

Arbër Road and The Socio-Economic Transformation of the Municipality of Klos

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Abstract: *This study aims to analyze the transformative impact of the construction of the Arbër Road on the socio-economic development of the Klos Municipality, an area with a rural character in northern Albania, characterized by geographical isolation, high emigration and slow economic development. Using a mixed methodology that includes document analysis, statistical data, and stakeholder interviews, the study reveals notable changes in agriculture, tourism, and microenterprise development. New guesthouses and local businesses have emerged, while returning emigrants are investing in small-scale projects supported by government schemes. Informal markets and cultural events are also revitalizing the local economy. Despite these advances, challenges remain, such as limited spatial planning and weak institutional capacities. The study concludes that Klos is a clear case where road infrastructure, combined with strategic support, can catalyze inclusive regional development through economic diversification, community engagement, and diaspora reintegration.*

Keywords: Road infrastructure, regional development, agrotourism, Arber Road, Klos Municipality.

INTRODUCTION

Road infrastructure plays a key role in fostering economic and social development, especially in rural areas, where lack of access severely limits development opportunities. According to the World Bank report (2019), improving road infrastructure contributes to increased trade, improved public services, tourism development and poverty reduction. International literature highlights the fact that investments in transport networks and road infrastructure have significant positive effects on GDP growth, employment and regional development (Banister & Berechman, 2001; Lakshmanan, 2011; European Commission, 2023). In a recent study on the Western Balkans, The Vienna Institute for International Economic Studies (wiiw, 2025) emphasizes that modern infrastructure is one of the key factors influencing post-pandemic recovery, improving regional integration and attracting new investments. In the same vein, a study by Jaćimović et al. (2025), focusing on the Western Balkan countries, argues that the development of physical infrastructure is among the most important factors that promote regional economic growth and accelerate rapprochement with EU structures.

In this context, the Arbër road represents one of the most important strategic interventions in the road infrastructure of Albania, not only because of its historical importance, but also for its multifaceted impact on the economic development of the regions it crosses. Built on a route dating back to the Roman period (1st-2nd century), this road has historically connected the coastal region of Durrës and Tirana with the hilly-mountainous region of Klos, Bulqiza and Dibra and further with the continental region of North Macedonia (Halili, 2013;

Shtylla, 2007). The completion of the Arberit road has the potential to significantly reduce the economic and geographical isolation of the northeastern areas of Albania, shorten distances to larger markets such as Tirana and Durrës, reduce transport costs and create favorable conditions for the circulation of goods, people and capital. The distance Tirana-Klos has been reduced from 112 km to only 36 km, while Tirana-Peshkopi from 180 km to 82 km, which translates into a significant reduction in travel time and costs. Its impact on the Municipality of Klos is particularly significant, as this area has faced deep problems of depopulation and economic stagnation for decades. Between 2001 and 2011, the Municipality of Klos lost over 20% of its population due to emigration and internal migration (INSTAT, 2011). With around 20,281 inhabitants currently (Civil Registry, 2024), distributed in four administrative units (Klos, Xibër, Suç and Gurrë), the area has traditionally supported economic development in agriculture and livestock, which still represent around 45–50% of economic activity. Meanwhile, the service sector is experiencing steady growth (30–35%), and the mining industry remains important (15–20%).



Figure 1. Road corridors in the Balkans and the interregional and European impact

The construction of the Arbër Road has stimulated a new development dynamic, characterized by the return of investments in tourism and agrotourism, the revitalization of artisanal and agricultural activities, the return of emigrants and the creation of a new climate of economic optimism for the area. Concrete examples include new investments in the establishment of guesthouses, the growth of organic and artisanal products in the area, the establishment of ambulatory sales markets along the road axis, access to major consumer markets, etc. This article aims to analyze this complex and multidimensional transformation, highlight the social and economic

