

## **Environment-population relations in Albania and their impact on the management of socio-geographical space**

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**Abstract:** *Environment-population relations in Albania and their impact on the management of socio-geographical space.* There is a very interesting relationship between population on one hand and environment on the other, which can offer useful contributions to broaden the understanding of this subject. It is an interdisciplinary field of study, due to the broad-spectrum that it displays. A specific territory, a region anywhere on the globe, makes sense, existence and development, at the same time it evolves only as a result of interaction between it and human activity. Constantly, nature, the environment, territories and different regions around the world, have been the arena of conflict clashes, which have emerged for various reasons and factors. Relations between population and geographical environment in Albania are presented with some particular features. There are effects and important reciprocal relationships between the natural factors such as the landscape, climate, hydrography and lands on one side, intertwined with social and economic activity on the other. Cooperation between these factors is expressed also in the presence of many environmental phenomena, which are quite problematic for the population of Albania in its socio-geographical space. In certain socio-geographical areas we find the presence of water pollution, land degradation, erosion and desertification of different territories. At the same time, such environmental situations are increasingly being present, dealing with the pollution of the atmosphere as a result of the use or production of different assortments, which are transmitted into the air by the burning of harmful substances to human health, causing in many cities a thick smoke screen and pollution; there are loggings and damages are observed in the flora of the forests and the various areas, and many tourist and social

economic constructions damage in many cases many territories, with indiscriminate exploitation in terms of the tourism of many coastal and alpine areas etc. At the same time, due to overcrowding in many territories, mainly in urban areas, in many of them from year to year, numerous problems arise, which have many concerns related to the use of water, mineral resources and their economic use, such as the case of oil, the need for construction and land in their disposal, the power supply of hydrosupplier relations, thermal, renewable energy, etc. Likewise, many tourist places are losing their importance because of the sewage spills in them or due to the discharge of industrial waste, where there are no more specific areas for spilling or their concentration. The complexity of these issues mentioned above is analyzed in this paper. Besides, dealing with the relations between people and the environment, attempts are made by the author to highlight the role of social planning and social policy in the management of the socio-geographical space of Albania.

*Key words:* environment-population relations, socio-geographical space, Albania, environmental issues, human impact, management

### **THE ROLE OF NATURAL FACTORS IN THE POPULATION OF ALBANIA**

The Albanian population is subject to constant change and evolution, as a result of the cooperation of natural factors on the one hand and economic, social and religious factors on the other. The

most prominent is the role of natural factors in the population settlements, their evolution and living conditions, etc. We emphasize that the impact of these factors is seen in different ways and with multifaceted effects. The role of natural factors in the development of the population of Albania is critical. A greater impact, related to these factors, is seen on the constituent elements such as the landscape, climate, hydrography and land. In many cases, cooperation of the natural factors has conditioned the evolution of the development of the population in the socio-geographical space of the country. Relations between these factors often have enabled different developments of elements related to the diversity of the population, its evolution, in various socio-geographical spaces, in rural and urban areas (Axhemi 2007).

The role of the landscape is prominent, with a significant contribution in leading to the settlements of the population. We highlight significant changes to this population establishment at an altitude above sea level. To a greater extent, the population of Albania is located in the flatland socio-geographic spaces (in the western and northwestern part and in the southwestern part), where the major administrative centers are concentrated, such as Shkodra, Tirana, Durrës, Fier, Lushnja, and Vlora, etc. A small part of the population of Albania is located in the hilly territories (in the central, eastern and southeastern part of the country), where other administrative centers stand out such as Elbasan, Berat, and Korça etc. A very limited part of the population is located in the context of its deployment in mountainous areas of Albania, mainly in the (northern, north-

-eastern, eastern, south-eastern extremes of it) with administrative centers such as Kukës, Dibra, and Kolonja.

The landscape has led to other important processes dealing with the geomorphology of many geographical spaces. Slope and erosion-denudation processes, etc., have enabled the emergence and development of erosion, landslides and demolition, thus influencing in the creation of non-favorable geographical spaces for the lives of the population and its settlements. These issues are found in some parts of the socio-geographical spaces of Elbasan, Mallakastër, Mat and Librazhd, etc.

