

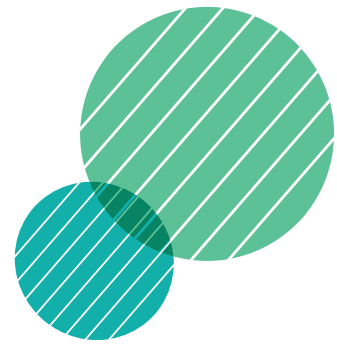
ANNUAL REPORT

2024

Threads of Transformation

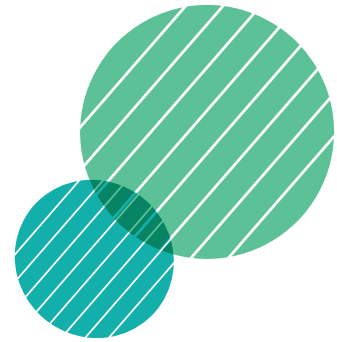


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“Nature uses only the longest threads to weave her patterns, so that each small piece of her fabric reveals the organization of the entire tapestry.”

— Richard P. Feynman

“We all should know that diversity makes for a rich tapestry, and we must understand that all the threads of the tapestry are equal in value.”

— Maya Angelou

0. Glossary

0.1 Acronyms

To make the reading of this report easier, the following acronyms appear frequently:

Acronym	Meaning
URI	Urban Research Institute
EU	European Union
EUKI	European Climate Initiative
GCF	Green Climate Fund
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
ALDA	European Association for Local Democracy
UNEP	United Nations Environment Programme
GEF	Global Environment Facility
EBRD	European Bank for Reconstruction and Development
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
MRV	Measurement, Reporting, and Verification
NDC	Nationally Determined Contribution
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal

0.2 Technical Language

Circular Economy

An economic system designed to keep materials and products in use for as long as possible. It replaces the traditional “take, make, dispose” model with reuse, recycling, and regeneration. For URI, the circular economy is more than an environmental concept; it is a social one. By turning waste into opportunity through projects in Berat, Durrës, and Gjirokastër, URI helps communities re-imagine value, create local jobs, and protect natural resources.

Watershed Management

The coordinated stewardship of land, water, and biodiversity within a river basin. URI applies this integrated approach through initiatives such as BIODRINI, where municipalities in Albania and Kosovo share a single ecological responsibility. Watershed management recognises that rivers do not stop at borders; they connect communities through shared challenges and shared potential.

Climate Mitigation and Adaptation

Mitigation reduces greenhouse gas emissions, while adaptation helps societies cope with the effects of climate change. URI works on both fronts, supporting national strategies, developing emission-reporting systems, and helping local authorities strengthen resilience to floods, droughts, and heatwaves. These twin efforts reflect URI’s commitment to both prevention and preparedness.

Capacity Building

The process of strengthening knowledge, skills, and systems so that individuals and institutions can act effectively and sustainably. In URI’s experience, capacity building is not a one-off training session; it is a continuous thread of mentorship, collaboration, and shared learning that binds government, academia, and communities together.

Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E)

A systematic way to measure what works, what changes, and why. URI treats M&E as a learning journey rather than a checklist. By analysing evidence and feedback, the organisation ensures that each project leaves behind not only results but also insight for future policy and practice.

Sustainability

The principle that underpins every decision URI makes. Sustainability means meeting present needs without compromising the ability of future generations to meet theirs, a responsibility that guides URI’s internal operations as well as its external programmes.

1. Preface: Threads of Transformation

1.1 Overview of 25 Years of URI

The Urban Research Institute was founded in 1999, at a time when Albania was redefining its institutions and its relationship with citizens. From its earliest studies on public administration reform and fiscal decentralisation, URI sought to build bridges between evidence and policy.

Its founders believed that effective governance depends on informed decision-making and that sustainable progress grows from dialogue rather than decree.

In its first decade, URI focused on governance and local democracy, training municipal officials, designing transparent budget systems, and helping communities participate in public planning. URI has extended its services to Russia, as well as to several other states to deliver training and hands-on expertise for budget with choices, based on what citizens want and value, in South Sudan and 5 other republics to introduce newly developed budget software and train the public administration, as well as in neighbour countries such as Kosovo and Montenegro, related to public service delivery improvement.

By the 2010s, environmental challenges demanded broader engagement. URI began addressing waste management, water resources, and energy efficiency, applying the same principles of research, participation, and accountability to new fields.

Partnerships soon extended beyond Albania's borders. Collaboration with Italy, Greece, Croatia Kosovo, Montenegro, and North Macedonia brought URI into the regional conversation on climate action and sustainable tourism. Engagements with the European Union, Swiss Development Cooperation, UN agencies, and the Green Climate Fund placed URI within a global network of knowledge exchange.

Through each phase, the organisation adapted without losing its essence: independence, integrity, and cooperation, extending our services to all 61 municipalities of Albania.

These qualities have allowed URI to evolve from a small national think tank into a regional actor and trusted partner, a bridge between institutions and citizens, research and practice, policy and the lived environment.

Today, the results of those twenty-five years can be traced across Albania: in cleaner municipalities, inclusive decision making, restored heritage sites, and municipal policies built on data rather than assumptions.

Yet URI's greatest achievement may be less visible: the trust it has earned by remaining consistent in purpose, transparent in action, and open to collaboration.

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1.2 2024, A Year of Connection and Impact

In 2024, the Urban Research Institute celebrated not only its longevity but its evolution.

