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## DIVERSIFIED ECONOMIC ACTIVITIES – THE BASES FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT OF RURAL SETTLEMENTS IN SHKODRA LAKESHORE (CASE STUDY – ZOGAJ VILLAGE)

**Përmbledhje:** Fshati Zogaj ndodhet pothuajse në skajin juglindor të bregut jugperëndimor të Liqenit të Shkodrës, shumë afër kufirit me Republikën e Malit të Zi. Popullsia merret me peshkim, artizanat, turizëm, blegtori, bletari, kopshtari, grumbullim bimësh mjekësore, tregti, ndërtimtari etj. Këto veprimtari të shumëllojshme kanë mundësuar punësimin gjithëvjetor, nëpërmjet alternimit të sektorëve (turizëm, kopshtari, ndërtimtari, gjatë periudhës së ngrohtë; artizanat dhe veprimtari të tjera gjatë periudhës së ftohtë, peshkim, pothuajse gjatë gjithë vitit). Zhvillimi i zejeve të tezgjahut ka mundësuar punësimin e grave dhe vajzave. Grumbullimi i bimëve mjekësore angazhon fëmijët gjatë stinës së verës; me bletari merren kryesisht të moshuarit, me peshkim dhe ndërtimtari kryesisht meshkujt.

**Fjalë kyçe:** *fshati Zogaj, Liqeni i Shkodrës, shumëllojshmëri veprimtarish, turizëm, artizanat, peshkim, zhvillim i qëndrueshëm*

**Abstract:** Zogaj village is located almost in the southeastern edge of the southwestern Shkodra lakeshore, very close to the border with the Republic of Montenegro. The main economical activities of the population are: fishing, crafts, tourism, farming, bee-keeping, horticulture, medicinal plants gathering, trade, construction etc. These activities have provided a perennial employment through alternation of sectors (tourism, horticulture, construction in the warm period and crafts and other activities during the cold season, while fishing is almost throughout the year). The development of loom handcrafts made possible the recruitment of women and girls. Medicinal plants' gathering engages mostly the children during summer. The old people are mostly engaged in beekeeping, while men in fishing and construction.

**Key words:** *Zogaj village, Lake of Shkodra, variety of activities, tourism, crafts, fishing, sustainable development*

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## INTRODUCTION

Zogaj village is mentioned as a settlement in the Ottoman registers of XV century (Gruda,

1991) and is marked on Corronell's map of 1614 (Armao, 2006). It is part of Shkodra municipality, although it is located in a distance of about 10 km from the town (Fig. 1).

Zogaj is well-known to the residents of Shkodra region for its various natural resources, fishing, crafts, livestock, bee-keeping, etc., but it is not known to the rest of Albanians due to its border position. In the period 1945–1990, a special permission from the Department of Internal Affairs of Shkodra was required to visit this village.

After 1990, the residents of Zogaj village could exploit the opportunities created by the democratic system and free market economy in order to develop diversified economic activities, to attract investors, generate employment, increase and diversify the income sources and in general to improve the living conditions.

Besides the economic development, the infrastructure has been improved and the social life of the community has become more active, thanks to the strong connections with Shkodra town and nearby rural areas, which facilitates the movement of residents and tourists as well as trade of local products (fish, loom products, honey etc.). The village has an elementary school, health center, mosque, retail and other service units etc.

