Brief description of Berat.

The city of Berat is located in South-Central Albania, 120 km south of Tirana. It has a population of around 100,000 people. The old town was inscribed in the World Heritage List of UNESCO in 8th of July 2008 as “a rare example of an architectural character typical of the Ottoman period”. Berat was declared a Museum City in 1961 by the Government of Albania.

The town is one of the oldest in Albania, with a fortress-settlement- the Castle, having existed since at least the 4th century BC with a continuous life until nowadays. It was the settlement of the Illyrian Desaretes tribe, who were the first to built fortifications in the city - the basements of the Castle. Known as Antipatrea, it was captured by the Romans in the 2nd century BC. Tit Livy - a famous Roman historian, describes it as a strong big town, settled in a narrow rocky strip of land. Livy tells for the cruelty of the Roman legions who “… killed all people from sixteen and up, destroyed the city walls and put the city on fire”. The Romans called the city Albanorum Oppidum (Albanian Fortress).

During the Byzantine period in the 5th century, the city was known as Pulcheriopolis (from Pulheria) after the name of the sister of the Byzantine Emperor Theodosius who took the town. This name Pulheria, that meant “beautiful, wealthy, strong city”, was given to the city not casually; it was becoming a key center with a high cultural growth.

In the 7th century began the Bulgarian invasions, which lasted until the year 1018, naming Berat as Belgrad – White City.

In the 14th century the town was transformed into the capital of a big principality, under the rule of the Albanian noble family of Muzaka.

In 1417 Berat was under the Ottoman occupation. During the Ottoman invasion, Berat remained one of the biggest cities in Albania.

The town is known for its cultural heritage, historic architecture and natural beauty and is known as the "Town of a Thousand Windows", due to the many large windows of the old houses overlooking the town.
It is a remarkable scenic town, with beautiful buildings of high architectural and historical interest. The city has a mountainous and hilly relief with the highest peaks of Tomori mountain (2,416m) and Shpiragu mountain (1,218 m) which combined with the valley of Osumi create a beautiful landscape in the town.

Berat bears witness to the coexistence of various religious and cultural communities down the centuries. The old historic part consists of three quarters divided by the Osum River: Castle (Kala), Gorica and Mangalem. The town also has the Medieval Center which consists of old religious monuments of Bektashi sect and a 15th century mosque.

The Castle is one the most marvelous sight of the city. It has remained faithful its plans which date back to the 4th century BC. From time to time, it has performed some changes during the 6th, 8th, 15th and 19th centuries. It is not only one of the biggest inhabited Castles, but also a stone archive, that offers a variety of styles and contributes of different époques: Roman-Byzantine, Albanian and Ottoman.

The Codices of Berat

*The “Purple Codex of Berat “ (called Beratinus)*, contains extracts from the Gospels and it is one of the oldest variants used for the text of the *New Testament*. At the time it was written in the 6th century it was one of the five existing codices throughout the world. *The Codex Aureus* represents the second most important codex of Berat, is a manuscript of the 9th century. UNESCO has shown a great attention toward the protection of this unique heritage of the old liturgy literature in the world history. The Codices of Berat are inscribed in the Register of the World Heritage List.

Regional Attractions:

*Mountain Tomorri National Park* is the largest protected wildlife and outdoor recreation area. Visitors to the Park environs will find an abundance of nature’s gifts ripe for exploration and outdoor recreation.

*Cascades of Bogove*: The Cascades of Bogove are a light hike up from the village of Bogova. The trip along the river banks, takes approximately 45 minutes to reach the cascades and natural springs. The cascades of Bogova are the region primarily source for fresh drinking water. Hidden in the cool shade of the forest of the foot of Mountain Tomorri, the cascades offer a popular retreat from the summer heat of the region. The village of Bogove is about an hour ride from Berat.

*Canyons of Osumi:*
The canyons of Osumi are standing evidence of the active geological history in the area and mainly trails and areas for outdoor recreation.

**Climate**

The region around the city typically has a Mediterranean climate, though given the topographic variation there are diverse microclimates as well, including alpine. The driest month is July and the wettest months are November and December. The micro-climates immediately around the city are very favourable for farming, and thus development of local agribusinesses is seen as very important for the city’s economic development.

**Demography**

Berat’s available human resources now position the city as an important source of economic development for Albania as a whole. The majority of the population is of working age and the presence of a large population of youth. The city has a population of 100,000 inhabitants.

**Municipal government**

The Municipality of Berat forms part of the district with the same name and is the centre of the Berat Region. The Municipal Council, as the decision-making organ of municipal government, has 31 members, which were last elected in June 2015. The Mayor of Berat is Mr. Petrit Sinaj and is elected directly by the voters.

**Municipal budget**

The main sources of income for the municipality are budgeted by both central and local government; the former is very important and is divided into conditioned and unconditioned funding.

The local government has, in addition to the investments made to improve the city infrastructure, made a special priority for the use of its revenues for the direct benefit of its citizens through direct services offered to the community.
Social- Economic Strategy of the city:

VISION
Berat, the Noble City with Noble Hearts, will be a municipality thriving on sustainable economic development, with consolidation of its agribusinesses and handicrafts, and a family tourism centre focused on its unique history and culture.