The anniversary year served as a mirror, reflecting how far the organisation has come and how its network of partnerships continues to grow.

Throughout the year, URI's work illustrated transformation in motion:

- **In climate governance**, it helped establish Albania's first national system for measuring and reporting greenhouse-gas emissions, laying the groundwork for transparent climate finance and accountability.
- **In waste management**, it supported the municipality of Berat to implement separate collection systems and promote circular-economy practices that create both jobs and cleaner neighbourhoods.
- **In cross-border cooperation**, it advanced eco-tourism routes and watershed management initiatives that link Albania with its neighbours through shared environmental stewardship.
- **In civic participation**, it engaged hundreds of citizens, youth, and civil society organisations in policy discussions, trainings, and community-based actions.

Internally, 2024 was also a year of renewal. URI launched its Gender Equality and Inclusion Action Plan 2024-2027, welcoming new staff who brought diverse skills and perspectives. The organisation invested in digital communication tools and learning spaces to enhance transparency and public engagement.

These milestones collectively form a tapestry of progress, evidence that transformation does not occur in isolation. It emerges through relationships, through data shared and lessons learned, through every meeting, training, and field visit that turns commitment into reality.

As URI steps beyond its twenty-fifth year, it does so not as an institution looking back but as a network looking forward, continuing to weave together Albania's people, policies, and possibilities into a more sustainable and inclusive future.



2. Institutional Overview

2.1 About URI

The Urban Research Institute (URI) is an independent, non-profit organisation headquartered in Tirana, Albania. Established by court decision in 1999, URI's mission is to promote cooperation between civil society, government, and academia in support of evidence-based and sustainable national policies and local action plans.

URI provides technical assistance, policy advice, and research across a wide range of thematic areas, including environment, governance, infrastructure, social development, and education.

Over the years, it has supported all 61 municipalities in Albania, helping them design strategies, improve service delivery, and access donor funding. Its expertise spans from project planning to implementation, monitoring, and evaluation, ensuring that every intervention remains transparent and accountable.

The Institute's credibility is rooted in its method. Each project begins with data collection and analysis, continues with consultation and participation, and concludes with reflection and learning. By following this process consistently, URI has built a reputation for delivering results that are both technically sound and socially meaningful.

Beyond Albania, URI's footprint extends through partnerships in the Western Balkans, the Mediterranean, and beyond. Its collaborations with the EU, Swiss Development Cooperation, UN agencies, and the Green Climate Fund place it within global dialogues on climate resilience, circular economy, and social inclusion.

What makes URI distinctive is not only what it delivers but how it delivers it: through cooperation, dialogue, and a long-term vision that values relationships as much as results.

2.2 Mission

Weaving Evidence, People, and Policy

URI's mission is to strengthen governance, empower communities, and promote sustainable development through the use of evidence, participation, and innovation.

At its essence, this mission transforms data into understanding, and understanding into action.

Over the years, it has supported all 61 municipalities in Albania, helping them design strategies, improve service delivery, and access donor funding. Its expertise spans from project planning to implementation, monitoring, and evaluation, ensuring that every intervention remains transparent and accountable.

URI's mission is expressed through **four enduring principles**:



Knowledge as a public good.

Reliable data and research should guide every policy decision that affects people and the environment.

Cooperation over competition

Sustainable development emerges through collaboration between government, civil society, academia, and citizens.

Inclusion and equity.

Every intervention must consider gender, youth, and vulnerable groups to ensure that progress benefits all.

Accountability through transparency.

True transformation occurs when institutions are open and responsive to the people they serve.

These principles give URI its role as both a convener and catalyst, bringing diverse actors together, helping them identify common goals, and supporting them to implement effective, long-lasting solutions.

Through this mission, URI continues to weave together evidence and empathy, building bridges that sustain both human and environmental resilience.

2.3 National and Regional Engagements

Weaving Evidence, People, and Policy

Transformation does not recognise borders. The challenges of climate change, waste management, and inclusive governance extend across municipalities, rivers, and regions, and so does URI's work.

Within Albania, URI collaborates with ministries, local authorities, and state agencies to strengthen governance systems and public-service delivery. Its support ranges from national policy formulation to hands-on municipal assistance.

URI has worked with nearly every Albanian municipality, helping to develop waste-management plans in Durrës and Berat, supporting energy-efficiency planning in Elbasan, and assisting environmental monitoring efforts in Kukës and Gjirokastër.

Regionally, URI plays an active role in connecting Albania to its neighbours through cross-border initiatives. Programmes with Greece, Kosovo, Montenegro, and North Macedonia demonstrate that environmental and cultural challenges are shared, and that cooperation yields mutual benefit.

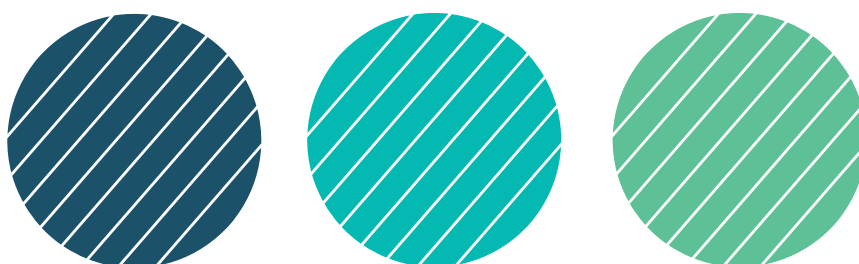
Projects like EcoRoutes, Cult2Routes, and BIODRINI link people through rivers, trails, and heritage, transforming boundaries into bridges.