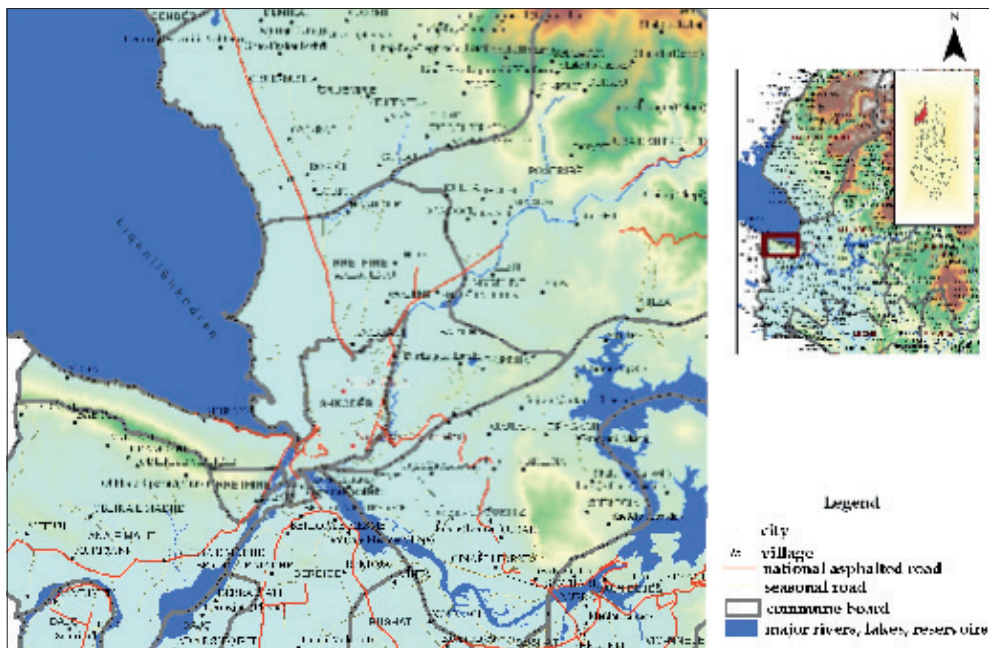


Figure 1. Physical map of study area

Fishing is the main economic activity for more than half of the households; handicrafts (carpet weaving), tourism and trade for nearly  $\frac{1}{4}$  of households, while other activities (agriculture, livestock, beekeeping, gathering of medicinal plants, etc.), provide additional income for households and perennial employment for the population.

All the socio-economic data show that Zogaj village is a prominent model of integrated and sustainable rural development to be followed by other villages situated in the lakeshore, in both sides of the border.

## METHODS

The basic research method here applied is the field work: interviews with representatives of local authorities, representatives of private entities, residents of the area, researchers etc. Also the previous works on Lake of Shkodra and the surrounding settlements have been studied; data from INSTAT (INSTAT, 2009) about Shkodra and Region no. 1 (RDS, 2010), where Zogaj village is included, have been used; topographic maps of different periods (MIG, 2007) have been used, the physical map of the area was digitalized and many photos of the studied objects were taken, etc.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The orientation of Zogaj rural community towards various economic activities is as a result of the natural conditions and historical, political and socio-economic factors.

Geological constitution and relief do not favor the development of the agriculture; Zogaj village territory is composed of Mesozoic limestone rocks highly permeable and water – soluble, while the northeastern slope of Taraboshi Mountain has a considerable steepness, not favorable to the creation and development of the productive humus layer (Gruda, 1991). Consequently, the territory of the village has limited arable soil allowing the cultivation of a few dozen olive trees, fruit trees and vineyard, as well as a limited number of vegetable for family consumption (Photo 1). Thus, agriculture was developed as a complementary branch for household economies and is practiced mostly by elderly people and women (Laçi, 2005).

The climate is field Mediterranean (northern subtype), very healthy and curative, thanks to a better circulation of air and moisture in satisfactory parameters for the human body. Climate is one of the important factors of development of various economic activities in the village, especially tourism (Gruda, 1991), at least since the beginning of the XX century, when residents of Shkodra and its surroundings began to visit the village for recreational and curative purposes, especially for curing asthma (Laçi & Rustja, 2010).

Waters are the main resources of Zogaj village. The village's development and future is closely related to the Lake of Shkodra, the largest in the Balkans (Gruda, 1991), because of: i) fishing and hunting of the water birds; ii) the lake with its water, iii) beaches, iv) microclimate etc., main element of what the village tourism offers; v) domestic water birds (ducks and geese) are fed in the lake's water; vi) the use of lake water for irrigation of gardens (with mechanical lifting or pumping); vii) the trade of the



Photo 1. Zogaj village at the shore of Shkodra Lake

residents of Zogaj with Shkodra and other settlements situated on the lakeshore (on both sides of the border) and along Buna river up to the coast by simple means of water transport (raft, mid-air, boats); viii) the development of leather handcrafts up to 60-s of XX century based on water resources (Shkodra, 1984); ix) the use of canebrakes growing in the lake (near the coast) by residents for the construction of ceilings for dwellings, covering of hut for livestock and production of craft objects; x) the use of straw for rugs; xi) the use of aquatic vegetation as food (moist and dry) for cattle; xii) the use of plankton, available in considerable quantities in the lake waters as food for aquatic fauna.