Regarding the role of natural factors and their impact on population, the role of the climate is also very critical. Albania is fascinating due to the presence of a variety of microclimates, which have an impact on the development of the population and their economic activities. In addition to basic divisions and differences that are noted in the conditions that the Mediterranean climate, plains and hilly areas offer along with the Mediterranean, mountaineous areas and foothills, it is very important to have an analysis in the function of the opportunities it has in terms of the development of various economic activities. The climate diversity has served as a main natural resource in terms of the cultivation of varied agricultural crops in different parts of the socio-geographical space of the country. Several agricultural crops, from wheat to maize, potatoes and beetroots, a variety of fruit trees, citrus fruits, and viticulture are the most influential in the development of the economic activities of the agriculture sector in Albania.

The climate, with the diversity of its elements, has had an important impact on the development of economic activities, such as tourism development. The large number of hours and days of sunshine (Saranda 2,731 hours of sunshine per year, Vlora 2,722 hours of sunshine per year, Fieri 2,800 hours Tirana 2,560 hours of sunshine per year), their perennial extent, the presence of snowfalls, the number of snow days (about 100 snow days in Razma, Thethi, Boga, Voskopoja, Valbona), have an important impact in the context of their perennial exploitation of tourism resources (Physical Geography of Albania 1990).

On the other hand, these climate natural resources have stimulated the population establishment in various administrative units, part of the socio-geographical space of Albania, in creating the opportunity to benefit from alpine and balnear tourism activities. In terms of the benefit of tourism activities we can mention such important socio-geographical spaces of the establishment of populations as Valbona, Thethi, Boga, Razma, Voskopoja, Shëngjini, Velipoja, Durrësi, Vlora, Saranda, etc.

The socio-geographical space of Albania is well-known for its rich and complex hydrographic network, composed of diverse rivers, a considerable number of lakes, divided by their origin, wetlands, and groundwater, and seas such as the Adriatic and Ionian seas. This hydrographic richness has played a prominent role in the development of the population. Many of Albania's main administrative centers are located near these important hydrographic basins. Therefore, Durrësi is located near the Adriatic Sea, Vloralies near the Adriatic and Ionian

littoral space, Saranda near the Ionian Sea, Shkodranear on Shkodra Lake, and Pogradeci near Ohrid Lake, etc.

Due to its rich hydrographic resources the socio-geographical space of Albania has also developed an important economic activity, which is extended in several key areas, such as tourism, fisheries, and hydropower activity. The complexity of the littoral, lake and river socio-geographical space of the country has a significant potential for tourism development. There is a considerable presence of social places of housing, production, exchange and entertainment related to the development of tourism (such as bars, restaurants, hotels of different types and sizes) along the littoral and coastline. We can mention in this respect the socio-geographical spaces of Shiroka and Zogaj in Shkodër, Kunë-Vain in Lezha, Lalzi Bay in Durrës, Orikum and Himarain Vlora, Tushemisht in Pogradec, etc. In terms of hydrographic resources, the development of tourist activity has influenced the population establishment in these parts of the socio-geographical space of Albania, enabling them to generate economic activity from tourism to the advantage of individual and family lifestyles, helping to ensure adequate incomes for the beneficiary population.

Another important activity for the population of these territories, which is closely linked with the hydrographic resources, is fishing – part of the socio-geographical space of the country. The economic activity of fishing is a real advantage to the population, to its particular social groups, dealing with fisheries, in order to provide food for their families. At the same time, tourism development demands to supply fresh food

coming from the hydrographic basins of the sea, lakes or rivers, such as fish and its diversity of species. In this way, many people provide incomes for their families, through the fish trade in different restaurants.

Another impact of the hydrographic resources in terms of the people's lives is to use them as an energy source. The socio-geographical space of Albania is distinguished in the Balkan Peninsula for its hydrographic richness and consequently for its hydropower potentials. Yet, we have not only the presence of several powerful hydropower plants in the country, such as: Fierza, Koman, Vaui-Dejës, Ashta, Ulza, Shkopeti, and Bistrica, which are not only used for the energy production for the population in the country, but also for exportation to other countries. This has influenced the development of the improvement of living conditions in Albania, with job openings in diverse social categories of the population, according to different professions, technicians, engineers, and hydrotechnics, etc.