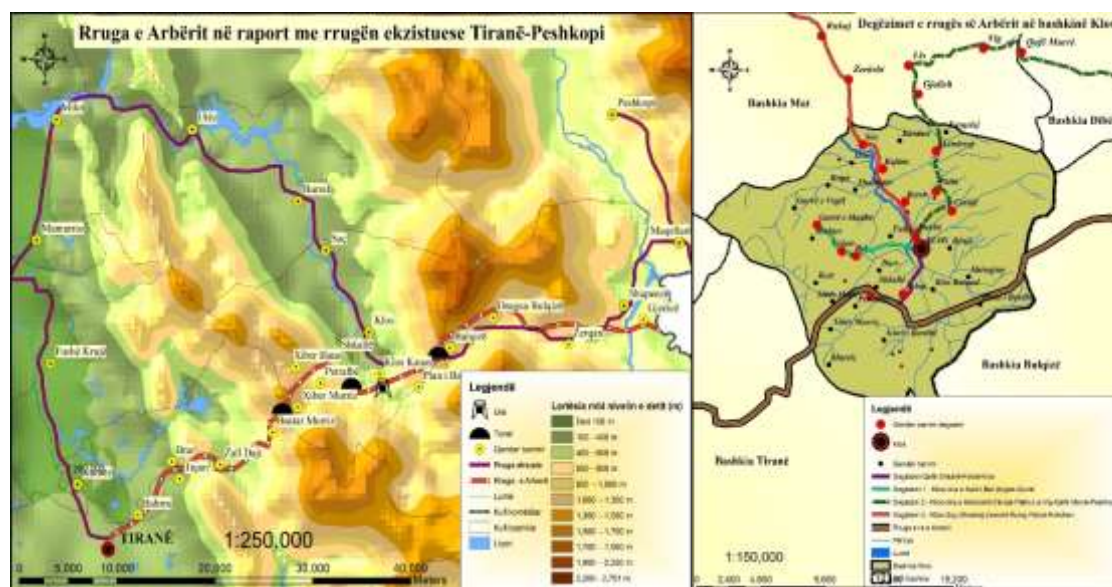


Figure 2. Arber's road in relation to the existing Tirana-Peshkopi road

impacts stemming from an infrastructural intervention of this level, and suggest measures to deepen the benefits and guarantee inclusive and sustainable development. The paper proceeds by reviewing the literature, explaining the applied methodology, analysing the key socio-economic impacts, and concluding with implications and suggestions for future research.

LITERATURE/THEORETICAL UNDERPINNING

The role of infrastructure, particularly road networks, in fostering regional economic development has been widely documented in the international literature. Banister and Berechman (2001) emphasize that transport investments can generate productivity growth and enhance regional competitiveness, particularly in peripheral areas. Similarly, Lakshmanan (2011) argues that transport connectivity has a multiplier effect on rural development, facilitating access to markets, services, and social integration. These arguments are further supported by the European Commission (2023), which highlights the strategic role of infrastructure in strengthening economic cohesion and reducing regional disparities in the Western Balkans.

In recent years, two key conceptual frameworks have shaped the understanding of infrastructure-led development: transport-led development and place-based rural development. The transport-led development approach posits that investment in connectivity acts as a catalyst for local economic transformation, particularly when paired with supportive institutional and policy frameworks (Crescenzi & Rodríguez-Pose, 2012). Meanwhile, the place-based rural development perspective, as developed by Capello (2013) and later expanded by the FAO and OECD (2019), emphasizes the importance of leveraging local assets, such as natural resources, culture, and human capital, within the context of improved accessibility. This approach argues that rural development should not be based solely on generalized policies but on tailored strategies that reflect the unique potential of each territory.

Despite a growing body of research in the Western Balkans examining the role of infrastructure in economic convergence (Jaćimović et al., 2025; RCC, 2024), studies specifically addressing the socio-economic impacts of strategic roads in rural Albania remain scarce. Comparative research from Kosovo (Mustafa M. & Hasani A., 2025), North Macedonia (World Bank, 2021), and Montenegro (CEED, 2022) reveals similar patterns of transformation following road infrastructure upgrades, particularly in the tourism and agriculture sectors.

However, these studies often focus on national corridors or urban linkages, while rural areas like Klos have received limited academic attention. This gap justifies the relevance of the present study, which adopts a place-based perspective to examine how the Arbër Road, a strategic infrastructural intervention, has influenced key development dynamics at the local level in Albania.

METHODOLOGY

This study uses a mixed-methods approach, combining qualitative and quantitative data collection and analysis to analyze the multifaceted impact of the Arberi Road on the socio-economic development of the Municipality of Klos. The methodological framework is guided by the principles of place-based development research, emphasizing the importance of understanding localized dynamics within a broader regional and infrastructural transformation. Quantitative data were obtained from secondary sources, including national statistics published by INSTAT (2021–2023), civil registry data for the Municipality of Klos (2024), and development and investment reports from the Ministry of Infrastructure and Energy, the Ministry of Agriculture and Food, and the Municipality of Klos. These data provided a basis for assessing demographic changes, the sectoral composition of economic activity, and measurable growth indicators in agriculture, tourism, and small enterprise creation.

To complement and analyze these findings, around 11 semi-structured interviews were conducted with different local target groups during the period March-May 2025. Interviewees were selected based on purposive sampling criteria to ensure representation across sectors and perspectives. The sample included: 2 local government officials (representatives of municipal and administrative units); 4 owners of newly established guesthouses or agritourism businesses; 3 farmers operating in the area; 2 returned emigrants engaged in small-scale investments. The interviews aimed to explore perceptions, experiences and concrete impacts related to improving road access, with particular attention to changes in investment behavior, market access, tourist flows and socio-cultural dynamics. Qualitative data were analyzed taking into account the objectives of the study, which focused on three main thematic areas: (1) economic revitalization and diversification, (2) changes in mobility and market integration, and (3) the role of infrastructure in supporting community resilience and return migration. A combination of quantitative indicators and qualitative insights was used to strengthen the validity of the findings and capture the nuanced relationship between infrastructure and rural transformation. This integrated methodology allows for a more comprehensive understanding of the impact of the Arbr Road and reflects a growing trend in development studies to combine statistical analysis with context-based and qualitative data.