Limestone rocks and karst phenomenon prevent the habitants of this village from fresh water. Consequently they are obliged to open wells for potable water.

The natural vegetation on the steep slope of Taraboshi Mountain is rare, generally represented by species of short vegetative cycle and resistant to the long summer drought (Gruda, 1991). Some medicinal plants (sage, smoking the wild Thyme, etc.) are of an economic importance, which are gathered and sold by the habitants of the village, mainly children and women, providing considerable additional revenue (Photo 2).

The presence of sage and some other honey plants has favored the development of beekeeping, mainly as a secondary sector in the household economies, while in some cases (3–4 family) it represents an important income source (Photo 3).

Due to the almost complete lack of pastures, the keeping of considerable number of livestock was not possible. Only less than half of the families own one cow for family needs, while most of families own domestic birds. However, livestock is an additional income resource to the households practicing it.



Oak forests, which cover most of the north-eastern slope of Taraboshi, have disappeared almost completely over a century ago, while some species of Mediterranean bush, mainly with aesthetic value, grow at the foot of the mountain (Gruda, 1991).

The symbol tree of Zogaj village is mulberry tree, which is wild or cultivated (Photo 4). Mulberry

tree, as a condition for the development of the silk worm culture in Albania, during the National Renaissance was spread almost everywhere, even in the form of plantations (Shkodra, 1984). To the residents of Zogaj, mulberry tree has multiple economic value: i) the wood is used for heating and cooking and for construction of fishing boats and spades, agricultural tools, household furniture, etc.; ii) the leaves are used for the growth of the silk worm; iii) the fruits are used as fresh food for humans and birds, producing a kind of jam (pekmez) and raki, iv) the crown has aesthetic value in the landscape of settlements, especially for visitors.

Aquatic fauna is rich in fish species (carp, mullet, shad, pike, small herring, eel, sturgeon, etc.), while the land fauna is represented by the wild rabbit, fox, weasel, partridge, quail and other bird species (Gruda, 1991).

Fish reserves have stimulated the development of fishing, as the main economic activity for most of village's families. The fishing tradition is combined with characteristic cooking and serving techniques, such as carp casserole, eel or mullet baked in tile.

The fishing in significant amounts and the lack of refrigerating equipment have forced the population to develop traditional ways of fish processing and roe of carp and mullet (conservation and drying), which are known all over Shkodra region (Laçi & Rustja, 2010).

Fishing and hunting also serve as entertainment activities for tourists spending the weekend or holidays in this village.

During the XX century, there were at least three historical-political events of a significant impact on the development of various social and economic activities in Zogaj village:

Establishing of the border, in 1913, which led to the limitation of tradition-



Photo 2. Gathering of medicinal plants



Photo 3. Private beekeeping



Photo 4. Mullberry – symbol tree of Zogaj village

al relations of Zogaj village with the settlements of Kraja area (Montenegro). Despite the liberal policies of the governments during 1913–1945, these residents were forced to turn completely toward Shkodra and villages around it. On one hand, it required an economic restructuring and professional retraining of village residents, in accordance with the urban market of Shkodra, which was one of the most important handcraft centers in the Balkans (Shkodra, 1984). Under these conditions, production activities such as production of natural silk and

silky fishing nets, leather products, wool products, rugs weaving etc. were developed. On the other hand, the settlement was adapted to host citizens of Shkodra, which began to get to know with the natural values and rich traditions of Zogaj inhabitants (Anonymus, 2010). As a result, the culinary art was developed and housing facilities were adapted for hosting of the guests from the town (friends' room, etc). The contact with urban population has influenced the emancipation of Zogaj population. The expansion of relations with Shkodra, considering the lack of the road, has stimulated the development of boat-building sector for the transportation of goods and people, together with the fishing boats.

