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## **SESSION 1: STRATEGIC PLANNING OF DESTINATIONS**

**Helga SALLAKU, Dragana PANTOVIĆ NIKĆEVIĆ, Radovan STAJANOVIĆ**  
DEVELOPING A SUSTAINABLE STRATEGIC PLANNING  
FOR TOURIST DESTINATIONS THROUGH INTERNET OF  
THINGS (IOT) TECHNOLOGY.....9

**Adriana GALVANI, Brilanda BUSHATI**  
SUSTAINABLE TOURISM CAN BE SUCCESSFUL ONLY IN A  
SUSTAINABLE WORLD.....17

**Arian GJURA, Brilanda BUSHATI**  
NAVIGATING CONFLICTS IN TOURISM WITHIN  
PROTECTED AREAS: STAKEHOLDERS AND SOLUTIONS  
(LITERATURE REVIEW).....29

**Fatjon MLLOJA, Elvisa DRISHTI**  
INVESTIGATING DARK TOURISM ROUTES IN ALBANIA -  
THE CASE OF THE REBELLION OF POSTRIBA .....39

**Alkida HASAJ, Majlinda LAÇAJ**  
MUSEUMS AND DIGITAL CULTURE IN THE SHKODER  
CITY.....53

**Steisi ÇOKAJ, Eri ÇOKAJ**  
EXPLORING THE DETERMINANTS OF TOURIST  
SATISFACTION IN ALBANIA'S GASTRONOMIC TOURISM:  
EMPIRICAL INSIGHTS.....71

<b>Sabrina KUÇI, Samina KRAJA</b> DEVELOPMENT OF HISTORICAL CENTERS. CASE STUDY: SHKODËR HISTORICAL CENTER.....	87
---	----

## **SESSION 2: CHALLENGES OF SUSTAINABLE TOURISM**

<b>Jetmir MUJA, Albana BORIÇI, Ardita BORIÇI</b> EMPOWERING HOSPITALITY: STRATEGIES FOR IMPROVING SERVICE QUALITY AND CUSTOMER SATISFACTION.....	101
---	-----

<b>Elvisa DRISHTI, Drita KRUJA</b> A SYSTEMATIC REVIEW OF THE TOURISM EXPERIENCE RESEARCH FROM 2009 TO 2018.....	119
--	-----

<b>Arlinda HALLUNOVI (YMERI), Azra ZMIJANEJ</b> EMPLOYEE MOTIVATION AFFECTS THE PERFORMANCE OF THESE EMPLOYEES AT WORK.....	131
---	-----

<b>Volfrida TOMA, Ardita BORIÇI</b> THE PERCEPTIONS AND CAREER GOALS OF "LUIGJ GURAKUQI" UNIVERSITY STUDENTS ON EMPLOYMENT IN THE TOURISM INDUSTRY .....	145
---	-----

<b>Dorina KOÇI, Erjona SERJANI</b> THE IMPACT OF IPARD II PROGRAMME ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF RURAL TOURISM IN ALBANIA.....	165
---	-----

**Irsida KOPLIKU, Elton SHPUZA**

DENTAL TOURISM - TRENDS, GROWTH, OPPORTUNITIES  
AND CHALLENGES FOR A SUSTAINABLE  
DEVELOPMENT.....183

**Darko PETKOVIC, Dzafer DAUTBEGOVIC, Erjola  
BARBULLUSHI, Amer NEIMARLIJA, Rijad LICINA**

LOGISTICS AND CIRCULAR ECONOMY AS LIMITING  
ELEMENTS OF THE TOURISM ECONOMY OF THE  
MEDITERRANEAN NON - EU COUNTRIES OF WESTERN  
BALKANS.....193

### **SESSION 3: ENVIRONMENT QUALITY AND CHALLENGES ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT**

**Luljeta JAKU, Anila DIZDARI**

ASSESSMENT OF WATER QUALITY AND IMPACT ON THE  
SUSTAINABLE TOURISM DEVELOPMENT IN SHKODRA  
LAKE.....205

**Valbona PAJA**

ADOPTING CIRCULAR ECONOMY PRINCIPLES IN THE  
TOURISM SECTOR – SHKODRA REGION.....229

**Alkida HASAJ, Enkeleda Golemi LAÇEJ**

"BOTANICAL GARDEN", AN INNOVATIVE APPROACH  
TO SUSTAINABLE TOURISM IN SHKODËR.....247

**Ervis KRYMBI, Ornela HASRAMA, Giovanni MESSINA**  
NATURAL POTENTIAL AND ECOTOURISM ITINERARIES IN  
THE BUNA RIVER AREA.....265

**Renaldo XHANEJ, Edlira KOLA, Ervis KRYMBI**  
THE USE OF ADVANCED METHODS IN THE CREATION  
OF TOURIST MAPS IN THE MUNICIPALITY OF  
LEZHA.....281

**Dritan RUSTJA**  
CLIMATE CHANGE IMPACTS AND ADAPTATION  
STRATEGIES IN ALBANIA'S TOURISM SECTOR: A  
CASE STUDY OF THE SHKODRA REGION.....297

**Paulin PUSHIMAJ**  
CHALLENGES OF SUSTAINABLE TOURISM DEVELOPMENT  
AT DRISHT.....313



## **DEVELOPING A SUSTAINABLE STRATEGIC PLANNING FOR TOURIST DESTINATIONS THROUGH INTERNET OF THINGS (IOT) TECHNOLOGY**

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### ***ABSTRACT***

New and fast developments of Information Communication Technologies (ICT) in the last decade, have had a deep impact in the strategic planning in tourism destinations, and as well on the business practices of this industry. Tourism is a very complex industry, and implementing a strategic planning for managing tourist destinations is even more challenging as it involves several factors such as culture, branding and communication. Nowadays, concepts like Internet of Things (IoT), Big Data, Real-Time Data and Business Analytic tools, are helping to obtain information on nearly all tourism transactions, market structures, customer needs, etc., within an all-in-one electronic platform, thus helping stakeholders to make effective decisions and come up with a strategic planning in managing tourism destinations. There is a tendency amongst stakeholders to collect and exploit Big Data that are available from various systems or exchanged through web, or even embedding the Internet of Things (IoT) as another technology in organizations or destinations that utilizes ubiquitous computing, emerging as one of the global internet based information architecture in order to help decision makers, make decisions in a very complex environment and to enhance and enrich tourist expenditure. At the same time, the usage of Real-Time Data and Business Analytics in tourism

industry does not only help in measuring customer satisfaction but also in increasing the revenue management, pushing tourism business practices to invest heavily on technology during internet escalation as it opens up immense opportunities to improve their strategic development as well increase service sale. Withing this paper, we will introduce the concept of IoT, Big Data, Real-Time Data Business Analytics to strategic planning in tourism industry, which can have better application value and broad the development process. The proposal will present a study of a tourist attraction IoT-based system to enhance tourist experience in a smart city, able to process a personal set of input features, to recommend the tourist activities/attractions that best fit his/her profile. When the tourists will be in the smart city, the content-based information and the context-related information (like location, weather, time of day, etc.) will be obtained in real time using IoT devices, suggesting additional activities and/or attractions in real time as a tourist attraction recommendation system. This will be considered as a new form of Business Process Re-Engineering (BPR), where strategic planning in tourism industry will redesign and re-engineer the process, to be able to fit into the new generation of customer centric era thus giving competitive advantage over rivals. The concept is one form of Business Analytics of Big Data, where in, with a modified technical and organizational infrastructure, the tourism industry will be able to predict the potential demand of its services well in advance.

**Keywords:** *Big Data, Business Analytics, Smart City, Tourism, Real-Time Data*

## **1 Introduction**

The Internet of Things (IoT) represents a dynamic and unique network of smart, interconnected objects. IoT architecture enables seamless interaction and communication between humans and objects at any time, in any place, and with anyone or anything. This technology can produce an unprecedented volume of events and data (Big Data), which can be transmitted to the cloud for advanced analysis. At the same time, Artificial Intelligence (AI) methods are employed to uncover connections and patterns within this data. AI systems, driven by experience and powered by machine-learning algorithms, can determine optimal actions to streamline daily tasks and boost productivity without the need for explicit programming.