The lands are also an important natural factor, with a great impact on the population of the socio-geographical space of Albania. This impact is seen in a number of settlements, in a variety of agricultural crops, and in the presence of mineral resources. These numerous and diverse settlements in the socio-geographical space of Albania are attributable to the lithological and structural diversity of natural resources (Gjoka 2012).

There is a favorable and unfavorable geographic space depending on the physical, chemical and lithological-structural qualities about the building of settlements and therefore to the population.

The lands of Albania are quite diverse in types and composition. According to their categories, we can deem the presence of a variety of agricultural crops, which have a significant impact on the development of agriculture, on food and on the lives of the people and incomes through their commercial activity, on the agro-industry and agro-tourism development.

The lands of the socio-geographical space of Albania also hold important reserves of minerals. In this way they have served and serve as an active potential for the development of the mining industry. In this respect the mineral resources of chrome, copper, iron, nickel, and coal, etc., have made possible the establishment of extraction plants in many parts of the socio-geographical space of the country, having an affect on the job openings for local people. Many social categories, according to their professions, such as technicians, engineers, miners, etc., have created living opportunities by working in the mining industry in Bulqiza, Krasta, Katjel, Prrenjas, Selenica and Vlora, etc.

#### ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES AND THEIR IMPACT ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE POPULATION IN ALBANIA

The presence of various environmental issues in the socio-geographical space of Albania has had an influence on the serious developments in the evolution of the population and settlements in Albania. We should estimate that the relations between them increasingly are becom-

ing the subject of discussion of public opinion, due to the importance they have for the population. Besides the scientific analysis conducted by researchers of several geographical, environmental, biological, chemical, and engineering disciplines, etc., we take account of the undertaking of a number of initiatives or public actions and protests from civil society. We can mention in such cases the ecosystem of Vlora in 2011, the import of chemical substances in 2013, and the waste import in 2016 etc.

During the transition period, the socio-geographical space of Albania was accompanied by several environmental issues, which had their impacts on the population developments of this particular part of the socio-geographical space. From the scientific analysis' point of view, it is interesting to refer to the erosion and denudation issues in certain parts of the socio-geographical space of the country. Those particularly more common are in the socio-geographical space of Elbasan, Librazhd, Mat, Dibër and Mallakastër. On one hand, these erosion and denudation processes are favored by environmental damages, and on the other hand, by being a real problem for the establishment of the population and its living conditions. We estimate that such issues are closely related to the uncontrolled cutting down of forests and land degradation, thus enabling the starting point of numerous and diverse processes of demolition, destruction and landslides (Ziu 2015).

Similar processes have seriously violated the geographical environment of these socio-geographical spaces by destroying residential buildings and agricultural lands, thus having negative

impacts on the living conditions of the local population, as part of these socio-geographical spaces in Albania. Such problematic situations of the violations of environmental balances are accompanied by serious impacts on the population. Under the influences of these environmental issues, the population is obliged to migrate toward other socio-geographical spaces, in the context of internal or external migration. Statistics show that the population of the socio-geographical space of Librazhd is more prone to migration toward Elbasan, and those of Mati and Dibra to destinations out of the country, or toward Tirana.

Another environmental issue affecting the lives of the population of certain territories in the socio-geographical space of Albania, is related to the coastline change, and marine abrasion. Being influenced by global and local factors, significant interventions are being identified on the Adriatic Sea coastline, in its particular segments. The marine abrasion is expressed in some segments of the beaches of Velipoja, Shëngjin, and Patok, etc., which has ruined not only the environmental balance of these particular parts of the socio-geographical space of Albania, but has been associated with negative impacts on their local populations. In a concrete manner, many buildings, bars and restaurants are affected by the sea, as well as part of the population living there and tourist activity of these socio-geographical spaces, in these cases by sabotaging their lives.