RESULTS/FINDINGS

4.1. The role of geographical position, natural resources and their potential in the socio-economic development of the Municipality of Klos

The Municipality of Klos, located in the northeastern part of Albania, represents a territory of geostrategic and natural importance. It lies in an area that connects the mountainous region with the central lowlands of the country and is located along the axis of the Arbër Road, a key artery that connects it with Tirana, Burrel, Peshkopia and further with North Macedonia. This position makes the territory of Klos a potential node for economic and commercial development, especially in the context of an Albania that is striving to integrate more closely with the regional and European market. The area includes four administrative units: Klos, Xibër, Suç and Gurrë, which together create a rich natural landscape with great potential for development. Klos has historically been an important economic and commercial center, as evidenced by toponyms such as "Maja e Qytezës", "Dyqanet e Venedikasve" and the ruins of Petralba or the Xibri Castle (Kurti, 1998). This historical

background reinforces the local identity and adds value to the development of cultural and archaeological tourism.

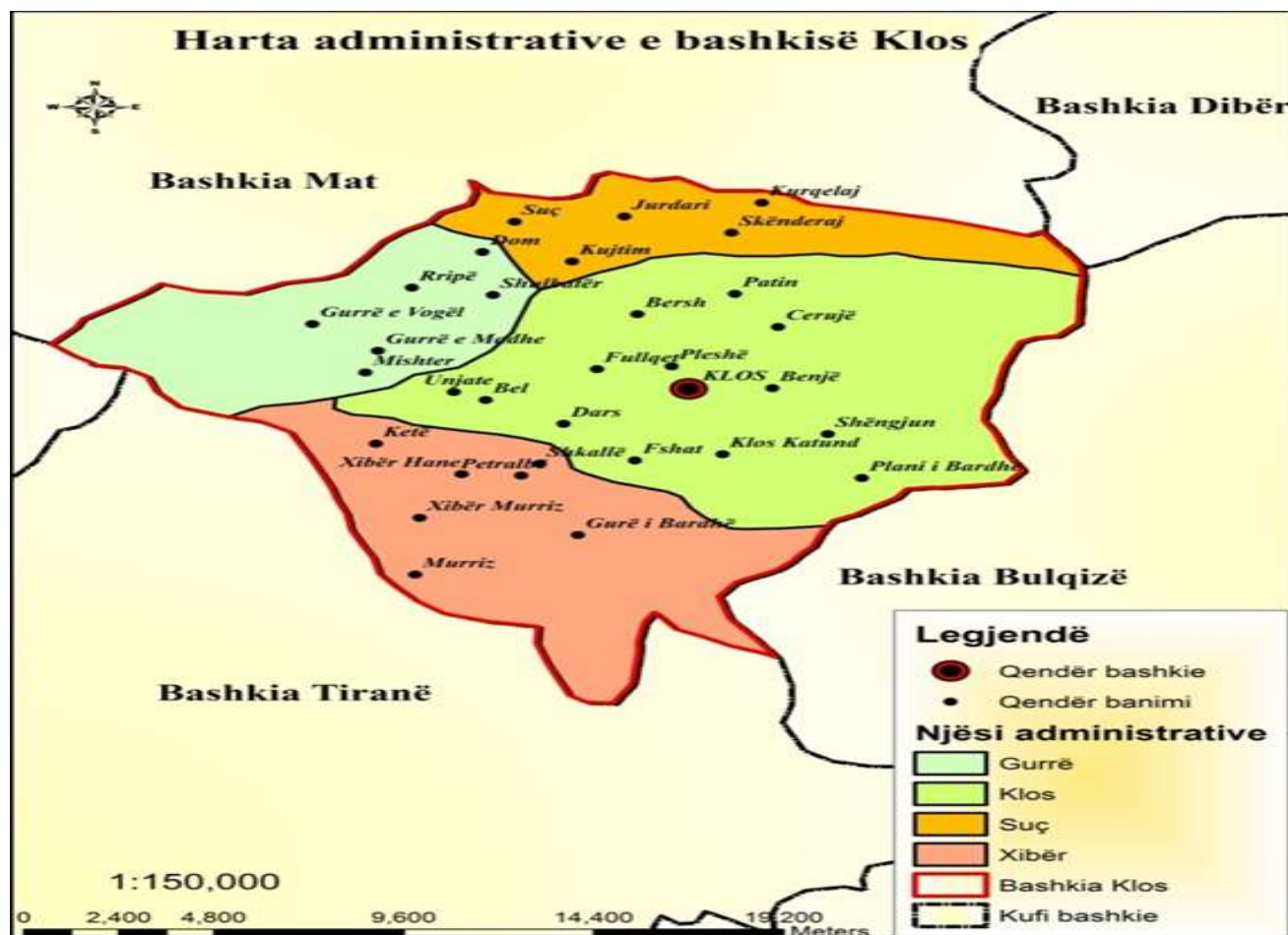


Figure3. Administrative map of Klossi Municipality

In the study "Physical Geography of Albania", of the Academy of Sciences (1991), the natural background of the area is analyzed, where the territory of Klos has an extraordinary wealth of natural resources, which extend both above the surface and underground. The geological formations consist of igneous, sedimentary and molasses rocks, which contain a wide spectrum of industrial minerals. The most important chromium deposits are located in the Shkallë–Qafë Burrel–Manazdre areas, where the forecast reserves of chromium oxide are estimated at several tens of millions of tons. The Xibër–Llapush area is known for its important sources of marble and marbleized limestone, while in QafëDardhë, Cërurë and Shatinaj significant concentrations of copper and nickel minerals have been found. Also, in the localities of Shoshaj and Shëngjun there are significant reserves of industrial clay, which is used in the construction and processing industry. The topography of the area is particularly favorable for integrated development. It includes fertile plains (Klos, Pleshë, Suç), deep valleys and mountains reaching up to 2100 meters above sea level (Mali i Micekut) (Academy of Sciences, 1991). The hilly and foothill Mediterranean climate with abundant rainfall creates optimal conditions for the cultivation of various agricultural crops, especially cereals, fodder, vegetables and fruit trees. The hydrographic network is dominated by the Mat River and its tributaries, which together with powerful springs such as the Shehu i Darsit and Shëngjuni, offer opportunities for the development of irrigated agriculture, small-scale hydropower and sustainable tourist uses. The soils are mainly brown and forest brown, suitable for agricultural

crops and the development of fruit trees. Biodiversity includes oak and beech forests, as well as a considerable number of medicinal and aromatic plants traditionally collected by the inhabitants (Pazari, 2014). Forest fruits and plant products represent an important economic asset that m still remains insufficiently exploited in the area.