Smart cities around the world, are urban areas that incorporate Information and Communication (ICT) technologies to significantly benefit from IoT

and AI, thereby improving the fundamental needs of citizens, businesses, and institutions. These cities leverage technological innovation to address various urban challenges, including tourism. Smart tourism focuses on developing innovative tools for acquiring and adjusting real-time tourism information through mobile Internet or Internet terminal equipment. It depends on four essential ICT components: IoT, mobile communication, cloud computing, and artificial intelligence. Smart cities can transform into smart tourist destinations by enhancing tourists' travel experiences, providing intelligent platforms for information gathering and distribution, facilitating efficient allocation of tourism resources, and integrating tourism suppliers at both macro and micro levels. Albania and Montenegro, being two of the best tourist attractions in Europe in the recent decade, need studies and coming up with a model proposal on how to develop their cities in the level of tourist smart cities.

Nowadays, when planning a trip to a specific city, tourism companies offer package tours that include transportation and accommodation, along with additional services such as activities or excursions during the holiday. These packages cater to a diverse group of people, despite each tourist having different needs and preferences. Independent travelers, on the other hand, seek activities and attractions that align with their interests. Consequently, they need to search the Internet for various options and alternatives (such as museum hours, ticket prices, weather forecasts, itineraries, and transportation) before their trip. This process often results in finding extensive, scattered, and disorganized information, leading to long hours spent in front of a computer and unnecessary time loss. This issue can be addressed using recommender systems designed to suggest the most suitable products or services to a particular user. These predictions are based on information gathered from various sources, such as the user's preferences for specific items (like songs, movies, etc.), social information (ratings, followers, etc.), demographic features (age, gender, etc.), and behavioral data from the Internet of Things (e.g., GPS, sensors, etc.).

In contrast, content-based recommendation systems suggest items similar to those a user has liked in the past or is currently exploring, based on a domain-specific understanding of item content and a user profile. Additionally, context-based recommendation systems offer personalized recommendations by analyzing and sensing user context (such as location and user activity).

Recently, deep learning-based recommender systems have shown very promising results. Despite IoT being a key concept in smart tourism, it is rarely applied in smart tourism recommendation systems. To address this

gap, we propose a tourist attraction IoT-enabled deep learning-based recommendation system to enhance tourists' experiences in a smart city. Travelers can enter specific travel circumstances, such as traveling alone or with a companion, type of companion (partner, family with kids), purpose of travel (professional or vacation), and personal information (age, hobbies, etc.) into the smart city app/website. This data improves the accuracy of tourist attraction recommendations. For example, tourists traveling with children might prefer outdoor activities like beaches or parks over visiting many museums. The deep learning-based recommender system processes this set of input features to recommend activities or attractions that best fit the tourist's profile.

Moreover, when tourists are in the smart city, real-time content-based information and context-related information (location, weather, time of day, etc.) are collected using IoT devices. This data allows the recommender system to suggest additional tourism activities and attractions in real time, based on the tourist's preferences, current time, and proximity to new places.

We propose a tourist attraction recommender system for smart cities based on deep learning.

It gathers IoT data about the tourist's visit within the smart city to provide real-time attraction recommendations.

It includes previously visited tourist attractions to enhance the accuracy of recommendations based on the tourist's preferences.

The paper presents an approach to address the gaps in real-time IoT-enabled tourist attraction recommender systems. The tourist attraction recommender system considers the specific circumstances of travel (traveling alone or with a companion, type of companion such as partner, family with kids, etc.) as well as user information (age, hobbies, etc.) to enhance recommendation accuracy. Real-time content-based information (already visited attractions) and context-related information (tourists' location, weather, time of day, etc.) are used to improve effectiveness.

## **2. State of the Art**

Tourism has become a significant contributor to the economies of Albania and Montenegro. As their cities become increasingly competitive, they strive to enhance their offerings and provide better experiences to attract more tourists. Transforming into a smart city allows them to deliver a more immersive, richer, and personalized user experience. IoT and ICT are fundamental components of becoming a smart city, enabling the creation of

innovative and exciting products for tourists. IoT also facilitates the development of monitoring and control systems for the protection and preservation of cultural heritage. It can be utilized to build early warning systems for disasters.

Given the numerous attractions and activities available in a city, creating an optimal itinerary can be a daunting task for tourists. This issue can be addressed by recommender systems. Recommender systems (RS) are models that help users find content or alternatives that may interest them. RS have been deployed in various sectors, including entertainment, e-commerce, services, and social media in many cities all over the world.

A content-based recommender system utilizes data provided by the user, either explicitly (through ratings) or implicitly (through actions like clicking on links). Implicit user preferences for certain points of interest such as restaurants, museums, and parks can be derived from three main sources such as: Geotagged photos from social media, location-based social networks, etc..

Context-based models enhance recommendations by incorporating information related to the user's context (e.g., location, user activity) to provide personalized suggestions. In studies, user information is gathered from social networks, photo-sharing websites, and user locations without any personally identifiable information (PII). In contrast, the approach of this paper includes specific details about a user's trip to the smart city to enhance the accuracy of the proposed tourist attraction recommender system.

Machine-learning applications in recommender systems have shown higher predictive accuracy for online reviews (e.g., TripAdvisor). Cultural heritage recommendation systems assess and categorize visitor behavior during cultural events, match visitor preferences with suitable information, suggest interesting artworks, or even recommend routes. Our research extends beyond these applications and is not confined to recommendations within a single environment or event.

Additionally, we intend to provide real-time tourist attraction recommendations using IoT context-related information (such as location and weather forecasts) once tourists are in the smart city.

When tourists are in the target smart city, content-based information (already visited attractions) and context-related information (such as tourist location, weather, and time of day) are obtained in real-time using IoT. This data enables the proposed deep learning-based tourist attraction recommender system to suggest additional tourism activities and/or attractions in real-time, considering the tourist's preferences, current time,

and proximity to new places.

## 2. Methodology

When tourists are in the target smart city, the proposed system gathers real-time content-based information (such as already visited attractions) and context-related information (including tourist location, weather, and time of day) using IoT. This data enables the proposed deep learning-based tourist attraction recommender system to suggest additional tourism activities and attractions in real time, tailored to the tourist's preferences, current time, and proximity to new locations.

### 2.1 IoT smart tourism architecture

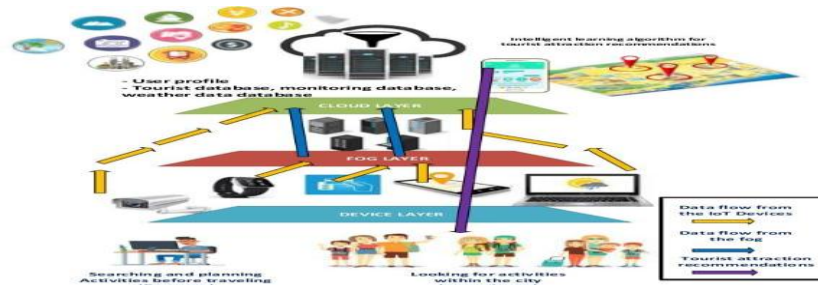
The flexible IoT smart tourism architecture, illustrated below in Fig. 1, comprises three layers as detailed below:

**Device Layer:** Responsible for identifying objects and receiving information through sensors to monitor the environment.

**Fog Layer:** Facilitates the transmission and distributed processing of sensor data, catering to services that are sensitive to latency.

**Cloud Layer:** Offers intelligent services by generating a global repository of relevant information and providing recognition and learning patterns, which are supported by data from the other layers.

Next, we will delve into the specifics of each layer.



Schematic representation of the IoT-based smart tourism architecture

Source: Deep learning and Internet of Things for tourist attraction recommendations in smart cities.

Neural Computing and Applications (2022) 34:7691–7709

#### 2.1.1 Device layer

As shown in Fig. 1, this layer consists of physical devices such as sensors and actuators, whose primary function is to collect and process information. This extensive array of intelligent IoT devices allows the system to monitor the user's movement within a smart city at any time, from any computer or mobile device. The collected data is securely stored in the cloud, analyzed,

and processed by our machine-learning algorithm to provide user-specific recommendations.

The suggested IoT smart tourist devices include the Global Positioning System (GPS), temperature sensors, RFID sensors, and video cameras. When tourists go sightseeing in the smart city, their visited attractions are logged using GPS. This allows the system to determine which recommendations the users acted upon and to suggest new similar attractions based on their preferences, current location, and time of day.

Using temperature sensors, the system can predict weather conditions to define possible routes and activities that can be conducted outdoors (e.g., parks) or indoors (e.g., museum visits) depending on the weather.

Tourist behaviors can be captured more precisely through RFID, video cameras, and other sensors located in strategic places such as stores, museums, churches, or entertainment venues. This continuous monitoring updates the tourists' profiles and enhances future recommendations.

Moreover, photos uploaded by tourists to the web, with their permission, serve as a powerful tool for obtaining additional user information. These photos are processed using image recognition to discern behavioral patterns and make even more tailored recommendations.

