

Article

Opportunities for the Transformation of Border Towns into Sustainable Systems in the Republic of North Macedonia by Applying the Integral Theory

Damjan Balkoski ^{1,*}, Ksenija Lalović ¹, Aleksandra Stupar ¹, Vladimir Mihajlov ¹ and Divna Pencić ²

¹ Department of Urbanism, Faculty of Architecture, University of Belgrade, 11000 Belgrade, Serbia; ksenija.lalovic@arh.bg.ac.rs (K.L.); stupar@arh.bg.ac.rs (A.S.); vladimir.mihajlov@arh.bg.ac.rs (V.M.)

² Department of Urbanism, Faculty of Architecture, University St. Cyril and Methodius Skopje, 1000 Skopje, North Macedonia; pencic.divna@arh.ukim.edu.mk

* Correspondence: damjanbalko@gmail.com

Abstract: The contemporary urban functioning of cities requires adaptability and progressive development guided by the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) that can be adjusted to local circumstances and needs. Currently, the small border towns in the Republic of North Macedonia (RNM) are facing numerous problems on social, economic and ecological levels (e.g., economic inequality, the unemployment and social isolation of citizens, the insufficient implementation of planning documents, the inadequate physical and functional structure of public spaces, the lack of environmental plans, improper waste management, etc.), which have influenced the efficiency and sustainability of their systems. Therefore, urban transformations are necessary due to the alarming reduction in the working-age population and the general stagnation which these towns experience. The aim of this article is to define possible solutions and recommendations for the ongoing urban challenges and transformations based on the performed analysis of the primary data sources, especially targeting the psychological and behavioral levels of identified problems, the culture of living and the management policies of local governments. The main research method used in the study was the AQAL method (all quadrants, all levels), which provided a comprehensive perspective of the current urban problems and conditions combined with a comparative analysis within an integrated framework. The application of these methods enabled the identification of the specific problems in the border towns, as well as the means and capacities for solving them, while simultaneously addressing the shortcomings and opportunities for urban renewal. By understanding the different viewpoints provided by the AQAL method, local governments, planners and policymakers can create adaptable urban models that can accommodate and overcome future changes and obstacles generated by contextual limitations. The obtained research results represent a starting point for the development and improvement of local sustainability through the advancement of economic innovations, environmental practices and social relations. Furthermore, specific recommendations are provided, directly and indirectly targeting the specificities of the selected towns, their urban development and management, as well as their future environmental and social sustainability.

Keywords: 'AQAL' method; border towns; regional planning; sustainability; urban transformation



Citation: Balkoski, D.; Lalović, K.; Stupar, A.; Mihajlov, V.; Pencić, D. Opportunities for the Transformation of Border Towns into Sustainable Systems in the Republic of North Macedonia by Applying the Integral Theory. *Sustainability* **2023**, *15*, 12713. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su151712713>

Academic Editor: Beniamino Murgante

Received: 4 July 2023

Revised: 15 August 2023

Accepted: 16 August 2023

Published: 22 August 2023



Copyright: © 2023 by the authors. Licensee MDPI, Basel, Switzerland. This article is an open access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

1. Introduction

The Republic of North Macedonia is a landlocked nation situated in Southeastern Europe on the Balkan Peninsula with a surface area of 25,436 km². It borders two EU member states, Bulgaria and Greece, and two EU candidate countries, Albania and Serbia. With a population of 1.8 million people, the RNM is a multi-ethnic country whose capital city Skopje serves as its political, administrative and cultural hub [1]. Since gaining its independence from SFR Yugoslavia (in 1991), the RNM has seen substantial socio-economic and political changes. The transition has caused the collapse of large industrial capacities

and the fragmentation of trade, resulting in decreased employment and, consequently, increased migrations from small towns to larger ones. All these factors have affected the overall loss of the previously established urban functions [2].

Although larger cities have transformed in accordance with the new conditions of social organisation, as in the case of the border towns with a lower number of inhabitants, this process has been slower, with evident depopulation, economic decline, migrations and urban stagnation [3]. Kriva Palanka, Berovo and Dojran are located in the eastern and southeastern parts of the RNM, which are underdeveloped. They face serious migration outflows, a lack of young and working-age population, as well as a low level of investments and decreased job opportunities. Although the distance between the border towns in the eastern region is only 10 to 20 km, they function as separate entities without complementing activities or mutual synergy. Additionally, their demographic, economic and spatial stagnation has had a strong impact on the low quality and attractiveness of public spaces, with inadequate physical and functional structures. Since these spaces have lost their role as being community nodes and gathering places, their social sustainability has become debatable. However, their favourable geographical characteristics represent a good basis for the development of their environmental sustainability, despite their evident problems, namely increasing traffic and industry pollution, illegal construction and a lack of environmental awareness.

Due to these factors, the selected border towns can be distinguished from the other regions of the RNM. However, after initiating the EU accession negotiation, some new development opportunities have arisen, especially within the contact zones near Bulgaria and Greece. Therefore, the economic development of border towns, based on updated regional and urban planning, has become a necessity in order to achieve overall long-term sustainability. Considering this contextual setting, the article focuses on the future transformational possibilities of the border towns in the eastern part of the RNM through the application of selected methodologies within the conceptual framework of the integral theory. The goal is to formulate a set of recommendations for the sustainable functioning of border towns in a specific transitional context in order to increase their competitiveness.

According to the new Leipzig Charter, urban transformation is based on the integration of the social, ecological and economic dimensions of sustainable development [4]. Nowadays, there is a growing need for urban transformations to make cities more inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable [5–7]. Parallel to this, urban transformations represent spatial manifestations and a product of specific political, economic and institutional changes in the post-socialist period, particularly affecting the states and cities from the Balkan region. The different models of economic interactions create a spatial setting which could serve new needs, while existing urban structures could be reconstructed and/or replaced accordingly [6,7].

Urban transformation, in the context of social processes, is the subject of observation, analysis and solution in urban sociology. Various scholars have focused on the sociological aspects and approaches to urban transformation [8–15], arguing that cities can be understood as complex and emerging socio-ecological and technological systems. According to this statement, ‘social’ includes the cultural and economic dimensions as well as governance, ‘ecological’ includes the climate and biophysical elements and ‘technological’ includes the engineered and built environment [9,16,17]. According to egalitarian urban planning, the spatial structure of a city, the neglect of its infrastructure and an unevenness of investments are mutually related to a social situation [8].

The planning of sustainable cities has triggered the growing interest of professionals and academicians and has been manifested on three main levels: global, European and local–regional. Consequently, various scholars and organisations have provided measures targeting the issues of urban rebuilding, improvement and revitalisation on all levels in order to improve the living conditions in cities [18–23]. Every city, regardless of its size, offers opportunities. Through detailed studies, analyses, problem detection and mapping, as well as a careful and thoughtful design, a city could be transformed into a living, healthy,

safe and sustainable environment, in which its citizens represent a priority [18,19]. Special attention has been given to social sustainability, representing a combination of social principles focused on basic needs (i.e., housing and health, equality and social justice) combined with new concepts such as a sense of place, happiness and life quality [24,25]. Social sustainability is a broad concept and has a significant democratic dimension addressing both the principles and practices which enable equitable access to decision-making processes, social justice and inclusiveness. It also underlines the importance of comprehensive civic involvement into the process of shaping policies, programs and projects which directly or indirectly influence their lives [26]. Consequently, sustainable spatial planning, through successful projects and strategies, plays an important role in directing sustainable growth and development [27–30]. Through urban transformation, cities can achieve long-term sustainability based on collaborative planning, which includes the local self-government, civil sector, private business and residents, while helping local governments solve collective problems related to the quality of common spaces and local environments.

In order to achieve urban transformation, it is necessary to conduct the following activities during planning process.