Another issue related to environmental problems in the population impact of the socio-geographical space of Albania is associated with floods. Generally under the influence of local factors in many

cases floods are affecting many socio-geographical spaces in Albania, accompanied by serious negative impacts on the population's lives. Similar issues related to inappropriate construction on the riverbed surfaces, riverbed destruction for the use of gravel for building purposes, blockage of many channels of water drainage, building of settlements in different collectors in urban and rural areas, and several lines of pumping stations in agriculture are out of order, etc., and altogether represent some of the main causes of floods in Albania over the last 26 years. More problematic floods for the population appeared in the socio-geographical space of Shkodra in 2010 and 2011, in the socio-geographical space of Lezha in 2013 and 2015, and in the socio-geographical space of Vlora in 2016 etc. (Krymbi 2013).

Another serious environmental issue with a considerable impact on the lives of the population is related to environmental pollution. Previously in the socio-geographical space of Albania we had the presence of some polluted areas, which have been transformed into geographical spaces with a negative impact on the lives of their local population. Of major concern is the situation in the socio-geographical space of Mallakastër; as a result of its pollution from oil and its by-products, numerous health problems to residents are taken into account (Municipality of Ballsh 2013).

At the same time, as a result of pollution that this socio-geographical space has, serious problems are highlighted even in agricultural products for the local people, which are closely linked to their problematic qualities. Intensive forms of pollution are also expressed in the socio-

-geographical spaces of Fushë-Krujë and Krujë, which is closely linked with the operation of the lime kilns where burning is fueled by the burning of tires of old vehicles. A number of concerns are observed in the population's health, with disease spreading related to problems in the respiratory system, etc. Environmental pollution is also observed in the peripheral parts of the urban socio-geographical spaces in Albania. In particular, pollution is present in the area of Kombinatin, the socio-geographical space of Tirana, in the Martyrs' Cemetery in the socio-geographical space of Shkodra, and in the territories nearby the river of Zaranikë in the socio-geographical space of Elbasan, etc. This pollution has caused serious problems in the lives of the population in these peripheral areas, where we constantly observe trends of residents leaving their homes of origin for other destinations.

Another issue of great concern regarding environmental pollution is the pollution of beaches. Particularly in the area of Currila in Durrës and in the socio-geographical space of Golem beach cases of environmental pollution are reported, as a result of the sewage released into the sea. This has affected the lives and establishment of the population in these tourist socio-geographical spaces from time to time. Year by year, a decrease of tourist flux is noted in these tourist socio-geographical spaces, with the trend to leave towards other destinations, the migration of the population to other settlements, relocation of tourist services and other economic activities or their closures by locals. Other pollution is also observed in the socio-geographical spaces of Shiroka, near Shkodra's

lake, where the ruins of bars, restaurants and other buildings, built near the lake shores, are deposited in the waters of Shkodra. In this way, this has caused that a lot of tourists are not visiting the beach and the waters of Shkodra.

Relations between population developments on one hand and environmental elements on the other, have also significantly affected the balance of sustainable development in certain parts of the socio-geographical space of Albania (Axhemi 2007).

In particular, environmental balance breaking is shown in the framework of numerous urban uncontrolled constructions in different urban areas of the country. These constructions are present in several parts of the socio-geographical space of Albania, just like the case of settlements built on the socio-geographical space of Tirana, in the Durrës beach area, in the socio-geographical space of Orikum, and in the socio-geographical space of Saranda, etc., have significantly led to the destruction of their sustainable development. Identified issues, in terms of the presence of overcrowding in certain socio-geographical spaces, and in terms of the absence in the accomplishment of social services to the population, perform their social functions of production, exchange, and entertainment, etc.

#### ENVIRONMENT-POPULATION RELATIONS MANAGEMENT IN ALBANIA

Recognizing and analyzing mutual relations between the environment on one hand and population on the other is necessary and indispensable to their

management in the context of the socio-geographical space of Albania. The management of the environment-population nexus is important due to the dual nature of this process.

First, the theoretical nature of management has an influence on the scientific importance of such research topics. In the context of the interdisciplinary theoretical approach, conditions and factors having an affect on the environment-population relations and their related issues, environmental problems and their impact on the development and evolution of the population, their geographical distribution, etc., should be highlighted.

Second, practical nature is related to the specific importance in the socio-geographical space of Albania that this environment-population nexus has. This practical importance is affected by concrete and applicable impacts that environmental problems have on the population of the socio-geographical space of the country. These environmental problems have their affect not only on the living conditions of the population, but also on migration, food, economic activity, and the social situations of social groups in the context of their geographical distribution.