Goal 1:
Development in the Berat region of agribusiness and the respective SMEs through appropriate utilisation of the potential in production, processing and marketing.

Goal 2:
Tourism development for Berat through utilisation of its unique historical and cultural heritage.

Goal 3:
Development of the urban environment of Berat in compliance with contemporary parameters and in harmony with specific features of the city.

These goals express the main directions in which the development of the municipality will follow, and are listed below according to their importance and to the creation of a favourable environment. They are developed through careful analysis of the vision and deal with issues crucial to the development of the city.

I. Economic profile of Berat

Local businesses, especially producers, want to develop and expand by using the region’s natural resources and geographical advantages with great effectiveness and efficiency. Tourism-based businesses exploit the city’s historical and architectural heritage. Artisan businesses, though small and based around the family, want to keep traditions alive and even expand into the national level and possibly into international markets.

Meanwhile, commercial businesses are reshaping their profile, merging with domestic production.
The main base on which this development depends, besides tradition and other above-mentioned factors, is the expansion from small and medium to large business and the change in business structure, focusing in Berat mainly on agribusinesses, hotels, tourism and services.

**Main advantages of Berat municipality**

Berat has a favourable geographic position for installation of a modern, complete infrastructure. Its location, flora and fauna, and its unique architecture and artefacts make the city attractive for tourists and appropriate for the development of a good quality of life for its citizens. The economy of the city is focused in three directions: Infrastructure, tourism and services.

The big producing and manufacturing businesses, of light and food industries are developed by exploiting the resources of the region. The most part of the small businesses deal with ambulant trade and services. In the city operate 1496 businesses. Production and services are the two main pillars of the economy. 40% of the products circulate inside the Country, the remaining good are for export.

There are many other active businesses in Berat, including the industries that deal with food products, meat and alcoholic and non-alcoholic drinks. Some manufacturing industries are attracting investments. They are the light industry, construction materials woodwork etc.

There is an increase in the industry of stone manufacture, by exploiting the natural resources of the Tomori region for construction materials and decorative stones. In the inner market these materials are substituting to a certain extent the exported materials and are present in the international market as well.

The region has a typical Mediterranean climate, which makes it possible to develop agriculture as an important foundation for development of agribusiness. The total surface area of nearly 23 km$^2$, of which about six km$^2$ are urban and nearly two km$^2$ are agricultural land, supports the idea of developing local agriculture. In addition, the farm irrigation system is still functioning, so that one important part of farming infrastructure is already in place.

Agro-business is a promising sector for the future development of Berat which is reflected in the number (41) of operating businesses in this field. The total territory that they cover is 23.5% of the total surface area, the number of employed people in this
sector is 42.3% of the total employment and they make 49% of the total number of businesses.

The Uznova district of Berat is the municipality’s newest administrative division and includes a considerable amount of agricultural land. It provides many possibilities for development of agriculture, with farming enhanced because of the proximity of villages and communes to the city.

Furthermore certain agricultural products such as olives, figs and cherries have been cultivated in Berat for thousands of years. Today they cover about 13% of the agricultural land of Berat.

At the moment the agro-business industry in Berat uses still the local agricultural products. The export of these products forms a considerable part of the total export of the District.

Berat is home to numerous museums and cultural artefacts, which together have a unique value, making the city attractive for both local and foreign tourists. There are some 108 cultural monuments in the city, and the Mangalem district is home to a unique complex of museums of remarkable architecture. The district of ‘one thousand windows’ has one thousand and one possibilities for foreign, national and local tourists. The Castle district has many important cultural objects, including, since 1961, the Onufri Museum, while the district’s unique architecture has attracted the attention of both local and foreign researchers. The Gorice district is another museum complex, again of architectural importance, forming part of the natural and historical wealth of the city that attracts local and foreign visitors alike.

The population of the city is relatively young, with an average age of 28 years and with a life expectancy of 70 years. Thus, it has a young, willing workforce, which, given the importance and quality of education in Berat, is also well qualified. Improving further both professional and general education, to deal with certain gaps, would improve the qualifications of that workforce.

Continuous improvement of municipal services and infrastructure is an important feature that opens a new prospective for the future economic development of Berat, while the favourable situation concerning law and order provides a secure investment environment for business.

Around the city, there is adequate space for enhanced concentration of businesses within the existing industrial zone and for improvement of the battery plant area in order
to make it an important site for development of agribusiness. The zone’s location makes it a suitable area for establishing an agribusiness wholesale market.

The distances to Berat from the country’s seaports, airports and other cities are not substantial and make communication easy.

**Partnerships and networks**

The city of Berat in July 2007 becomes part of the Network of Balkan Towns with historic centers. After, the network has applied for EU funds for joint projects. This has been a very fruitful experience for us, because part of the network are EU countries, and we have had the possibility not only to apply for the EU funds, but also to share the experiences in details for the standards of the preparation and implementation of the projects.

In 2010 – Berat becomes part of the World Heritage Cities Organization and is presented in the whole packages in, and having the possibility to be promoted.

In addition, in September 2010, Berat became a member of the European Cities of Culture and Art Network – with an invitation from the French Association of the cities of Art and Culture.

Berat is also a member of the NALAS network (Local Authorities of South-eastern Europe).