### **2.1.2 Fog layer**

The fog layer, depicted as the middle level in Fig. 1, offers real-time analysis and preprocessing services. Afterward, the primary information is transferred to the servers in the cloud for storage and further processing.

Sensors capture data from the device layer and send it to the network, which can become congested with the vast amount of information. The fog layer should be seen as part of a distributed architecture that spans between the cloud and edge networks. This setup improves efficiency and reduces the volume of data transferred by distributing critical tasks—such as computing, communication, storage, and decision-making—closer to where the data is generated. This distribution reduces the workload on both the cloud and user devices. It is especially important for time-sensitive IoT applications that require very low latency.

An app related to the proposed tourist attraction recommender system will be installed on tourists' mobile devices. The algorithm that will be developed in the cloud, will access the data from these different databases and will use it as input to return the most appropriate tourist attractions according to the user's profile. Figure 1 illustrates the different data flows. It shows how raw data is transferred to the fog layer or the cloud, and how the machine learning algorithm in the cloud will return an appropriate attraction recommendation to the tourist's mobile app based on

these predictions.

## Conclusions

In this paper, we introduce the concept of IoT, Big Data, and Real-Time Data Business Analytics to strategic planning in the tourism industry. The study aims to approach the proposal to Albania and Montenegro cities, as the most touristic and attractive destinations, due to the recent years' studies results in the region, proposing a tourist attraction recommendation system based on IoT. This will be considered as a new form of Business Process Re-Engineering (BPR), where strategic planning in the tourism industry will redesign and re-engineer the processes, to be able to fit into the new generation of customer-centric era thus giving a competitive advantage over rivals.

## Conclusions

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## **SUSTAINABLE TOURISM CAN BE SUCCESSFUL ONLY IN A SUSTAINABLE WORLD**

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### **ABSTRACT**

The economic development of the post-war period led to the birth of new customs and habits, including the boom in tourism in the 50s. Its growth has been preponderant, so much so that there has been a need for brakes and controls. The boom was limited by two deep leaks, the collapse of the twin towers and Covid19. After these events, tourism exploded even more. Environmental protection rules have entailed an improvement in external aspects and economic growth was expecting an enhancement of quality which has been achieved in many cases. The increase in the sector has been greater than the quality offer, so a further step has been envisaged, that of excellence.

Excellence can be well combined with economic development, but in recent times evolution has been so unbalanced to lead to growing inequality. As happens in all periods of instability, there are those who have become disproportionately rich and those who have become impoverished, and these are the majority. This is certainly not in line with the imperatives of the United Nations SDGs, on the contrary, it is moving further and further away from it.

In this work we will offer examples of how tourism is distancing itself from environmental and social sustainability.

**Keywords:** *Quality, Excellence, Luxury, Star System, Portofino, Yachts.*

### **1 Sustainability is an abused term**

Sustainability is an abused term, since we go everywhere to do everything. The international organizations recognize that sustainability must go hand-in-hand with strategies that build economic growth and address a range of

social needs, including education, health, social protection, and job opportunities, while tackling climate change and environmental protection. The term is also not exhaustive for tourism activities. The success of touristic places and holidays offer is related to a continual change, while sustainability could often mean stability.

For tourism enquiries and touristic sites new definitions are required, which better design and describe the evolution and transformation of one of the most dynamic economic sectors.

More than other activities tourism sustainability must be connected to quality, beauty, excellence; these three terms signify more than sustainability (Diessner et al. 2008).

The visitors' assault is dangerous for the most appreciated holiday resorts, which we love like our paradises. Their wonderfulness poses them as a utopia for us. U-topos (i.e. non-place) and eu-topos (happy place); utopia is therefore, literally a "non-existent happy place". Sustainability requires democratization and social equity, but in the leisure activities we can observe the greatest and the most apparent inequality. The tourism sector needs to serve as a catalyst for prosperity at a universal scale. Enhancing the well-being of individuals, safeguarding the natural environment, stimulating economic advancement, and fostering international harmony are key goals that are the fundamental essence of UN Tourism. The organization takes on the role of driving a sustainable force that is now central to many economies ([www.un.org](http://www.un.org)).

### **1.1 The growth of tourism**

After the economic stagnation of the 70s, its recovery at the beginning of the 80s, and a new crisis at the end of the 80s, there was a desire for renewal that required a re-evaluation of the economic development. The recovery had led to a purely quantitative increase which, however, no longer seemed sufficient for further development.

The growth of the tourism sector with intensification in international travelers coincided with an economic dynamism. As demand enlarged, so did the supply, that began to lead to overtourism, so in the countries most involved with tourism, the need for a qualitative improvement was felt.

The quality phase has begun in Spain with the *TourQual* ministerial program (OMT/WTO, 1995). Spain had been excessively environmentally exploited, and from here, organizations started to re-evaluate it. In countries less affected in the landscape, people have turned to the enhancement of niche tourism, to personalization, considered the best attractivity factor. In fact, the horizon of quality had meanwhile widened to all the economic

sectors. This direction was fruitful for the entire international movement, so much so that it led to develop a further step, which became that of excellence. This could be achieved with the best results in a world where competition and rivalry proceed supported by good administration.

## 1.2 Impacts

Tourism activities have great impacts on the environment. Greater the growth, greater the impacts.

Not only seas, but lakes and mountains are privileged spaces for tourists.

In common, these areas have the fragility, a vulnerability which cannot sustain crowds of clumsy tourists.

They are beautiful places, and they must remain wonderful.

The assault is surely dangerous for the most appreciated holiday resorts.

“Land degradation drives species to extinction and intensifies climate change, biodiversity and the ecosystem services. Sustainability determines the basis for climate change adaptation and disaster risk reduction strategies, as they can deliver benefits that will increase the resilience of people.” (UN 2023).

UN Tourism has articulated that sustainable tourism should:

(a) Make optimal use of environmental resources and conserve natural resources and biodiversity.

(b) Respect the socio-cultural authenticity of host communities.

(c) Ensure viable, long-term economic operations, including stable employment and contributions to reducing poverty.

<https://www.unwto.org/tourism4sdgs>

## 1.3 Can tourism be sustainable?

Sustainability is not only a long way, is it also a challenging option, when not a worsening of situations, and a demotion of environmental protection activities. Most of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are off track at the halfway point of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (2023 *Message from the UNEP Executive Director*). The concept of “sustainable tourism” was established in the 1990s and numbers of streams of work have taken place to develop the concept from both a policy and a measurement perspective.

In the context of the SDGs, sustainable tourism is clearly a relevant concept since, in principle, it seeks to consider leisure activities through the various perspectives, but all connected to sustainability, like economy, society and the environment.

We face a triple planetary crisis of 1) climate change, 2) nature and biodiversity loss, 3) pollution and waste.

Air pollution is transboundary. The consequence is that if all the world is functioning in an unsustainable way, even looking for natural and safe environments through tourism becomes a lost game. Tourism places are not uninhabited lands, and tourists are the same who pollute at their home, consume in irrational way, and waste unpolite.

It is the consumer society that force every one of us to drink aluminum canned water, plenty of sugar and preservatives; aluminum comes from Africa, it needs a lot of energy to be produced, in countries where children cannot study because they don't have electricity.

Tourists wear jeans pants, like at home, when an incredible quantity of water and bleach is used to produce them. Jeans continually make long ways, from Bangladesh, for instance, until Europe or America.

Tourists live in expensive hotels, eating costly food, using detrimental detergents, wasting mountains of plastics which pollute rivers and seas, spending lot of money for events and entertainments, contributing to an increase of prices in the places they visit.

#### ***1.4 Tourism Connect the Environment with Human Behavior***

We will never gain an optimal point in sustainability in our world, because we are addicted to industrialized products, starting even from the water we drink, the bred we eat, the clothes we wear...

Tourism activities have great impact on the environment; tourism is not safe, since the consumes and wastes are generally greater than in the usual routine.

Sustainability requires democratization and social equity, but in leisure activities we can observe the greatest and most apparent inequality. One example is the case of the luxurious yachts we see on the media, since it is not a question of everyday concern. The last yacht on the media news, of the value of 300 million dollars, is for sale by a Russian tycoon who ordered it, but who cannot longer afford it. More expensive is the yacht of the META owner, or of the Amazon tycoons.

The navigation tools, cruisers ships, are polluting the seas with the oil and the waste of several passengers.

Nature, as a principal asset in the holidays market, is at stake.

We must remember the words of *António Guterres, Secretary-General of the United Nations, (General Assembly 3 March 2024)*: "We depend on nature. Let's show that nature can depend on us – and act now to protect it."