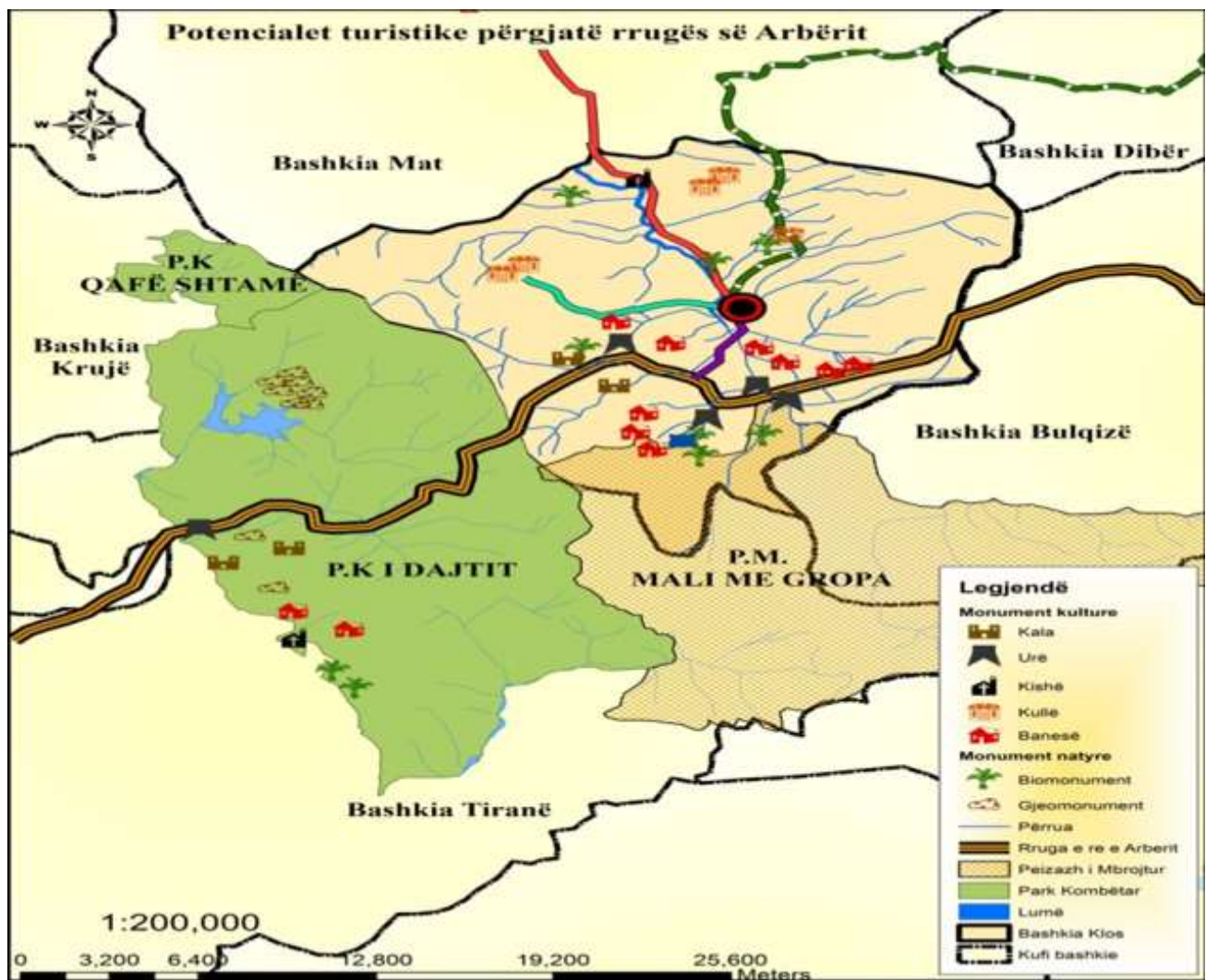


Figure 4. Touristic potential along Arber's Road from Tirana to Klos

The economic development of the Klos Municipality is based on the use of these natural resources. Agriculture is the most important sector for employment and family income, where the production of wheat, corn, fodder and vegetables dominates. The tradition of fruit growing and especially viticulture remains an inherited value, especially in the production of raki and white wine from local varieties is a traditional value that has high potential for agribusiness development. However, the development of agriculture encounters obstacles such as the division of land into small plots, lack of mechanization, lack of support with modern inputs and ownership problems. In recent years, a trend towards revitalization of this sector has been observed through the creation of new plantations and mini-farms, especially in the villages of Xibër and Gurrë. Growing interest in bio and organic products by urban consumers offers new opportunities for income diversification in the area. Livestock is also widespread in all administrative units. The activity includes cattle, sheep, goats, poultry, as well as the breeding of bees and equines. However, the lack of a value chain (processing, market, storage) means that a large part of the production remains for personal consumption. The industry is mainly represented by chrome

mining, with over 10 entities licensed by the Ministry of Energy and Industry. The reactivation of the selection plant in the village of Shëngjun has increased processing and export capacity, contributing to increased employment and income. The service and trade sector, concentrated in the town of Klos and along the Arbër road, includes a growing network of small businesses, bars, restaurants, gas stations, etc. Klos's historical role as a commercial center is recovering, especially after the improvement of the road infrastructure.

Tourism is one of the most promising growth sectors in the area, which is closely linked to the natural resources and cultural heritage of the area. Natural attractions such as the glacial lakes of Balgjat, the Mati valley, monuments such as the Horse Chestnut, the Zabeli plane tree and untouched water sources, create considerable potential for nature and mountain tourism. Cultural heritage includes castles, towers, traditional dwellings and toponyms that give the area a special historical character. Villages such as Gur i Bardhë, Xibër and Fshat offer great opportunities for the development of agritourism and hospitality, with traditional local products.