1. Problem identification (joint participation of all the actors, supplemented with academic institutions).
2. Vision—what should be achieved?
3. The creation of strategic goals with a specific deadline.
4. The adoption of action plan(s) [31,32].

These activities are based on the key aspects of social, economic and spatial planning. They are dictated by modern technology and market approaches, especially in the case of post-socialist cities which face difficulties in organising their spaces [13,14]—as in the case of the selected border towns in the RNM. According to Petrović, in the initial stage of the post-socialist period, the transformation of urban planning was neglected, and urban authorities brought solutions ad hoc to avoid a long-term definition of strategic development visions. This created multiple negative effects due to the uncontrolled commercialisation of urban spaces and the reduction in the quality of both public services and public spaces, causing a number of socio-spatial inequalities [15]. The small border towns are most affected by these inequalities. In order to achieve social sustainability, work should be performed in all areas, including the social, economic, educational and cultural components. At the municipal level, sufficient financial resources should be provided with advanced thinking and timely spatial planning [23–27]. In the process of transforming and developing small border towns, economic factors should be integrated and synchronised in order to create jobs for residents, advance the municipality's economy and ensure the financial independence of every municipality through private initiatives and public–private partnerships. The coordination of a sustainable city with economic variables can produce a whole where integrative planning can lead to already established goals, preventing young people from leaving cities and migrating for economic reasons. Therefore, the adoption of such strategies for sustainable development represents a mechanism for planning and promoting the territorial development of border regions. They can be favourable for the implementation of long-term cross-border comprehensive plans in order to reduce a so-called 'barrier effect', improve territorial capital and support the territorial development of cross-border zones [28,29,33].

This article consists of five parts. Following the Introduction, the sources and applied methodology are presented, while the case study introduces the research area and provides a detailed overview of the selected towns through the application of the "AQAL" method. The fourth part presents the results of the comparative analysis conducted for all three towns, whereas the concluding remarks provide a starting point for developing and improving the local sustainability of the border regions between the RNM, Bulgaria and Greece.

2. Materials and Research Methodology

This paper focuses on the border towns in the eastern and southeastern region of the RNM—Kriva Palanka, Berovo and Dojran. Using the qualitative research methods and an analysis based on the selected criteria, the overall goal was to identify possible solutions for future (sustainable) urban transformations. The methodology was set according to the complexity of the research problem—i.e., complicated problems and situations require comprehensive methods. Since urban transformation represents a multi-layered and broad concept, the main selected method was the AQAL method, which offers a holistic and multi-dimensional approach for understanding urban issues. Providing a way to analyse and address urban challenges, it simultaneously considered multiple perspectives, factors and levels of development. The overall research process was divided into several phases.

- (1) The elaboration of the problem from a theoretical background through the case study and the interpretation of the data obtained from the primary and secondary sources.

For this study, it was essential to use primary sources that provided firsthand information on the selected towns, both on the national and the international level. The national sources used for the study were the Spatial Plan of the RNM, publications from the State Statistics Office, action plans from the municipalities and local economic development plans, while the international sources originated from the European funds for the support and development of the regions.

- (2) The analysis of the integral theory.

The integral theory represents a comprehensive framework that aims to integrate various perspectives, disciplines and dimensions of the human experience into a unified understanding. It suggests that reality could be understood through multiple lenses [34,35]. The main components of the integral framework were quadrants, levels, lines, populations and types. The basics of the integral framework can be explained using the quadrants and levels. Integral sustainable development uses a comprehensive framework in which the components of sustainable development can be organised and integrated to work in synergy [36,37]. It acknowledges four fundamental perspectives through which reality can be analysed, namely individual (I)—the subjective inner experiences, thoughts and emotions of an individual; collective (We)—the shared cultural values, norms and beliefs of a group or a society; objective (It)—the objective external observations and measurable phenomena, such as physical structures and natural processes; and interobjective (Its)—the systemic or environmental factors which influence the collective, such as institutions, organisations and economic systems [38–40] (Figure 1).

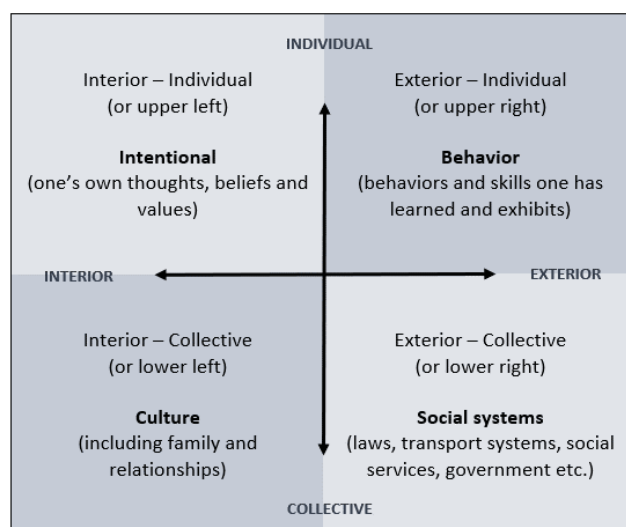


Figure 1. Ken Wilber's integral theory matrix [39].

(3) The development of a case study by applying the “AQAL” method.

This phase included the development of the case study covering three border towns—Kriva Palanka, Berovo and Dojran and their analyses using the AQAL method and its four aspects—psychological, behavioural, cultural and systemic (Figure 2).

	INTERIOR	EXTERIOR	
I N D I V I D U A L	CONSCIOUSNESS “what I experience” Areas studies: “I”, Subjective reality, e.g. self and consciousness, states of mind, psychological development, emotions, will.	BEHAVIOUR “What I do” Areas studies: “IT”, objective realities, e.g. brain and organism, visible biological features, degrees of activation of the various bodily systems.	I N D I V I D U A L
C O L L E C T I V E	CULTURE “what WE experience” Areas studies: “WE”, intersubjective realities, e.g. shared values, culture and worldview, webs of culture, communication, customs, norms.	SYSTEMS “what WE do” Areas studies: “ITS”, interobjective realities, e.g. social systems and environment, social structures, economic systems, political orders.	C O L L E C T I V E
	INTERIOR	EXTERIOR	

Figure 2. Ken Wilber’s AQAL model and quadrants [35].

The AQAL system considers the reality that can be understood on different complexity levels, namely the individual level—the experiences and perspectives of individual people; the group level—the dynamics and interactions within social groups, organisations and communities; the organisational level—the structures, processes and behaviours of institutions and systems; and the systemic level—the larger cultural, economic and ecological contexts that influence the collective. In the AQAL model, spiritual development is a key dimension of human growth and evolution. It is conceptualised as a process for increasing awareness, consciousness and connection to the deeper aspects of reality, often leading to a sense of interconnectedness and unity. It acknowledges the diverse and interlinked nature of human experiences providing a comprehensive framework for understanding and facilitating spiritual growth.

The AQAL system was considered on three levels, namely (1) border towns in the RNM positioned near Bulgaria and Greece; (2) the RNM—national level; and (3) the European Union (Figure 3). Treating the AQAL system on these levels, while considering all four perspectives/quadrants, was essential for analysing and understanding sustainable development on various scales. It provided insight into the integration and alignment of sustainable policies with various governmental procedures. Additionally, it addressed sustainable development from multiple perspectives, thus ensuring the inclusivity and participation of diverse stakeholders and actors, while optimising municipal resources and management in order to achieve a long-term sustainable vision.

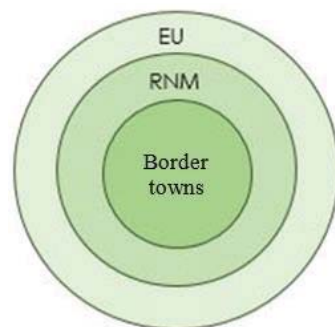


Figure 3. The levels of the established AQAL system.