As society progresses, the tourism sector, much like many other sectors, needs to be transformed to serve as a catalyst for prosperity at a universal scale. Enhancing the well-being of individuals, safeguarding the natural

environment, stimulating economic advancement, and fostering international harmony are key goals that are the fundamental essence of UN Tourism. The organization takes on the role of driving a sustainable force that is now central to many economies (<https://www.unwto.org>).

Figure 1. An object of 300 million value [www.vesselfinder.com](http://www.vesselfinder.com)



### 1.5 Tourism and the sense of beauty

A perfect world does not exist, like a perfect man or a perfect place, but beauty does exist, and tourist places must be beautiful: “Aesthetic judgments have a common basis in humanity .... According to Plato's view, human brain encodes ethical and aesthetical criteria (Plato IV cent. B.C).

The human brain, and the human brain only, has access to a virtual world and this peculiar capability allows us to ... ”distinguish the ugly from the beautiful, the bad from the good, the pleasant from the unpleasant” (Hippocrates, V century BC).

“The existence of innate ideas or at least the existence of innate rules explains encoding inborn of even complex behaviors or capabilities to give aesthetic and ethic judgements. (Hippocrates, V century BC).

Human beings seem to share a common denominator underlying all artistic experience. Experimental data indicate that aesthetic judgement might be, as the language, a function of cerebral dominance (Agnati, 2007).

As pointed out by (Di Camilo, Cela-Conde, Ayala, 2007, and by Jung, 1967) human beings are makers of ethical rules and are creators of gods and artistic masterpieces.

The genetically determined networks for emotions in the cerebral cortex may encode ethical principles and aesthetics. Recent studies support such a view, since they indicate that specific neuronal networks are activated in

aesthetic or in ethic judgements (Pohling, 2016). Thus, it has been shown that left prefrontal dorsolateral cortex is selectively activated in humans during the perception of objects which they qualify as “beautiful” (Cela-Condè et al., 2004).

Beauty is the essence of quality, but in a competitive world quality is not enough. In a competitive economy people of success like to show, or rather expose, their exorbitant wealth in an excessive manner. From many parts we have reached excellent services, but in the year 2023 and continuing in 2024, we have touched the excess of exorbitant wealth which becomes offensive to those who struggle to live with dignity.

It is said that this is a consequence of Covid, during which many people have encountered misfortune, unlike others who have made their fortunes from it, especially in the healthcare sector, in transports for online sales, and, in general, for all the web services.



Figure 2. The real meaning of beauty  
(Photo Paciotti)

Sadly, the excellence, instead of as an aspect of intrinsic beauty has been transformed into a kitsch appearance.



Figure 3. One of the greatest cruise ships in the Atlantic Ocean  
(Photo Galvani)

## **2.1 The last trends are the weddings in the most beautiful places of the world**

After a terrible period of pandemic, the desire to live, to have fun, to eat, to travel has reappeared. Trips have increased, catching up and surpassing previous figures.

After that, all has achieved a gorgeous aspect; the news is that all this is exposed to the world, and in order to obtain attention, all is becoming extraordinary. Sports events become greater, the fashion system is even more appealing, the pop and rapper music concerts are attracting thousands of young people, and strangely, private events, like weddings, become new reasons for tourism, naturally exposed to the media. Weddings are the last events on the media images, and they become magnified by outstanding apparatus<sup>1</sup>.

New trends in tourism are the ceremonies and fests in the best places of the world, in the most evocative and internationally renowned places.

Historical landscapes framed in natural environments of great naturalistic value are chosen. The choice is recently directed to Italy. The director of a 5 luxury stars hotel on the Como Lake is saying: "There is no wedding if not in Italy for Very Important Persons" (*author's direct personal interview*).

There are peculiar places which are not replicable by emulation, obviously because favored by natural landscape. The most renown is Venice, which is incomparable and unrepeatably.

Naples with Ischia, Capri, Ponza, Sorrento, Amalfi, makes an ensemble of fame and wonderfulness, but there is a place, which can be judged unique. It is in the Liguria region, where Genova is located; it is one of the smallest port in the Mediterranean, surely the most expensive place in Italy. It is also the most famous and the most expensive harbor for yachts - it is Portofino (small port).

Immediately after the end of the pandemic, there was a boom in postponed weddings, some of which have only now occurred. From the American stars who had set their sights on Liguria, a series of wedding parties began along the Mediterranean coasts, that culminated in June 2024 with the celebration of the union of two of India's richest descendants. The wedding of the year sees the figure of Anant Ambani, the third son of the ninth richest man in the world. The pre-wedding was organized in Italy on the fragile natural marine park of Portofino, upon which the 1200 guests have surely had a negative impact, but the final ceremony will take place in India.

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<sup>1</sup> This is strange, if one considers the increasing number of divorces and the decreasing duration of marriages.

In all this new rainbow, a trend appears, certainly not new, but striking, that of weddings celebrated in holiday places.

For some time now, the international star system has been frequenting the most famous and most beautiful places for

various events, where you show yourself at the best of your appearance.

Usually this happens in economically advanced countries, to benefit from quality and excellent services. For some time now, the Côte d'Azur, Sardinia, as well as Sicily, Tuscany, with its famous farms, or emerging areas, from a cultural and environmental point of view, such as Puglia, have been appreciated.

Italy is a destination of excellence, not only for its environmental values, but for its cultural and gastronomic services.

The most striking aspect was the rental of an entire village in Italy, but not just any village, but the Ligurian port of Portofino, where no one, unless invited, was allowed. This is an iconic place that holds a record in Italy, as the most exclusive and logically most expensive place, also given the very small size and its position on a peninsula peak of a jagged coast. 1200 people were gathered in the small port that could not even accommodate all the guests who were hosted on cruise ships. Well-known actors, movie people and singers have their photographs taken here for newspapers and glossy magazines to gain recognition all over the world. In the last days it has increased even more its attraction because of the financial investment realized by Bill Gates who has purchased a castle along this coast. The castle was a property of other rich Italians who have changed residence, but in the same area.

The Ambani celebration had various phases, from engagement to pre-weddings, up to the final party that lasted 3 days in Mumbai. The web that collects various news has made a hypothetical sum of the total cost of 600 million dollars. Cruises were organized for all the guests, the most famous and expensive singers in the world have been invited. It is rumored that a well-known American pop singer had received a compensation of 10 million dollars.

The greatest occasion will surely generate the utmost damages in environmental terms, like in social terms.

The area, rich in biodiversity is fragile for its small dimensions and its peculiar natural heritage.

The happening is socially unsustainable, because it is creating an occasion which will exclude a multitude of people, generating also a negative repercussion in the area of origin where the poverty is reigning.

The final result of this episode is difficult to measure and accept.



The echoes of this occurrence have not yet died down when the news of the future marriage of the Prince of Brunei appears. We have not yet forgotten the wedding of the Prince of Jordan, as well as of all the small and large personalities of Europe, who display on the Web the images of splendid weddings in luxurious tourist places. <https://www.un.org/pga/78/high-level-thematic-event-on-tourism/>



Figure 4. Luxury Hotel Restaurant

## Conclusions

In the post-Covid recovery, however, we have gone beyond excellence, and also beyond rationality, it can be seen that we have reached exaggeration. In this year 2024, we read on social media sensational news about global events of economic weight for tourism and leisure.

In the exposure to the media, everything takes on the character of a megaproject. Alongside this case's news, the appearances of the most flashy and expensive yachts of the tycoons on the front pages of the newspapers shine, with their price, beside the exceptional sizes. The navigation tools, cruisers ships, are polluting the seas with the oil and the waste of several passengers.

Exaggerated fests, mega events, like world celebrated weddings with hundreds of people are an unethical question both for the environment and the people.