In line with European trends for rural development and sustainable tourism (UNWTO, 2022), new hospitality structures such as “Bujtina Çupa”, “Bujtina Çeliku” and “Te Mulliri”, a successful initiative of a returned emigrant, have been established in the area. These initiatives have not only increased tourism capacities, but have also created models for the development of the social economy and the involvement of the community in the creation of added value.

Transformation of agricultural markets and value chains in Klos

The completion of the Arbër Road has brought about a substantial transformation in the agricultural economy of the Klos Municipality, a sector previously constrained by poor accessibility and market isolation. This section presents the key changes through four interrelated dimensions: improved market access, diversification of production, informal trade emergence, and institutional support for agribusiness.

Improved access to markets and logistical efficiency: The enhanced road connection has significantly shortened travel times between Klos and major urban centers such as Tirana and Durrës, enabling more efficient distribution of perishable agricultural goods. Previously, limited infrastructure hindered the sale of fresh produce beyond the local market, resulting in high post-harvest losses and low returns. Following the road's completion, interviews with farmers in the administrative units of Xibër, Gurrë, and Suç revealed that producers now send an average of 300–400 kg of agricultural products to Tirana per day during peak harvest, representing a 40% income increase compared to 2021 levels (Farmer Interview, 2024). The supply chain cost analysis indicates that reduced fuel and vehicle depreciation expenses have increased net profit margins by up to 25% for routes operating every two days. This shift in logistics has facilitated direct-to-market models, reducing dependency on intermediaries and allowing farmers to engage in custom sales to organic markets, restaurants, and guesthouses.