The management of environment-population relations in the socio-geographical space of Albania will be based on the principles and standards necessary to keep the natural and the environmental balance. In this respect, of great interest are the measures that should be taken in the context of the prevention of human activity which threatens and undermines the above standards (Hanxhari 2011).

As we put an emphasis on the above issues in the context of geographical

distribution, in certain parts of the socio-geographical space of Albania are recorded inappropriate interventions of human activity on the natural environment. Uncontrolled cutting down of forests, ineffective use of agricultural land, numerous constructions without planning according to scientific and urban norms and standards, pollution of waters and rural and urban geographical spaces, and interventions in hydrological regimens of different hydrographic basins, are just some of the negative elements which arouse the environmental balance breaking in certain parts of the socio-geographical space of the country, such cases like Tirana, the former backwater of Durrës beach, Lurë, the entrance to Puka and Dibra, Porto Romano, and the coast of Vlora, etc.

The management of environment–population relations has in itself a particular necessity influenced by the opportunities of sustainable development in the socio-geographical space of Albania. The encroachment of environmental values and the identification of environmental problems both affect the prospect of a sustainable development of the geographical space (Hanxhari and Yzeiri 2010).

On the other hand, the natural offer lack toward the population, imbalance and problems that can be encountered in their evolution, and natural factors such as climate, relief, hydrography, and land, are working as negative impacts for the establishment of the population and its living conditions in certain parts of the socio-geographical space of the country. Identified cases are in the socio-geographical space of Elbasan, Librazhd, Mat, and Mallakastër, etc. They are real

indications of breaking the relations of the sustainable development in these territories, as separate parts of the socio-geographical space of the country.

In the management of the relations between the environment and population, a particular role is played by the scientific contribution of researchers. Studies conducted by many researchers, associates of the academic staff at the Universities of Shkodra, Tirana, Vlora, Durrës, and the Polytechnic, etc., have aimed at highlighting the issues and problems of various categories related to the environment and its elements, environmental issues and impacts in the geographical space, their role on the population, in the settlements and social life. Organizing a series of scientific events on such topics, scientific publications in the context of specific issues of the environment and population, their relations and evolution in different parts of the socio-geographical space, have a significant contribution to make in being introduced to the central and local governmental institutions in the service of environmental protection and restriction of its impacts on the population developments of the socio-geographical space of the country (Municipality of Ballsh 2013).

Also, civil society, various NGOs, associations and independent organizations are playing a significant role. Their activity is increasingly being intensified by raising the public's awareness regarding many issues in the field of the environment, breaking of environmental balances, and sustainable development, etc. In particular, their contribution to the protection of such matters related to environmental pollution and their impact on the lives of the population, against the



waste import, chemical weapons, and interventions in the hydrological regimen that undermines and violates the nature ecosystems on the river of Valbona plays a prominent role.

The main directions to the management of these relations between environment on one hand and population on the other in the socio-geographical space of Albania, require intervention through social planning and a different social policy. Environmental issues identified in certain parts, their impacts on the population developments, should be recognized and valued by the structures of central and local government. Based on surveys, immediate measures should be taken to avoid environmental violations and their impacts on the population, by different social policies, assistance and emergency programs, and different investments in the problematic socio-geographical spaces. A real indicator of such effective interventions we have in the socio-geographical space of Dajçi, in Shkodër, with investments and adjustments made in the Buna river dikes, after the floods of 2010 and 2011 (Krymbi 2013).

## CONCLUSIONS

In the scientific analysis we addressed the relations between the environment on one hand and the population on the other, as well as their management in the socio-geographical space of Albania. These lead to the identification of several conclusions.

First, the role of natural factors in the development of the population in this socio-geographical space is highlighted. In particular, the roles of the landscape, cli-

mate, hydrography and land, have their impacts in many ways on the lives of the population, thus in many cases the establishment of the population, the building of their settlements and their economic activity, is conditioned to these factors.

Second, is highlighted the presence of many environmental problems in the socio-geographical space of Albania. Our main focus has been on the issues of water and beach pollution, on the coastline change and marine abrasion, on the uncontrolled cutting down of forests, and the presence of erosion and denudation processes such as landslides, demolitions, destruction, and floods, etc. The complexity of these environmental problems is present in the context of the geographical distribution, in certain parts of the socio-geographical space of the country.