Internationally, URI engages with partners such as the European Union, UNDP, UNEP, GCF, EBRD, World Bank, and Swiss Development Cooperation. These collaborations not only provide funding but also create channels for learning and policy alignment with EU standards and the Sustainable Development Goals.

Across these engagements, URI acts as both a participant and facilitator, connecting local experience with regional frameworks and global commitments.

Each partnership becomes a thread in a larger fabric of shared progress, reinforcing the idea that sustainable development in Albania is part of a wider regional and global story.

Behind every policy paper, pilot project, and partnership stands a community of people who embody URI's values.



3. Organisational Values And Structure

3.1 Our Values, People, and Place

3.1.1 Our Values

URI's work is guided by four enduring principles that define both its internal culture and its external relationships.

Integrity means doing what is right, not what is easy. URI upholds independence in its research and fairness in every partnership.

Cooperation reflects URI's belief that progress depends on dialogue. The organisation values joint effort, within its team, among institutions, and with the communities it serves.

Transparency ensures that accountability is embedded in every process, from project management and procurement to reporting and communication.

Sustainability underpins URI's long-term vision: that every policy or intervention must respect environmental limits and social equity.

3.1.2 Our People

URI's strength lies in its people, a small, multidisciplinary team supported by a wider network of national and international experts. Its professionals bring backgrounds in environmental policy, economics, governance, engineering, law, social development, and communication. They work collectively, sharing information and insight across departments to ensure that projects are approached from multiple perspectives.

The organisation maintains an atmosphere of openness and collaboration, where initiative and responsibility are encouraged. Regular coordination among team members and partners keeps work transparent and objectives aligned. Experience remains URI's greatest classroom. Through engagement in national and regional projects, staff continually expand their knowledge and understanding of the complex issues that shape sustainable development in Albania and the Western Balkans. This collective expertise, analytical, practical, and creative, gives URI its distinctive capacity to turn research into results.

3.1.3 Our Place

From its base in Tirana, URI manages activities that extend across Albania and neighbouring countries. The office functions as a hub for coordination, learning, and communication, a space where ideas and evidence are gathered before being translated into policies and field actions.

URI applies the same principles of responsibility within its daily operations that it promotes in its programmes: efficiency, careful resource management, and professionalism in all interactions.

This internal coherence reinforces URI's credibility as an organisation that strives to practise what it promotes: responsible management, respect for the environment, and integrity in every detail of its work.

Together, these values form the moral framework that binds URI's people, projects, and partners into a single, coherent purpose.

3.2 Scope of Work

URI's activities cover four complementary areas that together define its identity as both a research institute and an implementing organisation.

Policy Research and Planning

Conducting analytical studies, preparing evidence-based strategies, and supporting policy formulation in sectors such as environment, energy, waste management, water, and decentralisation.

Capacity Building

Designing and delivering training and technical assistance to strengthen the skills of public officials, civil society representatives, and community stakeholders.

Programme and Project Management

Coordinating and implementing development initiatives funded by bilateral and multilateral partners, ensuring technical accuracy, compliance, and participatory engagement.

Monitoring, Evaluating and Learning

Establishing systems to measure performance and capture lessons, enabling each project to inform and improve the next.

4. Leadership Message

As we mark the Urban Research Institute's twenty-fifth year, I am reminded that true change rarely happens overnight. It unfolds gradually, through collaboration, learning, and the persistence of people who care deeply about their communities.

In 2024, URI's work reflected that spirit of connection. We supported national institutions in developing Albania's first system for climate measurement and reporting, helping the country take an important step towards transparent and accountable climate governance.

We strengthened municipal capacity for waste separation and recycling in Berat and Durrës, linking circular-economy principles to daily life.

Across borders, we promoted inclusive tourism routes, protected river basins, and built partnerships that unite communities through shared environmental goals.

Each of these initiatives demonstrates what has always defined URI: a commitment to evidence, participation, and practical results.

Our achievements are not ours alone; they belong equally to the partners and collaborators who make this work possible. Ministries, municipalities, donors, civil-society organisations, universities, and local communities have each played their part in this shared story of transformation.

"Transformation is not a single act; it is a continuous weaving of people, partnerships, and possibilities. Each connection adds strength to the fabric we have built together."

As Executive Director, I am especially proud of the people behind URI's name. Our small but dedicated team continues to work with professionalism, passion, and care, proving that a clear purpose and strong cooperation can deliver impact far beyond what numbers alone can show.

Looking ahead, the challenges we face, climate change, social inequality, and institutional reform, require not only technical solutions but renewed trust and solidarity. URI will continue to connect these threads: linking research to action, national vision to local reality, and today's progress to the well-being of future generations.

To all who have supported, partnered with, and believed in URI over these twenty-five years: thank you.

Together, we have created something lasting, a community of practice that continues to weave the threads of transformation for Albania and beyond.

As leadership reflects on the past and looks toward the future, the next section turns to the tangible side of URI's impact: the projects, numbers, and partnerships that defined 2024, a year where transformation was not just envisioned, but lived.



Zana Vokopola

Executive Director, Urban Research Institute

5. 2024 Overview

5.1 Key Figures



These numbers represent relationships as much as results. Each partner joined a cooperative chain that stretches from local communities to regional institutions, demonstrating that measurable progress is built on human connection.