Product diversification and specialization: The new market accessibility has incentivized the cultivation of products with local identity and gastronomic value, such as wild apples, local plums, dried onions, winter cabbage, artisanal wine, and beekeeping products like honey and propolis. These goods are increasingly featured in organic food stores, weekend farmers' markets, and traditional restaurants in Tirana. This diversification reflects a shift from subsistence farming toward value-added production. New plantations and small-scale farms have emerged in areas such as Gurrë and Xibër, driven by the opportunity for higher returns and the revitalization of family agribusiness models. Additionally, interest is growing in standardization and certification, particularly for honey and wine, as part of long-term strategies to enter larger markets and align with EU geographical protection schemes (European Commission, 2020).

Informal roadside markets and micro-trade development: Another observable impact is the emergence of vibrant informal micro-economies along the Arbër Road. Dozens of residents have established roadside sales points offering artisanal products, including wine, brandy, herbal teas, and seasonal fruits. These spontaneous markets

not only serve as supplementary income sources but also as cultural exchange hubs between local producers and visitors. This community-based model aligns with sustainable rural tourism principles, emphasizing local participation in value creation and rural regeneration (OECD, 2020). It also reflects growing consumer interest in authentic, place-based products tied to local heritage.

Institutional support and policy integration: The Municipality of Klos, recognizing the catalytic role of the Arbër Road, has integrated rural development strategies into its 2023–2026 action plan. The plan promotes mechanization, improved irrigation, and the establishment of mini-processing units (e.g., for dairy, meat, wine, and raki production). These initiatives are part of a broader shift from informal production to structured value chains, aiming to improve competitiveness in urban markets. Public-private collaboration is encouraged, and national support schemes such as IPARD have already funded selected investment projects in the area.

Tourism as a driver of new economic development in the area

The construction of the Arbri Road has acted as a catalyst for the development of tourism in the Municipality of Klos, transforming this sector into one of the main pillars of local economic transformation. Its impact is not only in the numerical increase of visitors, but in the fundamental change in the way the area is perceived, used and invested by the community and visitors. Previously, the great distance, lack of passable roads and poor infrastructure prevented the integration of the area into the national tourist circulation. With the completion of the Arbri Road, which directly connects Klos with Tirana in just 30 minutes, a new tourist corridor has been created for urban visitors looking for natural, authentic and accessible destinations for weekends or day trips. According to the UNWTO principles (2022), accessibility is one of the key indicators for the development of rural destinations, and in this context, the Municipality of Klos gains a favorable position on the regional tourism map.

Data from interviews and observations during spring 2025 show that the number of visitors to small hospitality structures has increased by an average of 40–60% compared to the period before the road was opened. This increase is not only quantitative, but also qualitative, as visitors seek complete experiences: nature walks, cultural guides, involvement in agricultural activities and consumption of local products. This model represents a sustainable approach to rural tourism, where interaction with the community and the use of local resources play a central role. As the OECD (2020) emphasizes, rural tourism cannot be based only on natural supply, but on building a sustainable economic ecosystem, where the community is an active actor and direct beneficiary. Agritourism businesses such as “Bujtina Çupa”, “Bujtina Çeliku” and “Te Mulliri” are successful examples of this approach. They offer not only accommodation, but also comprehensive experience packages, strengthening visitors’ connection with the territory and local culture. In some of them, tourists are offered activities such as: grape harvesting and local wine production; tasting raki and artisanal cheeses; participating in seasonal farm work; nature walks and cultural visits to Kalana e Xibri or the village of Gur i Bardhë. These experiences not only add value to the tourist offer, but also create a new market for local products, promoting a local circular economy. According to the EU’s rural development strategies (European Commission, 2023), integrating the agritourism chain is one of the most effective ways to curb rural depopulation and increase the sustainability of micro-businesses.

Tourism has generated new employment opportunities, especially for young people and women, the groups most affected by unemployment in rural areas. Women are involved as managers, cooks or producers of artisanal products, while young people are engaged as tourist guides or in the creation of start-ups related to tourism services. This development is in line with the priorities of the National Strategy for Employment and Training 2021–2027, which identifies tourism and the green economy as strategic sectors for sustainable employment. The Arbri Route has brought not only tourists, but also a revival of the sense of local identity. Residents are becoming increasingly aware of the natural, cultural and historical values they possess, promoting them in a

structured way. This has brought about a new wave of cultural activities and traditional events, with the support of the municipality and civil society organizations. One example is the “Guja” (or “Vëllazërimi”) Festival in the village of Gur i Bardhë, organized on August 10th every year, which has gained the status of an annual tradition. This festival brings together local residents and returning emigrants to celebrate with songs, dances and cultural activities. It serves not only as an act of preserving spiritual heritage, but also as a concrete incentive for the development of cultural tourism. The craft exhibitions, local product markets and outdoor camps that take place during this festival contribute to the economic revitalization of the village and its promotion as an alternative destination. This form of “return tourism” is vital for maintaining links between the community and the diaspora, as well as for creating a sustainable rural identity. According to OECD (2020), such community events strengthen local identity and promote economic development through the involvement of the community and the diaspora in rural life.