As shown in Figure 4, the quadrants were used in the context of sustainability to describe the influence of an initiative and to list the tools which could be used to solve problems. The AQAL system allowed for the transformation of small border towns to be considered in an overall planning system, which could be a prerequisite for achieving their desired sustainable development. The result indicated that the problem could not be solved unilaterally, but all four perspectives needed to be considered together. The inhabitants of the selected towns would need to be informed about the activities undertaken for the planned transformation since they represent the direct beneficiaries of the applied transformation system. The quadrants provided an individual or a plural perspective, as well as an interior or an exterior perspective [41,42].

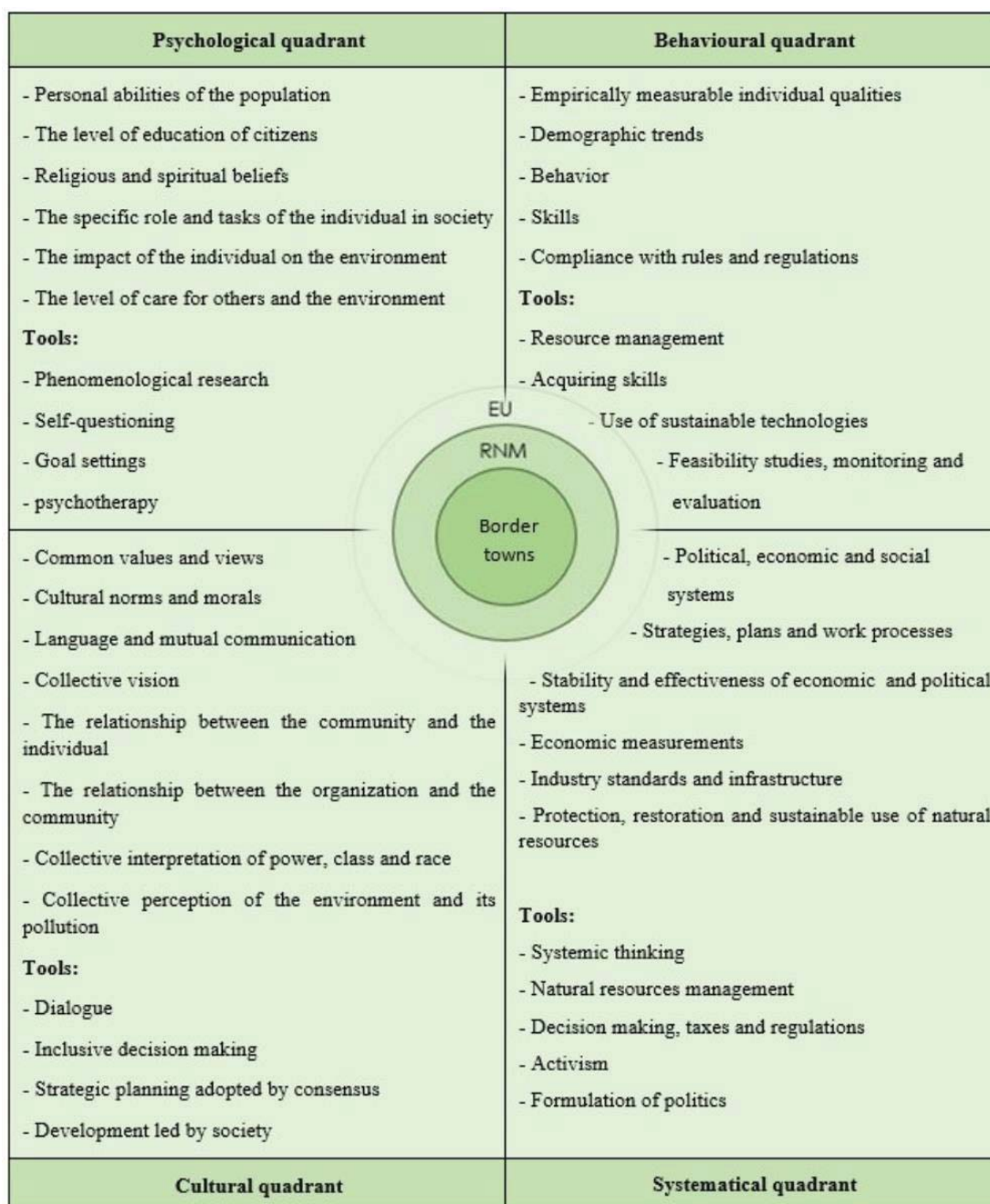


Figure 4. The application of the AQAL system.

It should be noted that while the AQAL model did not directly involve quantitative data collection or statistical analysis, it was used in conjunction with quantitative methodologies to complement the understanding of complex phenomena, such as the data obtained from the State Statistics Office.

Based on the previous table, which referred to three governmental levels and the social organisation depending on each quadrant, the AQAL system was created and applied to each town, offering important information for identifying solutions and taking further actions.

In order to develop the AQAL system for Kriva Palanka, the data obtained from the primary sources published by the Municipality of Kriva Palanka were used. The most important source was the Program for Local Economic Development [43,44], which provided the necessary data for the systemic and cultural quadrants.

The data used for the development of the AQAL system for Berovo were obtained from the primary sources published by the Municipality of Berovo, namely the review of the Master Urban Plan of Berovo, the action plan of the municipality [45–47] and the documents from the state agencies for the development of tourism [48–50], which were necessary for the systemic and cultural quadrants. The documents and publications from the State Statistics Office of the RNM provided the data for the behavioural and psychological quadrants.

Given that Dojran was located in a specific context, the data for the development of the AQAL system were obtained from the various tourism-related agencies of the RNM, as well as from the European projects [51–53]. Using the programs for local economic development (LED) within the framework of the AQAL method allowed for a better perception of the current effectiveness and comprehensiveness of the municipalities. Consequently, the AQAL method created a holistic framework that considered multiple perspectives and dimensions of the LED program, leading to more effective planning, implementation and evaluation.

(4) The comparative analysis of the data obtained from the selected towns.

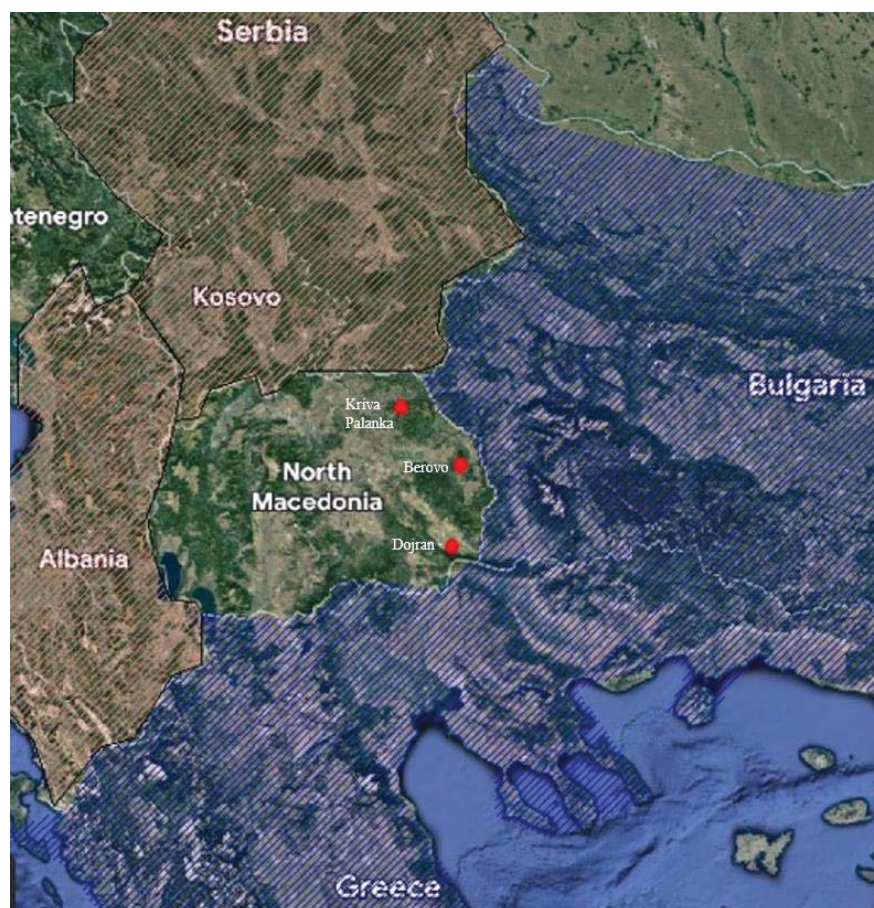
After implementing the AQAL method for the towns of Kriva Palanka, Berovo and Dojran, the data from each town were summarised, grouped and analysed separately in each quadrant in order to explain the problems faced by the border towns. These problems were used as a starting point for developing and improving local sustainability through social innovation, new social practices and relations, which enabled creative ways for learning, change and experimentation.