Figure 5  
The “Porticciolo” of Portofino. Il Secolo XIX - Genova - Newspaper)



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## **NAVIGATING CONFLICTS IN TOURISM WITHIN PROTECTED AREAS: STAKEHOLDERS AND SOLUTIONS (LITERATURE REVIEW)**

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### ***ABSTRACT***

With heightened awareness and exposure to natural scenic beauty, the need for environmental conservation is given its rightful place. Such protected landscapes are being subjected to tourism demand which leaves behind sporadic disputes. This abstract analyses the literature focusing on the core disputes which are primarily found in tourism places within the protected areas and the actors involved. Since the dawn of time, protected places have been incredibly important in the mission of safeguarding biodiversity, culture, and scenic geography. Unfortunately, the rise in tourism translates to adverse effects on environment, depletion of resources and disruption of the sociocultural fabric. The principal conflicts associated with tourism are rooted in environmental degradation including pollution and destruction of habitats; sociocultural impact including commodification of culture; resource disputes specifically water and land use rights; limited access to natural resources for indigenous populations; unequal distribution of tax revenues, whereby residents do not receive much from tourism; and the rivalry between large corporations and local businesses which places local producers at a disadvantage in the market. The actors involved in these disputes include local people, business partners in tourism development, organizations involved in environmental conservation and management, tourists, and governance institutions. Local communities are displaced from their traditional territories and resources, their cultural patterns being turned into tourism products in the process. Regarding tourism, the businesses are profit oriented, which makes them self-centered and responsible for fuel efficiency as low as possible. Non-government agencies try to combat the need to pragmatically protect the environment with the desire of locals and the companies providing services to tourists. Tourists, meanwhile, look for intense and new emotions, not paying attention to the ecological and

civilization traces left in the place visited. Such relations have been assigned to the domain of government who have the duty to control them. However, how policies are designed and implemented takes the very essence of the conflict and can assist in its alleviation or aggravation. The literature says that dwelling on a single type of conflict management strategy is not efficient for local level conflict whereas resolving such conflicts at the local level requires practices that can promote sustainability of tourism and hence equitable sharing of economic gains whilst protecting ecology and culture. This can be achieved through telling a story, diaspora communities and setting and adhering to sustainable tourism policies (Jamal, 2009). People living in and around the areas considered as protected areas cannot always and everywhere refrain from use of the resources sustainably, therefore, flexible management strategies, ones that are modifiable with time and space and promote longevity of tourism must be adopted for protected areas. However, this course of action success looks at a combination of social context, consideration of issues around the social context and understanding the trade offs opportunities and limitations that come with the strategy (Redpath, 2013). To properly broaden the existing body of literature, which is otherwise in existence, it is prudent to examine how these conflicts start and how they are initiated in the first instance. There is a need to pinpoint how these social problems can be addressed and in addressing them make tourism in protected areas enhanced.

This study is critical in formulating strategies that would permit tourism and at the same time protect the environment and the local people's interests such that human activities would not overpower the need to protect Mother Nature.

**Keywords:** *Community Involvement, Sustainable Tourism, Conservation Conflicts, Cultural Integrity Preservation, Adaptive Management Strategies.*

**JEL classification:** Q01, Q56, R11

## **Introduction**

Tourism development in protected zones is not a straight forward process and most of the time it is the source of strains among the parties involved. For example, Postma and Schmuecker (2017) recognize two for of conflicts in Hamburg that raise conflicts: tourists and local residents ratio and

visitors' manners.

From the point of view of the residents, economically, tourism seems beneficial since it brings in revenues from external sources (Postma & Schmuecker, 2017). But the consequences of the economy, culture, and human society must still be considered. The following literature reviews highlights the many issues that arise in tourism activities in conserved regions.

### **Conflicts in Protected Areas**

Local conflicts as within protected areas arise due to the discrepancies that exist between local acceptance and conservational expectations. As a result, it's imperative to take the public aspect into account (Bragagnolo et al., 2016). Such situations tend to be more serious and acute in nations that are still developing (Soliku & Schraml, 2018). Interactions with tourists often present approaches that lead to attraction and persistence of human wildlife conflict since provision of food coupled with some form of interaction with the tourists lead to tolerance and aggression by the wildlife (Cui et al., 2021). In dealing with such issues, the need to know the root cause of the problem and its the situations and using appropriate management techniques (Soliku & Schraml, 2018).

### **Categorization of Conflicts**

Conflicts as well as those in tourism impacted areas can be classified into several categories whereby the facets of these encountered issues are broad reaching:

#### **1. Environmental Conflicts**

- **Resource Depletion:** As a result of the large number of tourists, other natural resources needed the tourist, such as water and land, may be depleted and that presents a threat to the resident people (Wall & Mathieson, 2006).
- **Habitat Destruction:** Due to targeted structures that will accommodate the tourists, there will be needs for structures that may bring about displacement of natural habitats that are important for animals (Marion & Reid, 2007).
- **Pollution:** With the increase in the numbers of tourists, the level of the two will also rise such that it will bring harm to the natural resources which are air water and soil (Buckley, 2004).

## 2. Socio-Cultural Conflicts

- **Cultural Erosion:** As local cultures are packaged and sold as a tourist attraction, some aspects of the culture may be lost or devalued (McKercher & du Cros, 2002; Van der Duim et al., 2015).
- **Community Displacement:** The advancement of tourism may also cause the removal of the residents in the areas, creating social disruptions (Nunkoo & Ramkissoon, 2011).
- **Conflicts Over Cultural Sites:** Tourism can lead to competition among tourist groups in accessing cultural and heritage sites, leading to conflict over how to manage and protect the sites (McKercher & du Cros, 2002).

## 3. Economic Conflicts

- **Revenue Sharing Conflicts:** Where there are disagreements on the sharing of tourism revenues, e.g. between local communities and outside tourism developers (Mitchell & Ashley, 2010).
- **Economic Displacement:** Loss of traditional jobs for locals as international tourism businesses prevail over ancestors' enterprises (Mitchell & Ashley, 2010).
- **Inflation:** The development of tourism may result in inflation and increased living standards for local communities who may not share benefit from tourism income evenly (Holden, 2005).

## 4. Governance and Management Conflicts

- **Stakeholder Exclusion:** Allowing the interests of the communities oppressed by state actors and the market, including local communities, to remain dormant while making significant decisions tends to cause conflict (Reed, 2008).
- **Regulatory Conflicts:** Clashing sentiments which cause frictions include differing local and national laws on the management of tourism activities (Eagles et al., 2002).
- **Policy Implementation:** The failure to implement and enforce sustainable tourism policies may create tensions among stakeholders (Eagles et al., 2002).

## 5. Visitor Management Conflicts

- **Carrying Capacity:** Overuse and abuse of a protected area beyond its intended and realistic use can cause environmental problems as well as disputes with the surrounding populations (Newsome et al., 2012).



- **Visitor Behavior:** Littering in the nature, disturbing the wildlife or inappropriate behavior of tourists may cause a conflict with people's aims of conservationism and with locals' way of life (Postma & Schmuecker, 2017).
- **Tourism and Area Management:** The effort to mitigate the impacts of conservation and areas of high tourism attraction or use has its controversial issues (Newsome et al., 2012).

#### 6. Human-Wildlife Conflicts

- **Wildlife Disturbance:** Tourists may lead to stress in wildlife and eventually change animal behavior and habitat use (Redpath et al., 2013).
- **Safety Concerns:** Interaction of wildlife and human beings can constitute a risk to both tourists as well as wildlife leading to disputes in regards to how such interactions should be managed (Redpath et al., 2013).

#### 7. Conservation and Access Conflicts

- **Conservation vs. Development:** This occurred as a result of the conservation of natural resources and the need to promote tourism (Borrini-Feyerabend et al., 2004).
- **Protection vs. Utilization:** The aspect of conserving the environmental ecosystem and other natural resources for tourism and other forms of utilization (Borrini-Feyerabend et al., 2004).
- **Conservation Funding:** There have been differences regarding the use of revenues sourced from tourism for conservation purposes (Borrini-Feyerabend et al., 2004).

Soliku and Schraml (2018) further adapted a categorization of conflicts in conservation areas into specific types, which include:

- **Human-Wildlife Conflicts (HWCs):** HWC – Human-Wildlife conflicts request: crop damage, livestock predation; cytokine temperatures where wildlife impacts humans.
- **Restricted Access Conflicts (RAC):** This conflict arises when conservation practices limit local people's access to resources they could otherwise use.
- **Agriculture and Land Use Conflict (ALC)** The negative impact on agriculture and the lack of a clear contour line of the park.
- **Participation and Information Sharing Conflict (PC):** Such policy measures may lead to neglect of local people in decision-making

processes and poor mobilization of relevant information to specific areas.

- **Indigenous Rights and Beliefs Conflict (IRC):** An extended concept that includes the general question of indigenous peoples and their rights and beliefs being overlooked or overruled.
- **Eviction, Relocation, and Resettlement Conflict (ERC):** This is the act of driving away or relocating people for conservational purposes.
- **Benefits and Revenue Distribution Conflict (BRC):** Imbalanced distribution of revenue for almost all parks.
- **Law, Legislation, and Policy Conflict (LLC):** Conflicts created by the conflicting conservation laws and other policies or interests.