5.2 Focus Areas

URI's work in 2024 revolved around seven focus areas that together form its operational framework. Each area contributes to the others, a set of interwoven strands that combine environmental, social, and institutional progress.

1. Environmental Protection & Climate Change

URI advanced Albania's readiness for transparent climate action, leading initiatives that link local data collection with national commitments.

2. Waste Management

Through municipal partnerships, URI promoted circular-economy models that reduce waste generation and support new recycling practices.

3. Tourism & Cultural Heritage

Projects connected heritage preservation with community livelihoods, turning cultural assets into sustainable opportunities.

4. Water & Sanitation

URI strengthened integrated watershed planning and supported national reforms to improve governance and service delivery.

5. Energy & Mobility

Collaborations in Elbasan introduced clean-energy solutions and electric-mobility planning, linking innovation with education and jobs.

6. Biodiversity & Natural Resources

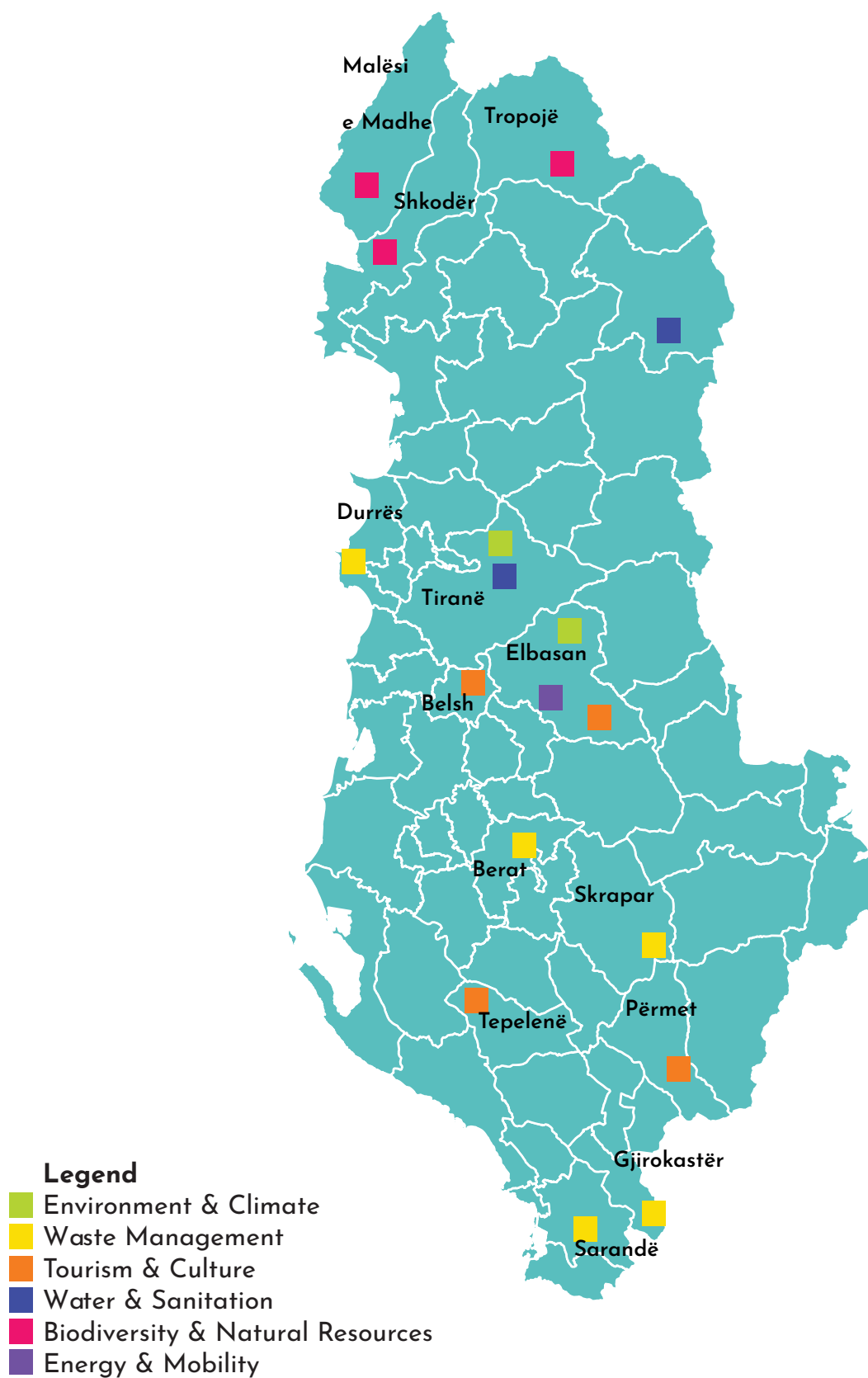
Research and fieldwork protected sensitive ecosystems such as the Albanian Alps while promoting responsible resource use.

7. Civil Society & Governance

URI empowered local organisations and youth networks, reinforcing democratic participation and institutional accountability.

Together, these seven areas illustrate how transformation takes form, not as isolated success stories, but as connected systems that strengthen one another. Each initiative, whether in a small municipality or a regional forum, adds a new thread to the growing fabric of sustainable change.