3. The Case Study

According to the Spatial Plan of the RNM and the State Statistics Office, there were 34 urban nodes (cities and towns) classified into four levels: state centres (1), macro-region centres (3), meso-region centres (9) and micro-region centres (21) [54]. The towns studied in this article (Kriva Palanka, Berovo and Dojran) represented the centres of micro-regions with populations of less than 30,000 inhabitants [54] (Table 1). They were located in three different planning regions—Kriva Palanka belonged to the northeastern planning region, Berovo belonged to the eastern planning region and Dojran belonged to the southeastern planning region (Figure 5). Even though these towns were classified as border towns, they had different functions. Kriva Palanka was a transit node due to the established routes for transport and exchange with Bulgaria, Berovo was a mountain town located 986 m above the sea level with developed mountain tourism and Dojran represented a lake city with developed lake tourism.

Table 1. Demographic parameters of the municipalities (2022) [1].

Municipality	Number of Settlements	Number of Residents in the Municipality	Number of Residents in the Administrative Centre
Kriva Palanka	34	18.059	14.558
Berovo	9	10.890	7.002
Dojran	13	3.084	363

**Figure 5.** The location of the selected border towns Kriva Palanka, Berovo and Dojran in relation to the EU member states (blue) and the EU candidate countries (orange).

These three regions of the RNM were neglected and underdeveloped for a long time due to weak infrastructural connections, as well as a lack of railway infrastructure—both within the regions and between the RNM and Bulgaria. Currently, the above-mentioned border towns are based on local economic development strategies, as well as their derived action plans (Table 2).

Table 2. Action plans and the implementation levels of the selected border towns in the RNM [43,45,53].

Municipality	Action Plans (LEAP)	Level of Implementation	Municipality Budget/Revenue
Kriva Palanka	Yes	Ongoing	7.53 milion euro
Berovo	Yes	Ongoing	5.51 milion euro
Dojran	No	In preparation	3.90 milion euro

3.1. Kriva Palanka

The town of Kriva Palanka is a border town and the administrative centre of the Municipality Kriva Palanka, which is situated in the northeastern part of the RNM under the slopes of the Osogovo Mountains and along the Kriva Reka River. It is located near the state border with Bulgaria—“Deve Bair”. It is 100 km away from the capital Skopje. The founding of the settlement was recorded in Turkish documents in 1633 [3]. The good position, communications, development of crafts and trade allowed it to grow into a town, with the following characteristics: (Figure 6).

TOWN KRIVA PALANKA	
Psychological quadrant	Behavioural quadrant
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Industrious, peaceful population, oriented towards craftsmanship and trade; - Education level: 11.5% high vs. 48% secondary education; - Religious beliefs: 96% Christians vs. 4% Other/various; - Specific role and tasks of an individual in the society: local elections for 19 representatives/members of the municipal council; - Average environmental awareness and concern on both the individual and the collective level. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Demographic trends: the migration from the surrounding villages to Kriva Palanka, and from Kriva Palanka to Skopje (the capital) and the EU countries; - Low level of emigration - about 1000 inhabitants between 2001 and 2021, according to the census data; - High level of applications for the Bulgarian passports increasing the working possibilities within the EU; - The preparation of Action Plans, strategic documents, development plans; - Successful implementation of plans and capital projects; - High level of implementation of architectural-urban design projects
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Citizens appreciate living in a quiet, small-town environment, without major changes and disturbances; - Satisfaction with the current lifestyle; - Close connections within the local community due to the small scale of the town; - Regular evaluation of the local government and its conducted work; - Sharp political division on the local level often disables a decision-making process and, consequently, a further development and progress of the town; - Detected implementation difficulties on the level of the community and local organisations. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The municipal council: 19 members from 6 political parties also present on the central/national level of governance); - Partial citizens' involvement in the decision-making process on the local level; - Adopted development strategies with the lack of implementation due to a low municipal income and the indebtedness toward the central governmental level; - Average road-network connectivity to nearby towns and the capital; - High possibilities for the preservation and further improvement of environmental quality (in case of an active application of the environmental laws)
Cultural quadrant	Systematical quadrant

Figure 6. AQAL analysis of Kriva Palanka.

3.2. Berovo

Berovo is located at an altitude of 986 m below the slopes of the Maleševski Mountains. It is 161 km away from the capital city of Skopje. It is in a close proximity to a new border crossing built by the RNM (Klepalo), as well as to an access road. Although the border crossing on the Bulgarian side is still under construction, it could be said that Berovo will become a transit town, since it is only 15 km away from the border crossing to Bulgaria. The AQAL analysis shows: (Figure 7).

TOWN BEROVO	
Psychological quadrant	Behavioural quadrant
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Hardworking, peaceful population, oriented to crafts. Employed in state-owned or small private companies; - Education level: 6% higher vs. 36% secondary education - Religious beliefs: 90% Christians vs. 10% Muslims; - Specific role and tasks of an individual in the society: local elections for 15 representatives/members of the municipal council; - High level of environmental awareness of the local community which actively contributes to the ecological quality of the surrounding; 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Demographic trends: the migration from the surrounding villages to Berovo, and from Berovo to Skopje (the capital) and the EU countries; - Low level of emigration according to the census data which does not correspond to the actual situation (the status of the relocated residents is not administratively registered). - High level of applications for the Bulgarian passports increasing the working possibilities within the EU; - The preparation of Action Plans and their implementation by the municipality; - Low implementation level of planning documents, which mainly remain formal.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Citizens appreciate living in a quiet, small-town environment, without major changes and disturbances; - Close connections within the local community due to the small scale of the town; - Individuals respect local government by regularly performing their civic duties; - Sharp political division on the local level often disables a decision-making process making a further development impossible; - Detected implementation difficulties on the level of the community and local organisations. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The municipal council: 15 members from two political parties also present on the central/national level of governance; - Due to the post-socialist transition and the privatisation (or closure) of state-owned companies, the unemployment rate drastically increased causing emigration; - Adopted development strategies and plans but the lack of implementation due to a low municipal income and the indebtedness toward the central governmental level; - Average road-network connectivity to nearby towns and the capital; - Clean environment due to the current structure of activities (the dominance of agriculture and wood industry and the total lack of heavy industry).
Cultural quadrant	Systematical quadrant

Figure 7. AQAL analysis of Berovo.

3.3. Dojran

Dojran is one of the oldest towns in Macedonia. It consists of two settlements—Old Dojran and New Dojran. The settlement New Dojran is located approx. 5 km from the municipal centre of the town and has approx. 600 holiday homes and 1300 permanent residents [53,54]. The primary function of the settlement is tourism. Therefore, apart from individual family houses and holiday homes, there are commercial–business facilities, several hotels and catering facilities. The settlement of Old Dojran is the administrative centre of the municipality and the town. It is connected by the regional road to the border crossing with Greece, which is 3 km away.