### **Strategies for Conflict Resolution and Stakeholder Integration**

Addressing the tourism-related conflicts in Protected Areas calls for a multi-faceted, including the following:

- **Stakeholder Engagement:** Meaning that all stakeholders such as local communities, tourism and business, conservation, and government organisations be involved in the planning of decisions (Reed, 2008). It so that a variety of voices is heeded in the management and thus the strategies are more widely accepted and adhered to. Protected area tourism, if benefit-sharing is implemented effectively and efficiently, can benefit a multitude of actors both within and outside the protected reserve (Snyman & Bricker, 2019).
- **Sustainable Tourism Practices:** Adopting sustainable tourism practices which reduce environmental harms and increase the benefits for local communities. This includes implementing laws governing waste management, habitat restoration and visitor management (Honey, 2008). Enhanced environmental education, community co-management of the resource and alternative sources of livelihood can instil pro-environmental behaviours and resolve tensions (Liu et al., 2010).
- **Equitable Benefit-Sharing:** The income generated from tourism should primarily benefit the local communities and all the other stakeholders. This could mean the possibility of income sharing schemes, aiding local enterprises and providing compensation for restricting access (Mitchell & Ashley, 2010). When the local populations benefit adequately from the income earned through tourism, it helps reduce conflicts and also aids the promotion of sustainable tourism practices (Snyman & Bricker, 2019).

- **Education and Awareness:** Educating tourists about the environmental and socio-cultural effects of their actions and promoting eco-friendly activities. Awareness campaigns could also educate local people regarding the benefits of protection and sustainable forms of tourism (Ballantyne & Packer, 2011). This entails explaining to tourists the expected code of conduct to help minimize human-wildlife conflicts (Cui et al., 2021).
- **Adaptive Management:** These are strategies that seem to evolve or adapt with respect to the prevailing conditions of conflict and emerging issues. This requires the constant tracking, analysis, and modification of managerial approaches for sustainability in the long run (Holling, 1978). It is possible to resolve disputes in protected areas by locating integrated usage system with well defined rights and obligations, an environmental study and well defined zoning for use of the resources (Li & Wang, 2020).
- **Collaborative Frameworks:** The implementation of cooperative frameworks that integrate the local population in the decision-making process, control the implementation of sustainable touristy practices considerate to the environment and inform the tourists of how their actions impact on the environment. Addressing the power imbalances and guaranteeing that every parties has a constructive role in decision making, participation can be generated (Jamal, 2009).
- **Conflict Visualization and Assessment:** Conflicts between the tourism industry and the environment can be analyzed and mapped so that important decisions can be made at the municipal level (Ruda, 2016). Resolving these conflicts requires knowledge of their particular sources and contexts as well as the application of strategic management (Soliku & Schraml, 2018).
- **Policy Harmonization:** To prevent inconsistency that would cause conflict, both national as well as local policies focusing on the industry, specifically tourism are expected to be coordinated. This involves incorporating conservation policies to other policies and agenda to be able to create a holistic legal framework (Eagles et al., 2002). This coordination in governance and management can aimed for and achieved through collaborative partnerships (Li, 2020; Sarhan, 2022).

Through addressing the root causes of the conflicts and taking all the stakeholders through the process, it becomes easier to reconcile and resolve the tourism development objectives against those of conservation so that the Protected Areas are adequately protected. However, the effectiveness of these strategies is rooted in social context, recognition of joint interests and

understanding of compromises (Redpath, 2013).

### **Relevant views and approaches**

Albert Postma and Dirk Schmuecker (2017) maintain that the time-space distribution of visitors and their activities is one of the key management factors in tourism impact. Thus they stress the need for norms and standards on the behavior of visitors with the objective of avoiding such negative impacts.

In a similar vein, Bragagnolo et al. (2016) argue for the inclusion of the public in conservation strategic processes as one of the key approaches to solving the challenges of local aspirations and regional policies. In their view, the participation of local communities in decision-making processes increases the acceptance and the success of conservation measures by making them more effective in practice.

Cui et al. (2021) argue for the need to manage certain aspects of human-wildlife interactions so as not to increase the level of conflict. They maintain that controlled forms of tourist-wildlife interactions and active education of tourists in basic forms of etiquette are indispensable measures in preventing such conflicts.

As for Snyman and Bricker (2019), they emphasize the considerable role of equitable distribution of benefits arising from tourism activities. They contend that enabling local communities to get some part of the economic gains obtained from tourism activities may decrease conflicts and enhance sustainable tourism.

Jamal (2004) raises his voice with regard to representation and interests within the participatory processes, whereby a genuine level of participation encompasses issues of power relations and the interests of all stakeholders being represented in the decision making.

### **Conclusion**

The available literature suggests that the management of tourism in protected areas is not straightforward and it requires a number of stakeholders, sustainable development, and adaptive management strategies. Further studies should be concerned with causes of many of the conflicts and how these can be resolved by integrating tourism, conservation and local community benefits. For the successful and sustainable development of tourism in protected areas, collaborative mechanisms and engagement of the stakeholders are important.

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## **INVESTIGATING DARK TOURISM ROUTES IN ALBANIA - THE CASE OF THE REBELLION OF POSTRIBA**

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### ***ABSTRACT***

**Context**—The phenomenon of dark and memory tourism has gained increased interest in recent times, with a growing attention in its study and analysis from academics, tourism scholars, and planning professionals alike. Dark tourism encompasses visits to locations associated with terror events, uprisings, atrocities, and cemeteries. It differs greatly from other forms of thematic tourism in that its focus is primarily on the emotional resonance and historical significance of these sites.

**Purpose**—The scope of this study is to address and develop sustainable tourism in the city of Shkodër by analyzing the concept of dark tourism and developing a model of a thematic tourist itinerary for this kind of travelling. Dark tourism is a relatively new approach for the northern region of Albania, but there are many such events that should be remembered. One such event is the notorious "Rebellion of Postriba" in 1946, which occurred in a historical context just two years after Albania was liberated. To grow, dark tourism requires the support of local tourism authorities, local associations, and local communities.

**Methodology**—A literature review consisted of a combination of primary data and secondary data. Supply-side and demand-side surveys were sent to travel agencies and domestic and foreign tourists visiting Shkodër. We sought to identify a new tourist route, which will be offered as a bicycle tour integrated in a larger sustainable tourist package for the archeological site of Drishti. It will include the Rebellion of Postriba itinerary, visiting the castle of Drishti and the entire archeological site. Demand for dark and memory tourism in the Western Balkans 6 countries (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Montenegro, North Macedonia, and Serbia) is rising, as evidenced by the reviewed literature.

**Key findings/results**—This location, which was not previously mentioned in

travel brochures and packages, will represent a novel travel experience that the city will offer. The work to create a themed tourist destination, as in this case, must also be coordinated with the academic sphere so that the historical facts are clearly weighted in chronological order, leading to the creation of a well-structured tourist product.

Significance of research—The investigation is original because it deals with a historical event that could have altered the future of the country, but unfortunately ended in the most tragic way possible. The policy implications include stakeholders such as the institutions responsible for the drafting of tourism policies and implementations.

**Keywords:** Dark Tourism, Memory Tourism, Visitor Motivation, Shkodër, Rebellion of Postriba

## **1. Introduction**

Dark tourism, the practice of visiting sites associated with death, tragedy, and suffering, has emerged as a significant niche within the global tourism industry. Scholars like Lennon and Foley in (Lennon, J. J., & Foley, M., 2000) have explored how dark tourism reflects society's complex relationship with death and memory, often highlighting the ways in which such sites contribute to historical consciousness, collective mourning, and cultural heritage. While much of the academic discourse has focused on well-known destinations such as Auschwitz, to modern-day sites of tragedies such as Ground Zero (Isaac, 2021), there remains a notable gap in the literature regarding the potential for dark tourism in less explored regions, such as the Balkans. Albania, with its tumultuous history marked by periods of dictatorship, political persecution, and social upheaval, presents a unique context for studying dark tourism. The country's landscape is dotted with relics of its communist past, including abandoned bunkers, secret prisons, and labor camps (Vickers, M, 1999). These sites serve as poignant reminders of a not-so-distant era of repression and isolation, offering a powerful narrative that can attract visitors interested in understanding the complexities of Albania's recent history. However, despite these potential attractions, dark tourism in Albania remains relatively underdeveloped and under-researched, particularly when compared to its Balkan neighbors who have more actively engaged in promoting their dark heritage (Light, 2017).