Third, the presence of these environmental problems has led to a negative impact on the lives of the population in particular parts of the socio-geographical space of the country. In certain parts of the socio-geographical space of Tirana, Librazhd, Mat, Dibër, and Mallakastër, we have the presence of the population moving to other destinations due to the negative effects of various environmental problems that affect their normal lives.

Fourth, the management of the relationship between the environment on one hand and the population on the other in the socio-geographical space of Albania is very important. This is closely linked with the theoretical and practical side of the topics that the relationship between them have. The main directions of management are oriented towards keeping the standards and principles of protection of the environmental balances, control and

the trend of human activity, maintaining the lines of sustainable development of the socio-geographical space.

Last, a range of stakeholders can play an important role in the management of the environment-population relations in the socio-geographical space of Albania. Among them, we evaluate the roles of central and local government institutions, the academic community and civil society. These stakeholders should cooperate with each-other for the specific position they have in the context of social planning and social policy in the service of establishing a positive orientation to the relations between the environment and the population in the socio-geographical space of the country.

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**Streszczenie:** *Związek środowiska i populacji w Albanii oraz ich wpływ na zarządzanie przestrzenią społeczno-geograficzną. Istnieje bardzo*

interesujący związek między populacją a środowiskiem, który może mieć przydatny wkład w poszerzenie zrozumienia tego tematu. Jest to interdyscyplinarny obszar badań ze względu na szerokie spektrum, które obejmuje. Specyficzne terytorium, region, gdziekolwiek na kuli ziemskiej, ma sens, istnieje i rozwija się, a w tym samym czasie ewoluuje jedynie w skutek interakcji między nim a aktywnością człowieka. Przyroda, środowisko, terytoria i różne regiony świata ciągle były areną wybuchających konfliktów, wywoływanych przez różnorodne czynniki. Związek między populacją i geograficznym środowiskiem w Albanii charakteryzują się pewnymi szczególnymi cechami. Istnieją tam oddziaływania i istotne wzajemne związki między czynnikami przyrodniczymi, takimi jak krajobraz, klimat, hydrografia i teren a społeczną i ekonomiczną aktywnością. Współzależność tych czynników wyraża się także obecnością wielu zjawisk środowiskowych, które są problematyczne dla populacji Albanii w jej przestrzeni socjogeograficznej. Zanieczyszczenie wody, degradacja terenu, erozja i pustynnienie obecne są w pewnych obszarach socjogeograficznych. Równocześnie coraz częściej zdarzają się inne kryzysy środowiskowe. Mamy do czynienia z zanieczyszczeniem atmosfery z powodu używania lub produkcji różnych substancji i przenoszenia się w powietrzu spalanych substancji szkodliwych dla ludzkiego zdrowia, co powoduje powstawanie gęstej zasłony z dymu i zanieczyszczenie wielu miast. Obserwuje się wycinkę drzew i niszczenie flory leśnej, powstawanie konstrukcji o znaczeniu ekonomicznym i turystycznym kosztem wielu terenów, masową eksploatację na rzecz turystyki wielu obszarów nadmorskich i górskich. Z powodu przepełnienia wielu obszarów, zwłaszcza miejskich, z roku na rok narastają w nich problemy dotyczące zużycia wody, zasobów kopalnych i ich używania, potrzeb budowlanych i terenów pod zabudowę, zaopatrzenia w energię i wodę, energii termalnej i odnawialnej itp. Liczne lokalizacje turystyczne tracą na znaczeniu, ponieważ dostają się do nich ścieki i odpady przemysłowe, dla których brakuje miejsc składowania. W tym artykule przeanalizowano złożoność wzmiankowanych problemów. Ponadto na podstawie związku ludzi ze środowiskiem podjęto próbę podkreślenia roli planowania społecznego i polityki społecznej w zarządzaniu przestrzenią socjogeograficzną w Albanii.

*Słowa kluczowe:* związek środowiska z populacją, socjogeograficzna przestrzeń, Albania, zagadnienia środowiskowe, wpływ czynnika ludzkiego, zarządzanie

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