Since Dojran is one of the most famous and frequently visited summer destinations in the RNM, the data for the development of the AQAL system (Figure 8) were obtained from various documents published by the Municipality of Dojran, publications from the State Statistics Office of the RNM, documents published by different state departments and the tourism-related agencies of the RNM, as well as European projects [49–53].

TOWN DOJRAN	
Psychological quadrant	Behavioural quadrant
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Hardworking, peaceful population, oriented towards tourism, hospitality and fishing; - Religious beliefs: 78% Christians vs. 22% Muslims; - Specific role and tasks of an individual in the society: local elections for 15 representatives/members of the municipal council; - Clean environment; - High environmental awareness of the residents. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Demographic movements – mostly towards the town during holidays, weekends and the summer period; - The statistical data indicate the movement of young people - students to Skopje or abroad and their seasonal return during summer, when they join the hospitality industry; - Frequent and close relations between local residents and their cross-border neighbors, due to the proximity to Greece and a physical connection between towns; - The preparation and implementation of Action, economic and environmental plans by the municipality.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Citizens appreciate living in a peaceful, small, lake town, with an increased dynamic during the summer period; - Close connections within the local community due to the small scale of the town; - Individuals respect local government by regularly performing their civic duties; -The attendance of cultural events by the residents is significantly increased during summer; - The community and organisations have no difficulties in adopting and implementing plans. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The municipal council composed of representatives of the two largest political parties, dominant on the central/national level; - Cooperation with several state institutions and international agencies focused on the development and adoption of action and ecological plans and projects (due to the touristic character of the lake and the town); - Adopted development strategies and plans, but partial implementation due to the low municipality income; - Average road-network connectivity to nearby towns and the capital; - Clean environment due to the current structure of activities (the dominance of hospitality industry) and the absence of any industrial production.
Cultural quadrant	Systematical quadrant

Figure 8. AQAL analysis of Dojran.

4. Discussion—The Comparative Analysis of the Obtained Results

Based on the tables for each selected town (Figures 6–8), the problematic issues were identified and summarised in order to determine the methods and available resources that could facilitate sustainable development in all three towns. The first comparison was conducted between the data from the psychological quadrant (Table 3). As indicated in Table 3, the citizens of all three towns were peaceful and hardworking. In Kriva Palanka and Berovo, they were orientated toward craftsmanship, trade and business, while in Dojran, tourism was a dominant activity, along with fishing and hospitality. The citizens of Kriva Palanka had a higher level of education than the citizens of Berovo, whereas the data related to Dojran were not available. In all three towns, the majority of the population was Orthodox Christian while others were declared as Muslims. Regarding the specific roles of the citizens in their local societies, a conclusion can be drawn that the citizens elected their representatives in local municipalities through local elections held every four years, where the number of representatives in the municipality's council depended on the number of citizens and the municipality's size. The Municipality of Kriva Palanka, as the largest one, had 19 members, while Berovo and Dojran had 15 each. The towns had clean environments due to the satisfying (high and average) environmental awareness of their residents.

Table 3. The psychological quadrant—data comparison.

City	Personal Abilities of Residents	Level of Education of Citizens	Municipal Council Members	Environment	Environmental Awareness of Residents
Kriva Palanka	Craftsmanship and trade	11.5% higher, 48% secondary education	19 members	Clean	Average
Berovo	Crafts and business	6% higher, 36% secondary education	15 members	Clean	High
Dojran	Tourism, fishing and hospitality	N/A	15 members	Clean	High

According to the obtained results from the first quadrant, it could be concluded that the situation was positive. Since the population in the selected towns was mainly craft-oriented since the 19th century, the inhabitants were used to hard work and trade, which allowed them to maintain close connections and establish strong social and cultural ties. These connections strengthened their ‘sense of place’ and the idea of ‘urban identity’ [55–57]. They lived with nature and had a high awareness of environmental protection. These data infused optimistic signals for future measures that local authorities can undertake and implement for the development of municipalities, together with the residents themselves. The future development of small crafts would be very important—as opposed to the construction of large industrial plants—in order to continue and develop communication and familiarity between the people.

The second comparison was conducted among the data gathered from the behavioural quadrant. As shown in Table 4, the data were classified into four groups. According to the identified demographic movements, the migrations from all three towns to the capital Skopje and to the EU countries were evident. Although the statistical data indicated a minor percentage of emigration, the reality was completely different and the majority of people were leaving in search for a better life standard, better education, etc. In Dojran, there was another noticeable characteristic—the periodical migration to Skopje due to educational reasons. Additionally, from June until September (during the tourist season) there was an increased number of tourists, as well as locals who lived abroad. As a result of the low living standard in the country, the citizens of all three towns massively applied for Bulgarian (EU) citizenship to pursue jobs and higher salaries. Based on that, they had close relations with the citizens from the neighbouring towns in Bulgaria and Greece. The municipality activities in Kriva Palinka and Berovo included the formulation and implementation of action plans, strategic documents, economic plans and development strategies that were valid for several years. In Dojran, the local authorities were oriented toward tourism and the protection and improvement of the environment and the natural lake. Therefore, the majority of official documents dealt with environmental issues. Regarding the implementation of various plans (especially architectural, urban and construction plans), Kriva Palanka had a higher percentage of implementation than Berovo and Dojran.

Table 4. The behavioral quadrant—data comparison.

City	Demographic Trends	Behavior of Citizens	Municipal Activities	Municipal Monitoring/Evaluation of Plans
Kriva Palanka	Migration towards the capital city and European cities	Massive application for Bulgarian passports	Developing action plans and strategic documents	High and successful realization of plans and actions
Berovo	Migration towards the capital city and European cities	Massive application for Bulgarian passports	Developing action, economic and environmental plans	Realization of plans and actions at low levels
Dojran	Towards the city during holidays and summer	Close relations with the citizens from Greece	Developing action, economic and environmental plans	Moderate realization of plans and actions

These results, unlike the previous quadrant, showed a negative situation. The main reason for this was the mass migration of the young population facing a lack of choice and opportunities for success, well-being, education and culture, which was also a trend during socialism [58–60]. The state, as well as the municipalities, did not have national and local strategies for keeping people in towns and cities. The municipalities were unable to facilitate cultural development, education and healthcare due to their low income. Therefore, future actions should aim to increase and enrich economic, intellectual, social and societal resources, as well stimulate cross-border cooperation with the neighbouring towns and cities from the EU member states.

The third comparison was conducted between the data from the cultural quadrant, classified into five groups (Table 5). Regarding the collective values and norms, the mutual characteristic of all the citizens was their positive attitude towards their towns, i.e., they were used to a quiet life, without big changes and turbulences, which contributed to their close mutual relations and respect. However, there were significant political differences and divisions among the political parties in all three towns. The relations between the local authorities and citizens were different in each town. They were neutral in Kriva Palanka, negative in Berovo and mostly positive in Dojran. The citizens of Kriva Palanka respected local authorities, vigilantly followed all decisions and regularly evaluated their performance. In Berovo, there were often problems in reaching decisions and implementation, while positive attitudes toward local authorities prevailed in Dojran. Furthermore, financial and economic challenges were present in each town, threatening decision-making processes and implementation. However, despite these obstacles, the majority of citizens fulfilled their civil duties. Considering the cultural aspect, all the towns organised regular cultural manifestations, although Dojran had the highest number, especially during summer.

Table 5. The cultural quadrant—data comparison.