This paper seeks to explore the potential of dark tourism in Albania by examining key sites that hold historical and emotional significance related to the country's authoritarian past. It aims to investigate how these sites are



perceived by both locals and international tourists, what ethical considerations arise in their promotion and development, and how they might contribute to Albania's broader tourism strategy (Smith, Laurajane, 2006; Tunbridge, J. E. & Ashworth, G. J, 1996). By analyzing the current state of dark tourism in Albania, this study contributes to the understanding of how post-communist countries can utilize their complex histories for educational and commemorative purposes while navigating the fine line between remembrance and commodification (Logan, W & Reeves, K, 2009; Macdonald, Sh, 2013). The paper will begin by providing a theoretical framework for understanding dark tourism, drawing on existing literature to define its key concepts and typologies (P. Stone, 2013; Strange & Kempa, 2003). It will then delve into the specific historical context of Albania, identifying and analyzing sites of interest that have the potential to attract dark tourists (Hall, C. Michael, 2010; Urry, J, & Larsen, J, 2011). Through a mixed-methods approach combining qualitative interviews with site analyses and visitor surveys, this research aims to uncover the motivations, perceptions, and experiences of those who engage with Albania's dark heritage (Craig Wight & John Lennon, 2007; Frew, 2012). Ultimately, this study seeks to offer recommendations for how Albania can ethically and sustainably develop its dark tourism sector, fostering both historical awareness and economic growth (Harrison, R, 2013; Timothy, D. J., 2011).

## **2. Literature Review**

### *Concepts*

Dark tourism is defined as the act of traveling to sites associated with death, suffering, and the macabre. It encompasses visits to locations such as battlefields, disaster areas, cemeteries, and museums that interpret tragic events (Fonseca et al., 2015; Lennon, 2017; Lennon, J. J., & Foley, M., 2000; P. R. Stone, 2006). The concept of dark tourism is rooted in historical and cultural practices of memorializing and interpreting death and disaster. This includes the role of remembrance and the public's fascination with mortality (Fonseca et al., 2015).

### *Typologies of Dark Tourism*

Dark tourism sites are categorized based on factors such as the nature of the death event (natural disasters, human-made tragedies), the scale of the tragedy (individual, collective), and the temporal distance from the event (recent, historical). The authors discuss the concept of 'degrees of darkness,' which ranges from light (less intense, more educational) to dark (more intense, morbid curiosity). This spectrum helps differentiate between

various types of dark tourism experiences (Fonseca et al., 2015). According to (Kennell & Šuligoj, 2024) “dark events” as organized occurrences, often within the realm of tourism, that are tied to themes of death, disaster or sorrow can range from historical reenactments of battles to memorial services or even festivals that commemorate tragic events.

However dark tourism is not a preestablished form of tourism but rather a more nuanced tourism experience. For example, lighter dark tourism refers to attractions that deal with death and tragedy in a less intense, more accessible manner. Examples include ghost tours, crime museums, and historic prisons turned into museums (Wyatt et al., 2022). (Biran & Hyde, 2013; P. R. Stone, 2006) argue that dark tourism now encompasses a broader range of experiences, including those related to environmental disasters and contemporary conflicts, not just historical events or sites suffering.

Kennell & Šuligoj, (2024) categorize dark events based on the intensity of their connection to death and tragedy. They suggest a spectrum of darkness, where some events have a more direct and explicit focus on death like memorial events for disasters, while others may have a more subtle or entertainment-focused approach as horror-themed festivals. Moreover they explore the psychological and sociocultural reasons why people attend dark events. These include a fascination with death, a desire to learn about historical tragedies, personal connections to the events being commemorated, or a more voyeuristic curiosity. Dark events influence both tourism patterns and societal attitudes toward death and tragedy. (Isaac, 2021) emphasizes the growing interest in dark tourism within academic research and among the general public. It highlights how dark tourism has evolved from a niche interest to a more mainstream topic in both tourism studies and heritage management. People who are specifically interested in the macabre, history or the exploration of death-related themes often seek out these events as part of their travel experiences. This specialized interest helps to diversify the types of tourism offering in a destination, potentially boosting local economies, especially in areas that might not typically attract large numbers of tourists (Kennell & Šuligoj, 2024).

Biran & Hyde (2013) suggest that visitors’ reasons for engaging with dark tourism are becoming more complex, driven by factors such as a desire for authenticity, a quest for personal meaning, and increased awareness of global issues. These events can also influence the seasonality of tourism. Dark events are often scheduled around anniversaries of historical tragedies or during specific cultural observances, which can draw visitors during off-peak times. Additionally, events that successfully engage their audience

emotionally or intellectually can encourage repeat visitation, as attendees may return year after year to participate in memorials or revivals (Kennell & Šuligoj, 2024). (Biran & Hyde, 2013) highlight both the economic benefits and potential negative consequences of dark tourism, such as commercialization and the potential negative consequences of dark tourism, such as commercialization and the potential erosion of cultural values. They discuss the challenges of maintaining respect and sensitivity while managing and presenting dark tourism sites. One of the critical points (Biran & Hyde, 2013; Kennell & Šuligoj, 2024) raise is the risk of commodifying tragedy through dark events. When these events are heavily marketed and commercialized, there is a danger that they could exploit human suffering for profit, trivializing the very real pain and loss experienced by those directly affected by the tragedies being commemorated. Dark events often have a strong educational component, providing opportunities for learning about historical events, cultural practices related to death or broader social issues (P. R. Stone, 2006). This educational value can be significant, particularly for younger generations or those less familiar with the historical contexts of the events being commemorated. By preserving and promoting the memory of significant events, dark events can also contribute to cultural heritage. They help keep historical narratives alive, ensuring that the lessons and memories of past tragedies continue to resonate with contemporary audiences (Kennell & Šuligoj, 2024).

### **3. Rebellion of Postriba in Albania**

The Rebellion of Postriba, occurring in September 1946, stands as a poignant symbol of the Albanian resistance against the rise of communism in the post-World War II era (Butka, 2013).

As Albania emerged from the devastation of the war, it transitioned from foreign occupation—first by Italy and later by Germany—to control under the Communist Party of Albania, led by Enver Hoxha. The new regime swiftly moved to establish a totalitarian state characterized by strict governance, radical reforms, and suppression of any form of dissent. This period was marked by policies that disrupted traditional social and economic structures, sparking discontent and resistance, particularly in rural communities. The rapid collectivization of agriculture and the targeted persecution of political opponents contributed significantly to the widespread dissatisfaction that fueled the Postriba uprising.

The rebellion was rooted in the anti-communist sentiments that resonated strongly in the northern regions, particularly around Shkodër, a city known

historically for its resistance to foreign and authoritarian control. The insurgency in Postriba was led by a diverse coalition that included former anti-fascist resistance fighters, local villagers, and political dissidents who opposed the harsh measures implemented by the communist government. Their objective was clear: to overthrow Hoxha's regime and reestablish a democratic system in Albania. On September 9, 1946, at approximately 2:00 AM, the rebels launched a coordinated assault on Shkodër, advancing strategically from three directions: from Postriba towards the military barracks, from Guri i Zi targeting the post near Kiri Bridge, and from Tepe Hills. Their primary goals were to seize weapons and military supplies and to liberate prisoners held in the central prefecture prison (Butka, 2013).

Initially, the rebels experienced momentary success as they managed to capture local government infrastructure, a testament to the widespread local support for their cause. However, this success was short-lived. The response from Hoxha's government was swift and unyielding, employing military and security forces to suppress the rebellion. Within days, the uprising was quelled, leading to significant bloodshed. Many of the insurgents were killed in the confrontation, while those captured faced summary executions. The local population did not escape unscathed; numerous villagers were subjected to brutal reprisals, including arrests, forced labor, and executions. The aftermath saw an intensification of state repression, as the communist regime sought to eliminate any residual anti-communist sentiment and solidify its hold on power.

The suppression of the Postriba Rebellion was pivotal for the communist government, serving not only as a demonstration of its capacity for ruthless enforcement but also as a cautionary message to deter further dissent. For many Albanians, the rebellion became emblematic of the struggle for freedom and the costs of opposing a totalitarian regime. The episode underscored the deep and enduring resistance within Albanian society, particularly in the northern regions, and became a historical marker of the sacrifices endured by those who stood against the imposition of an authoritarian rule. Today, the Rebellion of Postriba is remembered as a significant episode in Albania's history of anti-communist resistance, reflecting the profound struggle and the severe measures taken by the communist government to maintain control over the country (Butka, 2013).

#### **4. Methods: data collection and analysis**

To explore the potential and dynamics of dark tourism in Northern Albania, this study employed a comprehensive methodology that integrated both quantitative and qualitative approaches. Data collection was carried out using a structured online questionnaire, specifically targeted at domestic

and international tourists visiting the Shkodër region. This survey formed part of a broader doctoral research initiative conducted at the University of Shkodra "Luigj Gurakuqi." The questionnaire was meticulously designed to collect diverse types of data, ensuring a robust analysis of tourist behaviors, perceptions, and motivations.