The growth of agritourism and the role of returning migrants in rural development

The improvement of road infrastructure through the construction of the Arbër Road has not only enhanced tourism flows, but also significantly boosted investments in the agritourism sector in the Municipality of Klos. This development is primarily driven by local families and returning migrants, who have seized the new opportunities created by better access to urban markets and the growing demand for authentic rural experiences. Enhanced accessibility has transformed how the region is perceived by tourists and has stimulated a structural shift in the local tourism offer, with an emphasis on family hospitality and traditional gastronomy.

A notable example of this trend is the guesthouse “Te Mulliri” in the village of Gur i Bardhë, established by a returning migrant after 18 years of work in the United Kingdom. This investment represents a fusion of personal savings, international managerial experience, and institutional support through the IPARD program, which provided over €350,000 for the construction and standardization of tourism services (AZHBR, 2024). The guesthouse has become a reference point for agritourism in the region, employing family members and using exclusively local products. This case illustrates the role that the diaspora can play in sustainable rural development, contributing not only financially but also through knowledge transfer and cultural capital. Similarly, the “Çupa” guesthouse in the village of Fshat exemplifies a successful family investment stimulated by the improved road infrastructure. With a capacity of nine rooms and a traditional restaurant, this facility has attracted tourists seeking authentic and natural experiences. Positive feedback from visitors highlights the quality of service and local hospitality, positioning the guesthouse as a key player in Klos's rural tourism development. The “Çeliku” guesthouse in the village of Kurdari, supported by funding from the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, showcases a public-private partnership for promoting agritourism. The modernization of accommodation and hospitality facilities has made it attractive to visitors looking for peace, traditional cuisine, and proximity to local attractions.

In addition to accommodation, several restaurants with a strong local identity have emerged and consolidated, enriching Klos's tourism offer. The restaurant “Ura e Vashës,” known for its scenic location and local dishes, has become a favored stop for travelers. Likewise, “Doka” and “Vëllezërit” restaurants have established a strong reputation for traditional cuisine, attracting clientele from Tirana, Dibra, and surrounding areas, and becoming key nodes in the development of gastronomic tourism.

These cases demonstrate how the Arbër Road has functioned as a trigger for unlocking latent development potential, enabling returning migrants to become local investors and fostering an integrated approach to rural revitalization. The positive impact on agritourism microbusinesses supports international literature on “place-based rural development” and “diaspora-driven investment” (Crescenzi & Rodríguez-Pose, 2012; OECD, 2020), offering a replicable model for other regions with similar geographic and socio-economic conditions. A visual summary of the key findings is presented in figure 1, which illustrates the transformative impact of the Arbër Road on the Municipality of Klos across three main dimensions: (i) agricultural markets and value chains, (ii) tourism and hospitality development, and (iii) return migration and local investments.

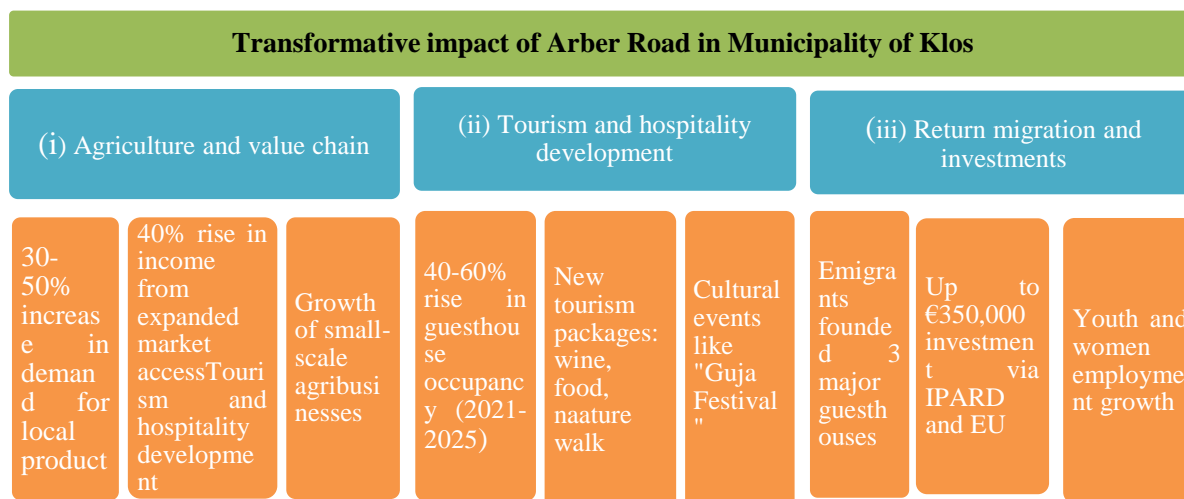


Figure 5. Transformative impact of the Arbër Road in the Municipality of Klos: Key findings by sectoral domain (agriculture, tourism, return migration).