City	Common Values and Views	Mutual Communication of Citizens	Relationship between the Community and the Individual	Relationship between the Community and the Local Gov.	Cultural Norms and Morals
Kriva Palanka	Residents had positive attitude toward the city	Residents had close relationships with each other	Negative, political division among residents	Neutral, occasional problems in adopting plans	Citizens regularly performed their civic duties
Berovo	Residents had positive attitude toward the city	Residents had close relationships with each other	Negative, political division among residents	Negative, frequent problems in adopting plans	Citizens regularly performed their civic duties
Dojran	Residents had positive attitude toward the city	Residents had close relationships with each other	Average	Positive, no difficulties in adopting plans	Citizens regularly performed their civic duties

The sublimated data from the third quadrant indicated that the residents had a positive attitude toward their towns, fostering mutual respect, understanding and close relationships. The frequent and timely performance of civic duties was also beneficial for future development plans. Consequently, the registration of new non-governmental organisations in all three municipalities was noted, while their projects contributed to development, organisation and management, maintaining mutual cooperation on a positive level.

The fourth data comparison was conducted in the systematical quadrant, classifying the information into five groups (Table 6). The municipal councils of the local governments in Berovo and Dojran consisted of the two biggest national political parties, which also participated in the state government. Meanwhile, the Municipal Council in Kriva Palanka comprised representatives from six political parties. Regarding the participation in the local decision-making process, the citizens of Kriva Palanka and Dojran were partly involved, which was not the case in Berovo, where they were completely absent. Since Kriva Palanka functions as a transit city, the economic system was stable, with occasional financial in-

debtedness toward the central government. Regarding the economic aspect, the situation in Berovo was unstable. The municipality had a small budget, financial problems and indebtedness, which, consequently, represented a serious problem for the implementation of plans and strategies. During the post-socialistic economic transition, the state-owned companies ceased to exist, while some became private properties. Unemployment drastically increased, triggering a higher level of emigration. The municipality of Dojran, due to its natural resources and their benefits (i.e., a natural lake and a developed summer tourist season), received the support and assistance from several state and international governmental and non-governmental organisations. They enabled funding and helped in the processes of formulating and implementing local plans, as well as developing strategies and protecting the environment. All three towns had clean environments due to the nonexistence of heavy and polluting industry. Trade activities were highly developed in Kriva Palanka, the wood industry was dominant in Berovo and Dojran relied on the hospitality industry. These activities represented the main sources of financial income. At the same time, the road infrastructure and the general connectivity to the surrounding and neighbouring countries could be described as average, while connections were established via highways and local roads.

Table 6. The systematical quadrant—data comparison.

City	Political, Economic and Social Systems	Strategies, Plans and Work Process	Stability/Effective Economic and Political System	Natural Resources Management	Standards and Infrastructure
Kriva Palanka	Municipal council composed of six political parties	Partially involved citizens in decision-making	Optimal, moderate adoption of plans and strategies	Has prerequisites for a clean environment	Average infrastructural connection with cities
Berovo	Municipal council composed of two political parties	Regular adoption of plans without involving citizens	Unstable, low income of the municipality and indebtedness	Has a clean environment, large forest areas	Average infrastructural connection with cities
Dojran	Municipal council composed of two political parties	Involvement of state and foreign institutions	Unstable, low income of the municipality and indebtedness	Clean environment, natural lake	Average infrastructural connection with cities

In this case, the system quadrant data was neither positive nor negative, which was the result of the constantly changing political situation, both on the central and the local level. If the central and local authorities belonged to the same political option, greater financial support and assistance were noticeable. Consequently, if the political orientation of the authorities differed, there was no cooperation between the central and the local level. In that case, the municipal government was left to its own devices to attract financial resources, which were mostly used for infrastructural projects of an average quality. Therefore, future measures should enable the development of adequate and high-quality infrastructure in and between the towns and cities of the RNM, but also toward the neighbouring European nodes, regardless of political preferences.

Urban development encompasses all the domains in the space where human life and activities take place. Therefore, all the recorded problems in the towns which have already been addressed in this study had an influence on urban development. To improve the situation in the domains of architecture and urbanism, ecological and social sustainability and city management, the following recommendations are given, directly reflecting on the urban development of municipalities and towns.

- (1) The improvement of the detected situations related to planning documentation through a consistent implementation of solutions and guidelines from urban plans.

- (2) The protection and promotion of green areas and public spaces through the development of strategies for increasing public green areas and their management and protection.
- (3) Improving the quality of housing with a special emphasis on providing social housing.
- (4) Maximum the utilisation and application of funds and resources obtained from foreign programs for the development of economy, tourism, ecology and sustainable urban development.
- (5) The improvement of culture, entertainment and sports life in towns in order to increase the overall quality of life.
- (6) Reducing the harmful impact of industry on urban development through the management programs for the development of industrial capacity and enhanced controls.
- (7) Increasing the public awareness of citizens in the field of ecology, economy and urbanism through the organisation of educational activities and projects by the local government, as well as through media promotion.

5. Conclusions

According to the above-conducted analysis, it was evident that the recently initiated negotiations for the EU accession have provided some new development opportunities, especially for towns and cities within the contact zones between the EU (Bulgaria and Greece as member countries) and the RNM (Figure 9). Therefore, it is necessary to transform and develop these urban nodes, especially regarding three essential elements: their geopolitical position (immediate proximity to the state administrative border), sustainability (finding strategies for sustainable socio-economic and ecological functioning) and spatio-functional characteristics. Currently, the towns selected for this study do not have long-term plans for sustainable development. Instead, their transformations were based on local economic development strategies, as well as their derived action plans. Additionally, the absence of multidisciplinary studies, which would contribute to their quality and sustainable implementation, was noticeable.

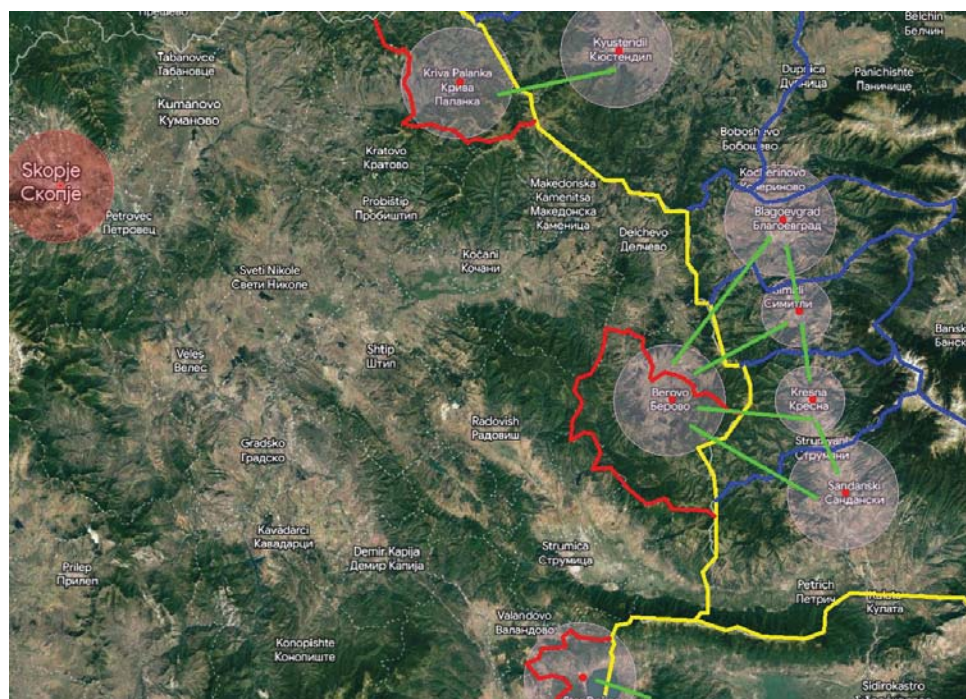


Figure 9. Possible connections (green) between the regions of the RNM (red) and the regions of Bulgaria (blue).