5.3 Field Trip Map



5.4 International Map



6. Portfolios And Projects

6.1 Environmental Protection & Climate Change

URI's environmental and climate portfolio represents the organisation's most established line of work, accounting for a major share of its programmes through 2027. As Albania's accredited **Delivery Partner** of the **Green Climate Fund (GCF)** since 2019, URI helps national institutions translate global climate commitments into practical national systems

Climate MRV System Readiness

The Climate MRV System Readiness project established Albania's first national system for Measurement, Reporting, and Verification (MRV) of greenhouse gases. Activities included drafting sub-legal acts, developing emission factors and methodologies, and piloting reporting with municipalities and private actors. Achievements include improved transparency in climate reporting and stronger readiness to access international climate finance mechanisms.

Policy and Investment Planning in FOLU in Albania

This Green Climate Fund project positions URI at the core of Albania's land-use and climate policy architecture. It supports the Government of Albania in realising the mitigation and sustainable development potential of the Food, Land and Urban Systems (FOLU) sector. Through integrated policy planning, data management and capacity development, the project builds a comprehensive investment framework for forestry and land use that directly advances Albania's Nationally Determined Contributions under the Paris Agreement. Its outputs will help shape national climate finance readiness and sustainable rural development pathways.

NDC Implementation Plan Readiness

The NDC Implementation Plan Readiness project supports Albania in translating its climate commitments into actionable steps. It prepares a comprehensive NDC Implementation Plan covering governance, mitigation, adaptation, finance, and transparency. Methods include updating land use data, standardizing cost assessments, and preparing a finance strategy for public and private investment. Its achievements are expected to include a clear roadmap for meeting Albania's climate targets and stronger mobilization of climate finance.

Climate Bridges Network in Action

The Climate Bridges Network in Action project, implemented across the Western Balkans, aimed to strengthen regional collaboration on the EU Green Agenda. Its methods included public campaigns, stakeholder training, and the development of Local Green Agendas. Achievements include nine campaigns in five countries, the collection of good practices, and the formation of a regional network of more than 75 organizations, all committed to sustainable and inclusive climate action.

6.2 Waste Management

Waste management remains one of Albania's most pressing environmental issues, and URI has positioned itself as a national leader in this field. Its projects combine technical planning with community participation, turning the linear flow of waste into a circular loop of value.

Durrës Integrated Waste Management

The project "Protection of Environment through Integrated Waste Management in Durrës Municipality" aims to strengthen the municipality's capacity to deliver sustainable waste management services. In its first phase, the project mapped waste collection points across the municipality's territory, engaged local stakeholders in planning processes, and built partnerships with Aleksandër Moisiu University to involve students through Eco-Club initiatives and a Summer School focused on circular economy principles and sustainable urban development. Key achievements include baseline analyses, enhanced community and stakeholder engagement leading to improved waste management planning and delivery, increased public awareness, and greater alignment of Durrës with EU standards on waste reduction and resource efficiency.

Separate collection of waste in Berat Municipality

The Berat City Green initiative introduced a new source-separated waste collection system in the city. For this system are distributed around 460 containers (1100 lt) in the city center, and more than 1200 (240 lt bins) in the surrounding areas such as historical area, Uznove and Gorice neighborhood. Apart from the separate collection of waste through 1100 lt containers in the residential area, the project introduced door-to-door collection of recyclable waste in historic neighborhoods. The initiative achieved its goal through the establishment of a Sorting Center for the separately collected waste and preparing the recyclable waste for the recycling sector. Furthermore, the project, and carried out awareness campaigns through boards, city lights, and digital tools. Training for staff and outreach to local businesses ensured smooth operations. Throughout the implementation the project successfully included the engagement of citizens in recycling practices.



Solid Waste Management Zone - Gjirokastër & Vlorë South

The Solid Waste Management Zone (vendos emrin e gjatë të projektit) project is an ongoing initiative for the modernization of waste management service at the regional level in Gjirokastër - Vlorë South waste zone. The main goal of the project is the development of detailed design for the constructing new transfer stations in Gjirokastër and Tepelene Municipalities, expansion of the Bajkaj sanitary landfill in Delvine Municipality including the construction of recovery and composting facilities and also, the closing of non-compliant dumpsites. The project is entailed with the review of the feasibility studies, development of environmental impact assessments, and its financial planning. The project at the end will deliver a comprehensive, EU-aligned regional waste management model that reduces environmental risks and promotes resource recovery.