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATION TO RESEARCH AND PRACTICE

The construction and operationalization of the Arbër Road has generated a multifaceted and measurable transformation in the Municipality of Klos, particularly within the sectors of tourism, agriculture, and micro-enterprises. Rather than being perceived solely as an infrastructural intervention improving physical connectivity to Tirana, this project emerges as a strategic enabler of socio-economic revitalization in a previously marginalized area. The returned emigrants investing in guesthouses and agro-tourism facilities, the diversification of agricultural production linked to improved access to markets, and the strengthening of local identity through community-led tourism initiatives represent key evidence of how infrastructure can trigger sustainable local development when combined with institutional support.

Concrete examples such as Bujtina “Te Mulliri”, Bujtina “Çupa”, and Bujtina “Çeliku”, supported by IPARD and AZHBR grants, underline the importance of synergies between public investment programs and private entrepreneurial initiatives. These cases also echo broader European trends where rural development is increasingly being driven by place-based approaches and diaspora engagement (FAO & OECD, 2019; Crescenzi & Rodríguez-Pose, 2012). However, several constraints persist. The absence of updated local development and land-use plans hampers strategic spatial management, potentially leading to uncoordinated urban sprawl or land degradation. Institutional capacities at the municipal level remain weak, particularly in areas such as urban planning, sustainable tourism development, and investment attraction. Compared to other rural areas in Albania, Klosi Municipality shows promising results, yet risks stagnation if not backed by long-term strategic planning and capacity-building initiatives. A particularly critical gap lies in the lack of a coordinated marketing strategy for positioning Klos as a distinct rural destination in both domestic and international markets. Lessons from other Western Balkan countries (e.g., the branding efforts of Northern Montenegro and Western Kosovo) show that visibility and identity-based marketing significantly influence rural tourism flows.

From a methodological standpoint, the study’s main limitations include a lack of detailed statistical data post-2021 and the qualitative nature of much of the evidence, which, while rich in context, may carry elements of subjectivity. Nevertheless, the findings offer valuable insights into the developmental dynamics triggered by

strategic infrastructure and serve as a solid basis for further comparative studies in other rural territories undergoing similar transformations.

For policymakers, this case suggests several implications:

- The Ministry of Infrastructure should prioritize integrated transport planning with local economic development goals.
- The Ministry of Tourism and Environment could use Klos as a pilot case for promoting agro and rural tourism.
- The Ministry of Agriculture should expand support for post-harvest infrastructure and product certification schemes to further enhance local competitiveness.

CONCLUSION

The empirical findings of this study demonstrate that the construction of the Arbri Road has served as a key driver for structural transformation in the Municipality of Klos, significantly impacting the economic, social and territorial aspects of local development. The reduction of geographical isolation and increased access to national markets have significantly improved the area's connection with urban centers, giving rise to a new development dynamic in agriculture, tourism and micro-enterprises. The agricultural sector has shifted from production for self-consumption towards market-oriented production and value-added products, thanks to improved logistics and increased demand for local products. In parallel, rural tourism and agrotourism have experienced a significant revival, which is reflected in the growth of hospitality structures, tourist experience packages and the development of cultural activities that strengthen local identity. A special role in this process has been played by returnees, who, through financial investments and experience gained abroad, have contributed to the revitalization of the local economy. This interaction between infrastructural improvements, community engagement and institutional support has created a successful model of place-based rural development.

To maintain and strengthen this positive development, a more strategic and coordinated approach is needed at the local level. The Municipality of Klos should focus on creating a well-defined strategy for the promotion of tourism and territorial identity, based on the natural, agricultural and cultural values of the area. In addition, the formalization of local product markets and support for their certification would increase credibility and inclusion in national and international value chains. Another priority is to strengthen the capacities of local government, especially in spatial planning and the management of development projects, to ensure that growth is sustainable and inclusive. Finally, more structured inclusion of the diaspora through incentive policies and mechanisms for investment in rural entrepreneurship can serve as a catalyst for innovative and long-term development. The case of Klos thus presents a replicable model of territory-based rural development, where infrastructure serves not only as a physical connecting tool, but as a platform for the economic and social empowerment of the local community.

FUTURE RESEARCH

Beyond the contribution of this study in understanding the impact of road infrastructure on local socio-economic development, there is a need to expand research in several directions. First, it would be of interest to develop comparative analyses with other local units that have not benefited from similar infrastructure interventions, to deepen the understanding of the differential effects of roads in marginalized territories. Second, further quantitative analyses with accurate time data after 2021 would enable a more accurate measurement of the economic impact at the micro and macro levels. Finally, research focused on the role of the diaspora in rural development, through formalized mechanisms for return and investment in the community, and would bring new theoretical and practical values to the field of studies on sustainable development.

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