The establishment of the communist regime, with obligatory collectivization and other restrictive measures of political, ideological and economic character during 1945–1990, imposed changes in the organization and functioning of some economic activities, as well as the displacement up to the interruption of some others. During 1946–1960 fishing, loom and leather cooperatives were established; land and agriculture tools were collectivized, while in the 1980 s livestock was collected. The obligatory collectivization, the lack of competition and material stimulations etc., influenced the quality of products, up to the loss of some activities and precious handcraft traditions. During the 1960 s, silk production was interrupted, while important crafting activities such as the construction of fishing boats or leather manufacturing were moved to Shkodra town, together with some of the best specialists of the sectors (Anonymus 2010). Zogaj residents, looking for alternative income resources and living under the regime's political pressure for self-sufficiency (providing of all necessary products), in the scope of „Perlat Rexhepi” agricultural enterprise, were forced to be more involved in agricultural economy, despite the suitable natural conditions for this sector. The breaking up with the former Yugoslavia led to a drastic diminution of relations between Zogaj and Kraja residents, while the passing of residents and other persons in the border belt, where Zogaj was located, was limited and strictly controlled by the army, police and state security. The complete collectivization, the deprivation of some manufacturing activity and the tensioned relations with former Yugoslavia contributed to the isolation of the community, un-

dermining the economy, exhausting some living resources and deepening poverty (Laçi, 2005).

Establishment of a democratic political system, which restored the right of private property and of the profession exercising, respecting the law and in accordance with the free market principles. Consequently, the contacts of the community with the surrounding area were liberalized; the right of religion was re-established and the mosque was rebuilt; the elementary school was reconstructed; fishing sector as well as family and collective crafts was revitalized; tourism and restaurant sector re-appeared and started to develop; the commercial activity with Shkodra and other settlements expanded; bee-keeping and gathering of medicinal plants were revitalized etc. The right conditions for diversification of economic activities, local products and income sources were created for Zogaj rural community, forming the basis for an integrated and sustainable socio-economic and environmental development.

The aforementioned statement describes fishing as the main economic activity for most of the families in Zogaj village; handicrafts and tourism are the main income source for nearly a  $\frac{1}{4}$  of households, while other activities play an additional role (Laçi & Rustja, 2010).

In antiquity Zogaj inhabitants were also well-known for building navigation tools of Liburn type and were famous seamen. Fishing is one of the oldest professions of Zogaj inhabitants, certified by the discovery of fishing tools of Neolithic and roman period (bronze hook, found in Kalldrun village in Koplík and exposed in the Historical Museum of Shkodra) (Anonymus, 2010).

Fishing is exercised privately or in small groups (family members or not) until 1946, when the first fishing cooperative was established. The production (all the fish that was caught) was delivered to the Fish Gathering Company, while fishermen were paid based on the catch. After 1990, the cooperatives were taken apart, and tools and fishing equipments were privatized by former fishermen (Anonymus, 2010).

Today, legitimate fishing is carried out in the scope of FMO (Fishing Management Organization), established on 23 March 2003 with Shiroka as center and with three secondary branches (Shiroka, Zogaj and Koplík). Fishermen from Zogaj, Shiroka, Rrethinat, Vraka, Koplík, Stërbeqi, Jubica, Kamica and Shegani are part of the organization. FMO has 400 members, who exercise legitimately, but (according to informal sources), there are also about 200 persons fishing illegally in the lake (FMO, 2010).

About 34 families of Zogaj village (about 73 in total) are members of the FMO, but fishing involves at least one family member (Photo 5).

FMO has given license to 192 mid-air, simple fishing boats. Most of the caught fish is carp (60%), mullet (10%) and shad (10%). By 2010 it is foreseen for the members of FMO to fish about 20 tons of carp, 30 tons of shad, 26 tons of small herring, 20 tons of mullet, 10 tons of eel etc. Fishing by licensed persons is carried out with nets (FMO, 2010).



Photo 5. a – Fishing Management Organization in Zogaj village; b – Fishing boats.