EU for Circular Economy

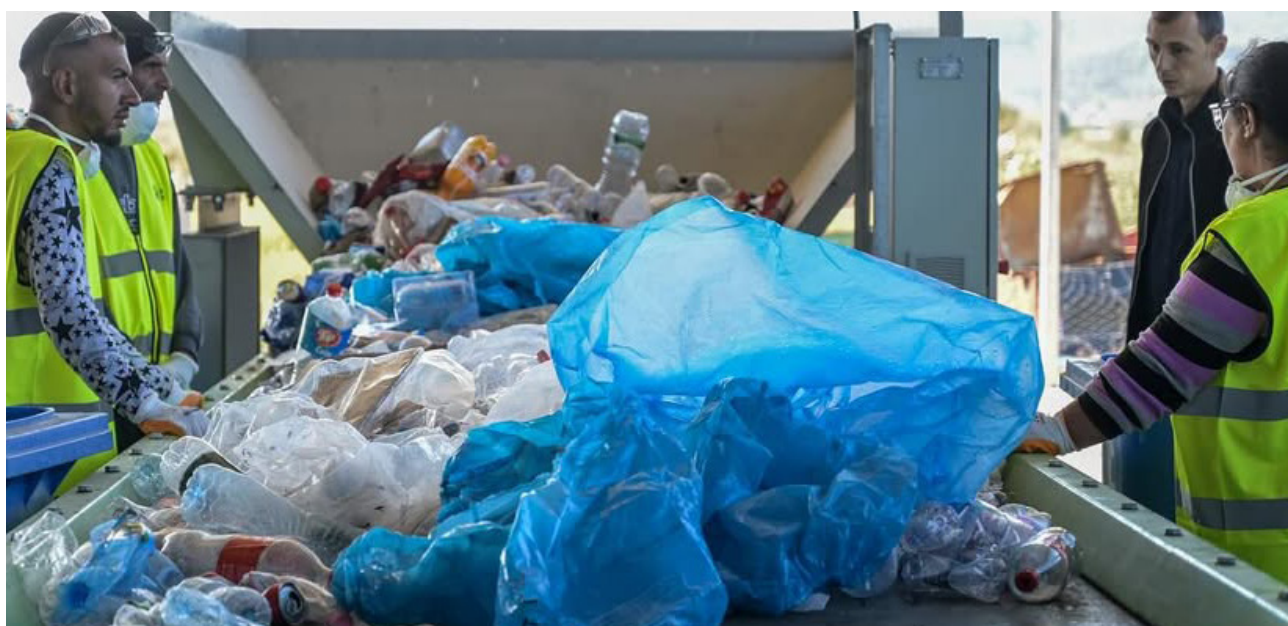
Within the EU for Circular Economy Investment Programme, URI collaborates with Groupe Huit on technical studies, detailed design and environmental and social assessments for the Waste Management Investment Programme in Albania (LOT 2). The project supports regional waste infrastructure planning and future investments in transfer stations, landfill modernisation and composting facilities, providing the technical foundation for Albania's circular economy transition.

WFD & EPR Guideline (WB6)

The WFD & EPR Guideline project provided practical support for businesses in the Western Balkans to align with the EU Waste Framework Directive and Extended Producer Responsibility. It surveyed companies to identify gaps, highlighted challenges faced by SMEs, and issued recommendations such as joining producer responsibility organizations, redesigning packaging, and improving staff training. Achievements include harmonized regional guidance and direct assistance to businesses preparing for EU market entry under circular economy rules.

LESS WASTE II - IPA CBC

The LESS WASTE II project promoted waste prevention and recycling through cross-border cooperation between Greece and Albania. It developed local composting systems, upgraded collection infrastructure and conducted awareness campaigns on sustainable consumption. By piloting circular practices and training municipal authorities, the project demonstrated replicable models for reducing landfill dependency and enhancing community participation in waste management.



6.3 Tourism & Cultural Heritage

URI approaches tourism not as a commercial venture but as a meeting place between culture, environment, and community identity. Its projects in this field reveal how protecting heritage can also generate sustainable livelihoods.

4ALL - Accessible Tourism

The 4ALL project connected Albania and Greece to make tourism infrastructure more inclusive for seniors and persons with disabilities. In Berat, ramps, pathways, and accessible information points were installed at cultural sites, while new signage and guides were introduced in Pindos National Park. Mobile applications, web platforms, and adapted tour packages were developed, and tourism professionals were trained to serve all visitors. The project succeeded in increasing visitor numbers, proving that inclusive tourism can drive both economic growth and social inclusion.



Cult2Routes

The Cult2Routes initiative transformed underutilized cultural heritage in Tepelenë (Albania) and Nestorio (Greece) into sustainable tourism opportunities. It developed signposted cultural and hiking routes, restored monuments, and created 3D digital records for heritage preservation. The project also invested in marketing campaigns, study visits, and stakeholder training to improve service delivery. Achievements include new employment opportunities, restored and promoted cultural assets, and a replicable rural tourism model that combines heritage preservation with economic development.



MAPCULT

The MAPCULT project in Përmet promoted the sustainable farming of medicinal and aromatic plants as an alternative to cannabis cultivation. Farmers received land, seedlings, a drying chamber, a warehouse, and transport facilities, while women and youth were trained to produce artisanal cosmetics. Public awareness campaigns engaged thousands of citizens, and cooperative structures supported business development. The project achieved tangible results by creating new farming livelihoods, supporting families, and launching a local cosmetic production initiative.

E-Mobility for Sustainable Tourism in Albania

Implemented with UNIDO and the Ministry of Tourism and Environment, this project introduces electric mobility solutions in tourist destinations such as Berat, Belsh and Elbasan. It pilots charging infrastructure and e-vehicle fleets, develops regulatory frameworks and raises awareness on low-carbon travel. The initiative accelerates Albania's transition to climate-smart tourism and strengthens institutional capacity for sustainable destination planning.

EcoRoutes

The EcoRoutes project aimed to boost sustainable tourism in Kukës (Albania) and Rahovec (Kosovo) by promoting natural and cultural heritage. It developed 20 km of mapped and signposted trails, constructed climbing walls and tree houses, and launched a mobile hiker app with an interactive tour platform. Alongside these investments, the project created a regional brand identity, tourist guides, promotional videos, and organized storytelling contests and fairs. Achievements include a stronger regional eco-tourism identity and expanded opportunities for women and local crafts producers.



6.4 Water & Sanitation

Clean water is a right, not a resource to be taken for granted. URI's work in this sector integrates environmental protection with institutional reform.