Strengthening the economy in small and border towns is a fundamental prerequisite for their transformation and sustainable development. Economic growth underpins the various aspects of community life, from job creation and revenue generation to enhancing infrastructure and promoting social well-being. By focusing on economic empowerment, these towns can pave the way for a more resilient future for their residents. Before small and border towns can be transformed and developed, the economy must be strengthened in order to create jobs for the locals, support a municipal economic growth and ensure that a municipality is autonomous and operates successfully. This can be done with the aid of private initiatives and public–private partnerships, through several steps.

- (1) The development of regional planning and coordination.
- (2) The adoption of properly phased plans for infrastructural investments.
- (3) The opening of special economic zones and free trade zones.
- (4) The development of eco-tourism.
- (5) The establishment of cross-border business collaborations.
- (6) Investing in social infrastructure.

Border towns are systems with complicated functioning, thus both the local and the central government must collaborate in a coordinated way to accomplish these goals. While local governments are responsible for creating and implementing local economic development plans, the central government must establish and support balanced regional development that can contribute to overall economic growth.

The general conclusions based on the above-conducted analyses emphasised the importance of several categories for the well-being of small border towns.

- (1) Balanced geographical distribution.
- (2) Economic and social development.
- (3) Healthcare.
- (4) Education.
- (5) Conservation of biodiversity.
- (6) Sustainable use of natural resources.

By promoting balanced economic and social development, both the local and the central government can help create opportunities for local residents, reduce poverty and enhance the overall quality of life. They can attract investments, boost local businesses and generate employment, leading to greater prosperity.

The access to quality healthcare and education is also necessary in small border cities in order to improve public health and provide equal opportunities for education and skill development. This approach can enhance the human capital of every town and support its sustainable economic growth.

The governments should also focus on promoting balanced environmental development based on the conservation, protection and sustainability of natural resources. By valuing and protecting local resources, small border towns cities can improve their capacity to withstand future environmental and economic shocks. Kriva Palanka, Berovo and Dojran have unique ecological and biodiversity values due to their proximity to natural areas and the cross-border ecosystems from Bulgaria and Greece. Maintaining air and water quality, conserving forests and vegetation and preserving soil health are crucial for all three towns. These natural resources have a direct impact on public health and the sustainability of the local ecosystems.

With gradual and balanced urban transformation, it will be possible for border towns to grow into a cohesive element of a jointly organised Euro space between the RNM, Greece and Bulgaria. Simultaneously, the integration of sustainable principles into urban and regional planning and governance is a necessity for creating sustainable, resilient and thriving communities that prioritise the needs of current and future generations, while respecting and protecting the local environment and the specificities of both local and global circumstances.

Author Contributions: All authors contributed to the paper. Conceptualisation, D.B., K.L. and A.S.; methodology, K.L.; writing—original draft preparation, D.B.; writing—review, A.S., V.M. and D.P.; writing—editing A.S., supervision, A.S. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

Funding: This research was funded by the Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development of the Republic of Serbia, grant number 451-03-68/2020-14/200090.

Institutional Review Board Statement: Not applicable.

Informed Consent Statement: Not applicable.

Data Availability Statement: Not applicable.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

References

1. State Statistical Office. *North Macedonia in Numbers*; State Statistical Office: Skopje, Republic of North Macedonia, 2022.
2. Acevski, I.; Matilov, N. *Development of Urban Centers in the Republic of Macedonia*; Institute for Sociological and Political-Legal Research: Skopje, Republic of North Macedonia, 1997; pp. 56–60.
3. Dunovski, V.; Balkoski, D.; Stojanovska, O. *Analysis of Urban Morphology of Border Cities in the Eastern and Southeastern Region of the Republic of Northern Macedonia and Typological Classification of City Squares*; MIT University: Skopje, Republic of North Macedonia, 2020; pp. 27–28.
4. European Commission. *New Leipzig Charter—The Transformative Power of Cities for the Common Good*; EC: Brussels, Belgium, 2020.
5. United Nations. *Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*; Department of Economic and Social Affairs: New York, NY, USA, 2015.
6. United Nations. *The Paris Agreement*; United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC): Bonn, Germany, 2016.
7. Fetting, C. *The European Green Deal*; ESDN Report; ESDN: Vienna, Austria, 2020.
8. Lefebvre, H. *The Production of Space*, 1st ed.; Blackwell: London, UK, 1974.
9. Petrovic, M. *Drustvo i gradovi, Između Lokalnog i Globalnog*; Cigoja Stampa: Beograd, Serbia, 2014.
10. Rawls, J. *The Laws of Peoples*; Harvard University Press: Cambridge, MA, USA, 1993.
11. Webb, R.; O'Donnell, T.; Auty, K.; Bai, X.; Barnett, G.; Costanza, R.; Dodson, J.; Newman, P.; Newton, P.; Robson, E.; et al. Enabling urban systems transformations: Co-developing national and local strategies. *Urban Transform.* **2023**, *5*, 5. [[CrossRef](#)] [[PubMed](#)]
12. Celik, T. Urban Transformation Project: The Case of Adana Seyhan. *J. Fac. Archit.* **2023**, *5*.
13. Tsenkova, S.; Nedovic-Budic, Z. The post-socialist urban worldm. In *The Urban Mosaic of Post-Socialist Europe*, 1st ed.; Tsenkova, S., Nedovic-Budic, Z., Eds.; Physica; Springer Publishing: New York, NY, USA, 2006.
14. Wiechmann, T. Conversion Strategies under Uncertainty in Post-Socialist Shrinking Cities: The Example of Dresden in Eastern Germany. In *The Future of Shrinking Cities—Problems, Patterns and Strategies of Urban Transformation in a Global Context*, 1st ed.; Pallagst, K., Ed.; University of California, Center for Global Metropolitan Studies: Berkeley, CA, USA, 2009; pp. 5–16.
15. Petrovic, M. *Transformacija Gradova ka Depolitizaciji Urbanog Pitanja*, 1st ed.; Institut za Socioloska Istrazivanja Filozofskog Fakulteta u Beogradu: Belgrade, Serbia, 2009; pp. 224–227.
16. Zhou, W.; Pickett, S.T.A.; McPhearson, T. Conceptual frameworks facilitate integration for transdisciplinary urban science. *Npj Urban Sustain.* **2021**, *1*, 1. [[CrossRef](#)]
17. McPhearson, T.; Cook, E.M.; Berbes-Blazquez, M.; Cheng, C.; Grimm, N.B.; Andersson, E.; Barbosa, O.; Chandler, D.G.; Chang, H.; Chester, M.V.; et al. A social-ecological-technological systems framework for urban ecosystem services. *One Earth* **2022**, *5*, 505–518. [[CrossRef](#)]
18. Gehl, J. *Cities for People*, 1st ed.; Island Press: Washington, DC, USA, 2010.
19. Gehl, J. *Life between Buildings*, 1st ed.; Island Press: Washington, DC, USA, 2011.
20. Wyckoff, M.; Neumann, B.; Schindler, K. *Placemaking as and Economic Development Tool*; MSU Land Policy Institute: East Lansing, MI, USA, 2015.
21. Shaw, K.; Montana, G. Place-Making in Megaprojects in Melbourne. *Urban Policy Res.* **2016**, *34*, 166–189. [[CrossRef](#)]
22. Project for Public Spaces. *Place Making Discussion Paper—Official Plan Review*; PPS: New York, NY, USA, 2015.
23. Social Life. *Design for Social Sustainability*, 1st ed.; Young Foundation: London, UK, 2012.
24. Bramley, G.; Power, S. Urban form and social sustainability: The role of density and housing type. *Environ. Plan. B Plan. Des.* **2009**, *36*, 30–48. [[CrossRef](#)]
25. Colantonio, A.; Lane, G. *Measuring Social Sustainability: Best Practice from Urban Renewal in the EU*; Oxford Institute for Sustainable Development: Oxford, UK, 2007; pp. 1–37.
26. Colantonio, A. Urban social sustainability themes and assessment methods. *Proc. Inst. Civ. Eng.-Urban Des. Plan.* **2010**, *163*, 79–88. [[CrossRef](#)]
27. Williams, D.E. *Sustainable Design: Ecology, Architecture and Planning*; John Wiley & Sons, Inc.: Hoboken, NJ, USA, 2007.

