and social-environmental the empowering development and environmental sustainability in the desired direction.

In rural area of the region, *environmental services* are still inexistent, despite the fact that their need is very big especially for the processing of urban wastes and used waters

*Environmental awareness and community education* is a key factor for appropriate protection and management of natural resources, but activities for this purpose are scarce, mainly at the level of school education. Rural poverty has a direct impact on the quality of the natural environment, because the rural population needs to survive, using up natural resources or spoiling their content. Old industrial centers (Memaliaj mines etc.), actually abandoned, create environmental problems threatening the health of residents.

Map 2. Administrative-territorial division of Gjirokastra region (A. Sinani) Photo 1: Mine of Memaliaj (A. Sinani)



Environmental organizations have not yet managed to extend their awareness activities in rural space. The main causes of rural environmental degradation are deforestation of forest in order to open new land area (1945-1990) economic activities and construction of the “Wild type” without keeping in minds the impact on the environment (transition), the lack of integrated management plan of environment etc.

## Conclusions

1. Mismanagement of the environment in the region has affected the health and lifestyle of people, has threatened the use of natural resources and environmental values, has destroyed tourist potential becoming so an obstacle for a sustainable development
2. Rural Area of Gjirokastra District has unused opportunities of clean qualitative and rich on mineral elements water resources
3. Completing and improvement of water supply infrastructure for the population will affect significantly on the quality of life and rural environment of our region in present time and in its future
4. Attraction of foreign and domestic investments for the preservation, protection, improvement and rational use of natural environment is the main condition for a sustainable social economic development of the rural area of the region and to create a healthy economic environment
5. Ensuring of environmental sustainability of the rural area is the main the duty of local and central community, institutions, and organizations aiming sustainability of socio economic development in rural area of Gjirokastra Region.

Transformations of the structure for the educated people during the transition period and changes associated with progressive reforms of educational system based of western European standards, launching of new series of projects for the democratization and modernization of school, introducing new technologies in teaching and consolidate civil and environmental education in school. Sustainable economic development, social-cultural and ecological should pay attention to importance to assessment of impacts on the environment for every activity in the region.

### Suggestions

1. To recognize environmental planning at communal level with participation of rural communities of the region in function of a healthy environment.
2. To increase awareness of rural consummators of environment and do an efficient assessment of it.
3. To increase the level of investments in order to support its tourism use and preservation of natural and cultural heritage.
4. To include rural communities of the region, local authorities and other stakeholders in the managment process of forests and pastures.
5. To keep in control reduction of livestock number at the level of best keeper of forsts and pastures.
6. To made possible to let environmental info to be used in local and central level.
7. To include environmental issues at schools increasing understanding and caring toward environment.
8. To organise effectively participation of the community in environmental decision making.
9. To icrease the service's quality through information, education, communication and awareness and responsibility level of parents.
10. To change the behaviour toward environment in general and to increase level of awarenese of public institutions, local authorities and communities about consequences of abusive use of space, mismangament of territory (erosion and reduction of soil fertility, pollution and environmental degradation, landscape damage etc.)
11. To be proposed models for a rational use of spaces and natural resources that guarantee social and economic development and preservation of environment and landscape values of rural areas of Gjirokastra Region.
12. To develop an network of environmental information using statistical and computer methods.
13. To do long term planning for the use of physical environment.
14. To strength cooperation between organizations and ecological institutions with economic impact, to serve so to the reducing of environment pollution and damages.
15. To improve legislation for a rational administration of environment such are: obligation of economic subjects to reduce pollution through the use of technology that is less polluting than others, installations of special equipments to treat in them technological wastes doing their recycling.

16. To clean rural areas for polluting wastes (liquid and solid ones) to establish ecological companies which in collaboration with Regional Agency of Environment, to take care for the protection and well administration of environment.
17. To prohibit by law importing of polluted goods that can cause pollution of the area.
18. To use media and other means of propaganda, to make possible awareness of the public and economic entities to pay more attention and more dedication to the renewal of natural environment spaces that are damaged in Gjirokastra Region.

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