BIODRINI - Enhancement of Biodiversity in the Drini River Basin

The BIODRINI Enhancing Biodiversity in the Drin River Basin through Integrated Watershed Management project enhanced biodiversity protection in the Drini River Basin across Kukës (Albania) and Rahovec (Kosovo). The main delivery of the is an Integrated Watershed Management Plan, that promotes the sustainable development, including Action Plan for short, medium and long term of the Black and White Drin Watershed in Rahovec Municipality from the side of Kosovo and municipalities of Qark Region from the Albanian side. The project also conducted legal and institutional gap analyses. In terms of investments, BIODRINI project contributed with the installation of 4 litter traps in Drin River tributaries, 2 on each side of the border, contributing in the capturing of around 40.000 kg of waste the first year. The project also implemented promotion and awareness raising activities such as: Clean-up events, Summer and Winter Schools with students from Albania and Kosovo, engaged youth and local communities, while partnerships ensured long-term maintenance. Achievements included thousands of beneficiaries reached, significant areas placed under integrated watershed management, and municipalities adopting regional solutions for biodiversity protection.

Technical Assistance on Water & Sanitation Sector Strengthening

URI partners with SEURECA SAS under a World Bank-funded technical assistance programme to support Albania's water and sanitation sector reform. The project provides analysis, capacity development and policy advice to improve utility performance and investment planning. It enhances sector governance and aligns national standards with EU water and sanitation directives.



6.5 Energy & Mobility

Sustainable energy and mobility are at the centre of Albania's green transition, and URI's work in Elbasan serves as a national pilot for innovation.

GreenElb

The GreenElb project focused on reducing emissions in Elbasan's building sector by preparing for near-zero emission retrofits. Energy audits of residential buildings provided the foundation for a technical and financial roadmap, while behavioral studies and a policy sandbox tested new solutions. Training programs built local expertise in energy auditing and renovation planning. The project's main achievement is establishing a pathway for scaling sustainable energy solutions in Albania's housing stock.

Elbasan Climate-Neutral Innovation in Mobility eCIM

The eCIM project advances Elbasan's transition toward climate-neutral mobility by piloting cycling corridors, smart infrastructure and data-driven transport planning. Implemented under the Climate-KIC network, it combines technical research and citizen engagement to reduce urban emissions and improve connectivity. The initiative demonstrates URI's capacity to adapt European innovation models to Albanian urban contexts.

6.6 Biodiversity & Natural Resources

Biodiversity is the living foundation of sustainable development. URI's work protects ecosystems while promoting economic opportunities that depend on their health.

Environment Support Programme Albania

This programme supports Albania in aligning its environmental policies and institutions with EU acquis requirements. URI contributes through technical assistance, capacity building and policy analysis focused on biodiversity conservation, climate adaptation and natural resource management. The initiative enhances national environmental governance and strengthens institutional frameworks for sustainable development.

Albanian Alps National Park Valorisation Study

The Albanian Alps National Park Valorisation Study was designed to strengthen biodiversity conservation and climate resilience in northern Albania. Ecological surveys mapped habitats using Natura 2000 methodology and identified rare species, while socio-economic studies and consultations updated zoning and management plans. A business plan for eco-tourism and green entrepreneurship was also prepared. The study's achievements lie in providing a strategic framework that balances conservation priorities with sustainable local development.



6.7 Civil Society & Governance

Strong governance and an active civil society form the institutional backbone of sustainable transformation. URI's programmes in this domain strengthen the relationship between citizens and institutions.

BOOST - Balkans for Optimising Opportunities, Sustainability and Transformation of Civil SocietyBasin

Balkans for Optimising Opportunities, Sustainability and Transformation of Civil Society - BOOST (2024 -2027) is a regional project coordinated by ALDA and its consortium of partners, with Urban Research Institute (URI) as the implementing partner in Albania.



Funded by the Agence Française de Développement (AFD), which implements France's international development and solidarity policy, BOOST aims to foster democratic, economic, and social development in the Western Balkans in the context of EU enlargement.



The project strengthens civil society organizations across key areas such as youth empowerment and entrepreneurship, environmental protection, rural development, cultural heritage preservation, and community advancement, with a strong focus on active citizenship, gender inclusion, and participatory governance.

7. Partnerships And Networks

URI's partnerships span public institutions, local authorities, international organisations, and development networks. Together they form a living ecosystem of collaboration that supports sustainable development in Albania and the Western Balkans.

National Partners

Ministry of Environment

Ministry of Infrastructure
and Energy

National Environmental
Agency

Municipality of Berat

Municipality of Durrës

Municipality of Elbasan

Municipality of
Gjirokastër

International Partners

European Union (EU)

Swiss Development
Cooperation (SDC)

Green Climate Fund (GCF)

United Nations
Development Programme
(UNDP)

United Nations
Environment Programme
(UNEP)

European Bank for
Reconstruction and
Development (EBRD)

World Bank

Networks & Alliances

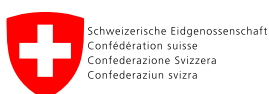
Central and Eastern
European Network
(CEEN)

International Union
for Conservation of
Nature (IUCN)

European Association
for Local Democracy
(ALDA)