Fishing seasons are as follows: i) in spring time: shad, carp, pike, sturgeon, trout; ii) in summer time: big mullet, bass, etc; iii) in fall time: small mullet, eel, small herring, etc.; iv) in winter time: flounder, etc.

FMO takes care for the reproduction of the fish, so that the fishing is balanced and does not harm the lake biodiversity.

Despite the efforts made to organize and legitimate the fishing sector in the Lake of Shkodra, it continues to face with different problems, such as: i) increasing of the number of fishermen (a part of them not having any experience in the fishing sector); ii) fishing with very fine nets, affecting new fish generations; iii) intensive fishing even during reproduction period; iv) blocking the „gorges” during the circulation period of the fishes for breeding; v) interruption of the supply of the lake with fish maggot;

Fishing with explosives and electric power, mainly in the throat and along the coasts, where large concentrations of larvae are found.

Until 1945, the handcraft in Zogaj was more important than today because fishing activity was not a sufficient income source. There was a leather processing factory working for craftsmen of Shkodra producing leather objects (Shkodra, 1984). The raw material (animal skin) was bought in Shkodra's butcheries, while the processed leathers were sold in the artisans' shops in the Old Bazaar of Shkodra. In the late 1950 s, this activity moved to Shkodra town, where a leather processing factory was established. The closure of this activity in Zogaj village deprived the community of a significant income source.

Women and girls of Zogaj village are traditionally involved in weaving rugs in looms, which were produced and maintained by village's masters. This is a profession inherited generation after generation, which has made Zogaj village well-known all over Shkodra region. The raw material (sheep wool) was bought in Shkodra market and other markets nearby (Malësia e Madhe is known for sheep breeding). The processed wool and quality products made by loom were sold directly to clients or



*a**b*

Photo 6. a – Women involved in weaving process; b – Loom products.

were sent in the shops of the Old Bazaar of Shkodra. In 1848, Zogaj exported to Austria 567 kg of thick wool (Shkodra, 1984).

During communist period, a loom cooperative was established in Zogaj village, where dozens of women and girls were forced to work in a joint sector for rug weaving, which became famous especially in foreign markets (most of production was exported).

Handcraft rug weaving continues even today as an activity that employs a significant number of women and girls of the village (a private entity established in 1992 today has about 20 workers, while others work privately in family crafts). Wool rugs and bags of different types and dimensions, produced by a traditional technology, are distinguished not only for their high quality, but also for their artistic values and originality, full of contrasting colors and impressing motifs (Photo 6).

In Zogaj village, as rarely in any other village, this tradition is being renewed (mothers teach their daughters how to use the loom) (GTZ, 2007). The production is destined for trade and is sold mainly to the shops in Shkodra. Manufacturers also take orders directly from the customers, producing according to their taste. Loom products are required especially by tourists visiting Zogaj village and Shkodra region.

The tourist offer of Zogaj village is: i) natural: the location on rocky shores, with small but interesting bays and beaches, providing a more intimate atmosphere; deep clean water, suitable for swimming, diving and other aquatic sports; natural flora and fauna representing economic scientific and esthetic values; olive trees and gardens also represent attractive elements of village's landscape, not only as an income source, but also because of the special atmosphere they create; Taraboshi Mountain with its steep slopes and karstic forms is another attractive element; fishing using original tools and methods are very attractive to national and foreign tourists; and, ii) cultural: tradition of the handcraft; rich folklore (clothing, customs, history and legends related primarily to lake and Taraboshi mountain); the internal structure of the settlement (based on hypsometric levels), architecture (2–3 store dwellings, with large bal-

*a**b*

Photo 7. a – Tourist objects; b – Visitors of Zogaj village.

conies and orientation towards the lake, with yards full of flowers and gardens separated by stone walls or fences), infrastructure of the settlement (causeways climbing towards the roads passing parallel to each floor); traditions in culinary art, especially in lake fish cooking, which has created a positive image in Shkodra region and other areas as well, traditional hospitality to the visitors etc. (Gërdoçi & Kabuni, 2008).