28. Baptista, T.; Cabezas, J.; Fernandez, L.; Pinto-Gomes, C. IDE-OTALEX C. the first cross border SDI between Portugal and Spain: Background and development. *J. Earth Sci. Eng.* **2013**, *3*, 393–400.
29. Medeiros, E. Barrier Effect and Cross-Border Cooperation. The Sweden-Norway INTERREG—A Territorial Effects. *Finisterra* **2014**, *97*, 49–97. [[CrossRef](#)]
30. Castanho, R.A.; Vulevic, A.; Cabezas, J.; Fernández-Pozo, L.; Gómez-Naranjo, J.; Loures, L. Accessibility and connectivity—Movement between cities, as a critical factor to achieve success on cross-border cooperation (CBC) projects: A European analysis. *Sustain. Cities Soc.* **2017**, *32*, 181–190. [[CrossRef](#)]
31. Healey, P. *Collaborative Planning: Shaping Places in Fragmented Societies*, 2nd ed.; Palgrave Macmillan: London, UK, 1997.
32. Healey, P. Collaborative Planning in Perspective. *Plan. Theory* **2003**, *2*, 101–123. [[CrossRef](#)]
33. Kurowska-Pysz, J.; Castanho, R.A.; Loures, L. Sustainable Planning of Cross-Border Cooperation: A Strategy for Alliances in Border Cities. *Sustainability* **2018**, *10*, 1416. [[CrossRef](#)]
34. Wilber, K. *The Integral Vision*, 1st ed.; Shambhala Publications Inc.: Boston, MA, USA, 2007.
35. Brown, B. *The Four Worlds of Sustainability*; Drawing upon Four Universal Perspectives to Support Sustainability Initiatives; Integral Sustainability Center: Guilin, China, 2007.
36. Esbjorn-Hargens, S. *An Overview of Integral Theory*; Resource Paper (no.1); Integral Institute: Uttar Pradesh, India, 2009; pp. 1–24.
37. Brown, B.C. Theory and Practice of Integral Sustainable Development, Part 1—Quadrants and the Practitioner. *J. Integral Theory Pract.* **2005**, *1*, 351–386.
38. Brown, B.C. Theory and Practice of Integral Sustainable Development, Part 2—Values, Developmental Levels, and Natural Design. *AQAL J. Integral Theory Pract.* **2005**, *1*, 2–39.
39. Integral Theory of Ken Wilber, All Quadrants All Levels—A Model for Everything. Available online: <https://ecovillage.org/solution/integral-theory-of-ken-wilber/> (accessed on 17 January 2023).
40. Lalović, K.; Živković, J.; Radosavljević, U.; Đukanović, Z. An Integral Approach to the Modeling of Information Support for Local Sustainable Development—Experiences of a Serbian Enabling Leadership Experiment. *Sustainability* **2019**, *11*, 2675. [[CrossRef](#)]
41. Tirel, K. Two ways to get an Integral Theory: Ken Wilber’s method of integration. *Scr. Inst. Donneriani Abo.* **2012**, *24*, 405–418. [[CrossRef](#)]
42. Baer-Bader, J. *An Integral View on Leadership and Organizational Transformation in Public Sector Organization*; Malmo University: Malmö, Sweden, 2022.
43. Regional Environmental Center. *Kriva Palanka, Program for Local Economic Development on the Municipality of Kriva Palanka*; REC: Szentendre, Hungary, 2022.
44. Center for Economic Analysis. *Citizen Report Card of the Municipality Kriva Palanka*; Center for Economic Analysis: Skopje, Republic of North Macedonia, 2021.
45. Regional Environmental Center. *Municipality of Berovo, Local Environmental Action Plan*; REC: Szentendre, Hungary, 2003.
46. Regional Environmental Center. *Municipality of Berovo, Strategy for Local Economic Development of the Municipality of Berovo for the Period from 2014–2019*; REC: Szentendre, Hungary, 2004.
47. Regional Environmental Center. *Municipality of Berovo, Report on the Strategic Assessment of a Planning Document on the Environment*; REC: Szentendre, Hungary, 2020.
48. Regional Environmental Center. *Regional Center for Environmental Protection for Central and Eastern Europe, Strategy for the Development of Eco Tourism in Berovo*; REC: Szentendre, Hungary, 2005.
49. European Commission. Interreg—IPA CBC, Marketing Strategy for the Development of Rural Tourism in the South-Eastern Region of Macedonia and the Blagoevgrad Region of Bulgaria. 2020. Available online: <https://interreg.eu/programme/interreg-ipa-cbc-bulgaria-former-yugoslav-republic-of-macedonia/> (accessed on 12 April 2023).
50. Center for the Development of the Eastern Planning Region. *Program for the Development of the Eastern Planning Region 2021–2026*; Center for the Development of the Eastern Planning Region: Skopje, Republic of North Macedonia, 2021.
51. Center for the Development of the Southeastern Planning Region. *Action Plan for the Implementation of the Program for the Development of the Southeastern Planning Region for 2023*; Center for the Development of the Southeastern Planning Region: Skopje, Republic of North Macedonia, 2022.
52. ICPR. *Tourism Development Plan for Dojran, Gevgelija and the Environment*; ICPR: New Delhi, India, 2018.
53. Regional Environmental Center. *Municipality of Dojran, Local Economic Action Plan of the Municipality of Dojran*; REC: Szentendre, Hungary, 2018.
54. *Ministry of Environment and Physical Planning, Spatial Plan of RNM, Assembly of RNM*; Ministry of Environment and Physical Planning: Skopje, Republic of North Macedonia, 2004; pp. 62–63.
55. Petrovic, T.; Tokovic, M. *Društvo i Gradovi, Između Lokalnog i Globalnog*; ISI—Filozofskog fakulteta u Beogradu: Beograd, Serbia, 2018.
56. Deffner, A.; Metaxas, T. Place Marketing, Local Identity and Branding Cultural Imager in Southern Europe: Nea Ionia, Greese and Pafos Cyprus. In *Towards Effective Place Brand Management, Branding European Cities and Regions*, Cheltenham—Northampton; Ashworth, G., Kavaratzis, M., Eds.; Edward Elgar Publishing: Northampton, MA, USA, 2010; pp. 49–68.
57. Cheshmehzangi, A. Identity and public realm. *Procedia—Soc. Behav. Sci.* **2012**, *50*, 307–317. [[CrossRef](#)]
58. Domanski, B. Post-Socialism and Transition. In *Handbook of Local and Regional Development*; Rodriguez-Pose, A., Tomaney, J., Eds.; Routledge: New York, NY, USA; London, UK, 2011; pp. 172–181.

-
59. Kiss, E. The impacts of economic crisis on the spatial organization of Hungarian industry. *Eur. Urban Reg. Stud.* **2011**, *19*, 62–76. [[CrossRef](#)]
 60. Jasso, M.; Finka, M. Selected aspects of territorial cohesion in Slovakia under the recent crisis. *Spatium Int. Rev.* **2010**, *23*, 17–21. [[CrossRef](#)]

Disclaimer/Publisher’s Note: The statements, opinions and data contained in all publications are solely those of the individual author(s) and contributor(s) and not of MDPI and/or the editor(s). MDPI and/or the editor(s) disclaim responsibility for any injury to people or property resulting from any ideas, methods, instructions or products referred to in the content.