European
Union



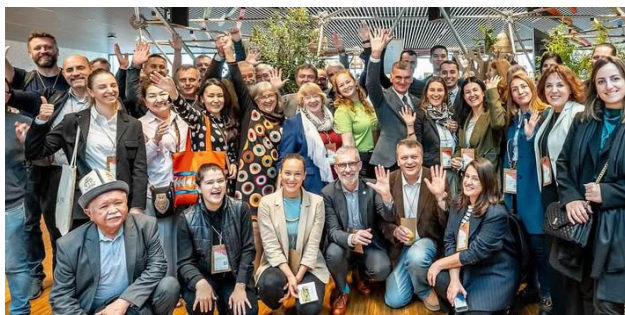
8. Our Eventful Year

8.1 International Engagements

URI's Global Footprint in 2024

IUCN Regional Conservation Forum

Held under the theme "Solutions for Nature and People," this regional forum gathered more than 400 participants from Europe and Central Asia. URI not only participated but also co-organised and presented a dedicated session titled "Environmental Conservation of Protected Areas: Law Enforcement and the Role of Civil Society." The discussion emphasised the importance of community participation and multi-level governance in protecting natural parks. URI's contribution showcased how organisations from smaller countries can influence conservation policy by connecting local realities with international frameworks.



GEF-EBRD Workshop, London

URI joined global experts and financial institutions in a workshop focused on innovative approaches to green investment. The dialogue provided a valuable opportunity to explore the intersection of environmental policy, infrastructure planning, and sustainable finance. URI's participation highlighted Albania's growing capacity to design and manage projects that meet international environmental and social standards.

Western Balkan EUKI Networking Conference

Organised and hosted by URI, this flagship event brought together more than 150 practitioners, researchers, and policymakers from the Western Balkans, Germany, and neighbouring EU member states.

The conference served as a platform for dialogue on the Western Balkan Green Agenda, enabling EUKI-funded projects to share experiences and good practices. For URI, hosting the event was a symbolic achievement: it demonstrated the Institute's evolution from participant to organiser, from beneficiary of networks to builder of them.



Sweden Partnership Meeting

URI took part in a bilateral meeting in Sweden to exchange insights on sustainable urban development and education innovation. The encounter expanded the organisation's reach into Northern Europe, opening opportunities for cooperation on digital learning and community-based sustainability initiatives.

8.2 National Engagements

Inauguration of the Waste Separation and Processing Centre in Berat

The centre, with a 40,000-ton annual capacity, marked Albania's first step toward a sustainable model for recycling and waste reduction.



Closing Conference of the Climate Bridges Project

Implemented ecosystem-based adaptation measures on about 2 hectares through planting, soil stabilisation, and bio-restoration, enhancing local climate resilience and municipal capacities.



MAPCULT Final Event

Promoted socio-economic development through the cultivation of medicinal and aromatic plants, farmer training, infrastructure support, and the empowerment of vulnerable groups in artisanal cosmetics production.



Launch of the BOOST Regional Calls

Focused on youth engagement, rural development, environmental sustainability, cultural heritage, and community empowerment, promoting regional cooperation across the Western Balkans.

Launch of the Waste Separation at Source System in Berat

Introduced the new waste-separation scheme with strong institutional and community involvement to promote responsible waste management practices.

Participation at the National Tourism and Travel Show Albania

URI presented the Eco-Routes Project's interventions in Kukës and Rahovec, showcasing sustainable tourism initiatives and community-based eco-tourism development.

Sustainable Forest Management in Elbasan

In collaboration with Elbasan Municipality and local residents, URI implemented reforestation in vulnerable zones to strengthen ecosystem resilience and community engagement.



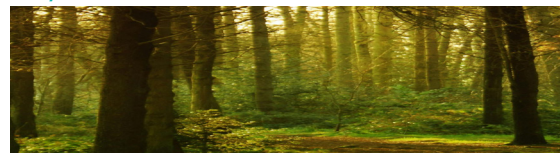
Eco-Routes Closing Conference

A public event inaugurating new hiking and adventure trails, presenting guides, storytelling booklets, digital trails, and videos, and gathering stakeholders to discuss future cooperation.



First Field Visit to the Albanian Alps National Park

Engaged with residents, tourists, and institutions to assess socio-economic conditions and study the effects of climate change on the Alps ecosystem.



National MRV System for Greenhouse Gas Reporting

Albania submitted its first Biennial Transparency Report to the UNFCCC, a milestone supported by the Urban Research Institute in building the national greenhouse gas inventory and transparency system.

9. Our Team

9.1 Meet the Core Team



Zana Vokopola, Executive Director



Edlir Vokopola, Director, Planning and Development Department



Dritan Gorica, Environmental Engineer, Planning and Development Department



Entela Kallamata, Finance and Economics Expert, Research Department



Drini Nushi, Legal Expert, Research Department



Ina Janushi, Human Resources and Finance Expert, Administrative Office



Marinela Spahiu, Public Administration Expert, Research Department



Erni Kocani, Environmental Engineer, Planning and Development Department



Fabio Çani, Communication Expert, Assistant Project Manager

9.2 New Recruits Testimonials



Kristi Dashi

Each engagement became a thread linking local insight with global dialogue. Through regional forums and international conferences, URI brought Albania's experience to global tables on climate, governance, and sustainability. These exchanges strengthened partnerships, inspired cooperation, and reflected URI's enduring belief that transformation happens when local voices, shared knowledge, and collective action are woven together into a common purpose.



Deni Ahmetaj

I started my internship at the Urban Research Institute right after graduating from university. Despite my academic background, URI opened a door to my professional development, and I had the opportunity to get involved in a variety of projects, from field monitoring to research. Above all, undoubtedly thanks to the experience I accumulated here, I managed to win an Erasmus Mundus scholarship to continue my master's studies, taking a step forward and towards my academic development.

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