The tourist hosting capacities of Zogaj village are still limited, but constantly growing and improving. Tourist investments were made along Zogaj-Shiroka road (restaurants) and within the village, in the lakeshore (buildings with 2–3 floors with the necessary facilities for family vacation, which last 7 to 30 days per year, mostly from May to October). Restaurants are mostly frequented by „excursionists” from the town or foreign visitors, while accommodation facilities have about 18 rooms with about 46 beds. The dwellings of local people, adapted for tourists, have approximately the same hosting capacities (Troshani, 2006) (Photo 7).

The tourist attraction of Zogaj village lies in its: i) stillness and the opportunity for a direct contact with nature and people; ii) restful and inspiring natural environment; iii) original rural environment, which is very traditional and welcoming, making possible the discovery of mysteries of traditions and customs in the rural world; iv) pleasure of tasting local products, handicraft produced and v) relatively low prices, etc (GTZ, 2007).

Meanwhile, in Zogaj village has positive premises for the development of agro-tourism (Troshani, 2006). Today, tourists might profit from village’s characteristic local products such as fish, honey or handicrafts products, which in the future can be completed with other elements such as fishing tools and techniques, farming and agricultural tools, bee breeding and honey extraction techniques, drying of fish and fish eggs, preparation of jams, beverages etc., which are very interesting, especially for foreigners.

Also, important elements of tourist offer in Zogaj village are expected to be boating and equitation, exhibitions or market fairs of specific local products, organization of popular games and aquatic sports etc.

The number of tourists who choose to rest in the lakeshore is increasing, even because prices are lower than those of tourist entities situated in the coastal area (Gërdoçi & Kabuni, 2008).

The lake and Taraboshi Mountain are attractive even to another category of tourists: those who are fond of fishing and hunting.

## CONCLUSIONS

The diversification of economic activities, as an opportunity for integrated and sustainable rural development, is not fully exploited in Albania (Laçi, 2001). Zogaj village, unlike most of the villages along Lake of Shkodra, has not based its existence and development in the agricultural activities (in the strict sense), but in the integrated development of fishing, handcrafting, tourism, farming, gardening, gathering of medicinal plants, trade and other services, providing employment opportunities and diversifying the income sources for each family. Thus, not only Zogaj village has managed to survive and develop, despite some political and economic unfavorable conditions, but at the same time it has created a suitable model for sustainable development of rural settlements situated in lakeshore, as well as those in mountainous areas.

Despite the abovementioned values, Zogaj village is known quite a little in the Albanian area. Therefore it needs to be promoted, in order to be integrated into regional, national and international tourist itineraries, aiming the revitalization of community's social and economic life.

Zogaj is part of a protected natural area (Lake of Shkodra: managed natural landscape: IV category, according to the IUCN classification). Therefore it is important to raise the awareness of rural community, local leaders and specialized institutions on the importance of territory and natural resources management in accordance with the principles of sustainable development.

Zogaj is a boundary settlement. Identifying the values of geographical position, natural resources, historical and cultural heritage, characteristics of settlements and of socio – economic development of Zogaj village, it is intended to get the attention of decision -making institutions on the possibility of giving to this village or to a larger area in both sides of the border (Shiroka and Zogaj in Albania, Ostrosi and Muriçi in Montenegro), a special status, which promotes the expansion of cross-border relations, the carrying out of joint development and integration projects, in local and regional level.

Being of vital importance to the community, it is required that fishing in Lake of Shkodra must be controlled and managed by local and state specialized structures, in accordance with the principles of sustainable development and biodiversity conservation. This can be carried out thanks to the improving of the Lake of Shkodra as a protected area of a highest category.

Despite the efforts of private entities, the loom handcraft activity and tourism sector need to be financially supported (with soft crediting) and promoted through

an organized marketing with the support of local, regional and national specialized structures.

The promotion of tourism values and the involvement of Zogaj village in regional, national and international tourist itineraries will make tourism an important sector for the economy of the community.

In this fragile sector of Skodra lake ecosystem, it would be advisable to develop types of tourism that do not harm the environment equilibrium and biodiversity.

Handcrafting activities in Zogaj village are inherited from generation to generation, but it would be interesting to open a professional high school in Shiroka or Shkodra, where, in addition to other professions, weavers, fishermen, managers of natural resources, tourism and services sector employees would be prepared.

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