The questionnaire included sections that captured demographic information such as nationality, gender, marital status, and country of residence. This allowed for the collection of a sample that represented varied backgrounds and perspectives. Additionally, the survey encompassed questions about travel details, including the size of the travel group (whether respondents were traveling solo or with others), the duration of their stay, and their accommodation preferences. These details provided context to understand how dark tourism fits into broader travel plans and preferences.

A critical part of the questionnaire focused on assessing respondents' awareness and interest in local historical events, particularly the Anti-Communist Movement of Postriba. This section aimed to gauge how familiar tourists were with significant historical narratives and whether they were inclined to participate in dark tourism experiences or guided tours related to these sites. To deepen the insights, open-ended questions were included, allowing respondents to express their thoughts on tour formats, economic considerations, and overall opinions about dark tourism.

The data collected were analyzed through descriptive statistics to provide an overview of the sample's demographic profile and travel behaviors. This statistical approach enabled the identification of central tendencies, frequency distributions, and patterns, with visual representations such as pie charts and bar graphs aiding in the clear presentation of these findings. This quantitative analysis was complemented by a qualitative thematic analysis of the open-ended responses, revealing recurring themes and deeper insights into the respondents' attitudes and motivations.

The thematic analysis highlighted key patterns, such as a strong interest in historical exploration, with many respondents expressing a preference for routes that combined historical depth and scenic value. A notable theme was the varied familiarity with the historical context, as some participants indicated limited knowledge but showed openness to learning more. Preferences for different tour formats, including self-paced and walking tours, were also observed, alongside mentions of economic considerations, with some respondents indicating a preference for affordable or cost-free experiences.

Additionally, a sentiment analysis was conducted on the qualitative data to classify responses into positive, neutral, or negative attitudes. Many

responses showed positive sentiment, with enthusiasm for dark tourism experiences and historical narratives. Neutral sentiment, characterized by curiosity and a desire for more information, suggested that educational content could enhance engagement. A minimal number of responses indicated negative sentiment, often due to confusion or a lack of understanding, highlighting the need for clearer explanatory resources.

The combination of data collection through structured questionnaires and a thorough analysis that included descriptive statistics, thematic exploration, and sentiment assessment provided a comprehensive understanding of tourist engagement with dark tourism in Northern Albania. These insights have implications for developing targeted tourism strategies that incorporate educational guides, diverse tour formats, and affordable options to cater to a wide range of visitors. This methodology supports the sustainable development of dark tourism, offering historical awareness while bolstering regional tourism.

## **5. Findings**

### *Demographic profile of the surveyed sample*

The demographic profile of the survey sample provides an insightful overview of the respondents engaging in dark tourism in Northern Albania. Below is a summary of the demographic characteristics based on the collected data:

The sample included participants from diverse backgrounds, with respondents identifying primarily as Europeans, such as Spanish, Dutch, British, Finnish, and German. This diversity indicates that the region attracts tourists from a range of national origins, showcasing its broad international appeal. Consistent with the nationality data, the countries of residence included various European nations, with some respondents residing in regions such as Spain, the Netherlands, England, Finland, and Germany. The notable presence of respondents from multiple countries suggests that Northern Albania's dark tourism sites are of interest to a wide international audience. The types of accommodations chosen by respondents varied, including stays at hotels, hostels, and guesthouses. The diversity in accommodation types highlights the range of tourist profiles, from budget travelers to those seeking mid-range lodging. The gender distribution was balanced, with a slight majority identifying as women. This suggests a mixed-gender interest in dark tourism activities, with no significant gender skew in engagement with this type of tourism. A considerable portion of respondents identified as single, while a significant segment indicated they were married or in cohabitating partnerships. The

data points to both solo travelers and those who travel with partners being attracted to dark tourism in Northern Albania. The data showed that respondents traveled in various group configurations, including solo travel and groups of friends. Notably, a significant portion of respondents were not traveling alone, indicating that dark tourism appeals to those traveling socially, either as friends or as part of organized group tours. The typical duration of stay reported ranged from a few days to several weeks, with many respondents staying for periods such as "2 weeks" or "10-15 days." This reflects the possibility that dark tourism is integrated into broader travel plans that encompass other attractions in Albania.

This demographic overview suggests that the sample included a diverse set of tourists, representing different nationalities, travel group compositions, and accommodation preferences. The balanced gender distribution and varied marital statuses further indicate that dark tourism holds wide-ranging appeal, not limited to specific demographic subsets.

#### *Thematic and Sentiment Analysis of Survey Responses*

To delve deeper into the survey data, a thematic analysis was conducted on open-ended responses, shedding light on the recurring themes and sentiments expressed by respondents about dark tourism in Northern Albania. This analysis provides insight into the attitudes, interests, and barriers faced by potential tourists.

Key Themes Identified were mainly in terms of (i) *Interest in Historical and Cultural Exploration*: Respondents frequently mentioned their attraction to routes and activities that intertwine history and nature. The "Rebellion of Postriba" emerged as a focal point of interest for those intrigued by the anti-communist movements and Albania's historical struggles. Comments like "Explore more castles" and preferences for routes involving sites such as the Castle of Drishti highlight an interest in places that combine historical depth and scenic value. (ii) *Varied Familiarity with Historical Context*: A recurring theme was the lack of awareness or familiarity with the detailed historical context of certain sites. Responses such as "I'm not very familiar with these histories" and "I would have to do more research" indicate that while there is a baseline interest, further educational content or guided explanations would enhance the experience for many visitors. This suggests that efforts to promote historical awareness could increase engagement. (iii) *Preference for Different Tour Formats*: Preferences for biking tours or alternative modes of exploration were noted, with some respondents showing an inclination for self-paced or walking tours over guided bike tours. Comments like "No, a walking tour is better

for me" and "Version two, I love bridges" reflect the diversity in how tourists wish to engage with dark tourism sites. (iv) *Economic Considerations*: There were remarks concerning affordability and cost, with some respondents preferring tours that are "Free or cheap," indicating that budget-conscious tourists are considering dark tourism but are mindful of expenses.

The overall sentiment varied across responses, but notable patterns emerged: (i) Positive Sentiment: Many responses demonstrated a keen interest and positive sentiment toward exploring dark tourism sites. Words such as "interesting," "love," and "explore" reflected enthusiasm for thematic routes that cover historical narratives and unique experiences in Northern Albania. (ii) Neutral or Inquisitive Sentiment: A significant portion of responses indicated neutral or ambivalent sentiment, characterized by phrases such as "not sure," "I would have to do more research," or simple statements of unfamiliarity. This neutrality highlights potential tourists' openness to more information and educational support before committing to such experiences. (iii) Cautious or Negative Sentiment: While minimal, there were hints of caution or negative sentiment. Comments emphasizing the need for more historical knowledge or expressing confusion, such as "I don't understand," signal potential barriers to engagement. These suggest areas where enhanced explanatory resources or contextual materials could alleviate hesitation.

The analysis indicates a broad interest in dark tourism in Northern Albania, driven by historical intrigue and cultural exploration. However, it also points to a gap in detailed historical understanding among potential tourists. To cater to this interest and address hesitations, integrating more educational guides, detailed narratives, and diverse tour formats (such as walking tours) could enrich the tourist experience. Economic considerations also play a role, suggesting that offering cost-effective tour options would likely appeal to a broader audience.

In conclusion, these thematic and sentiment insights highlight opportunities for enhancing dark tourism offerings by emphasizing educational content, flexible tour options, and affordability to cater to a wide range of tourists.

## **6. Discussion**

The findings from this study align with and contribute to the growing body of literature on dark tourism, particularly in the context of post-communist and historically significant regions like Northern Albania. As highlighted in the literature review, dark tourism is characterized by visits to sites associated with death, suffering, and significant historical events (Fonseca



et al., 2015; Lennon & Foley, 2000). This study's focus on the Anti-Communist Movement of Postriba provides a concrete example of how dark tourism can be leveraged in Albania, a country with a complex history marked by political upheavals and social transformation (Vickers, 1999; Light, 2017).

The demographic and thematic analysis of survey responses confirms that there is substantial interest among tourists in exploring historically significant sites tied to narratives of struggle and resistance. This aligns with findings from scholars like Stone (2006), who discussed the role of dark tourism in fostering historical consciousness and engaging visitors in meaningful reflection on past events. Respondents in this study expressed interest in routes that intertwine history and nature, underscoring the broader tourist motivations discussed by Biran and Hyde (2013), who highlighted the pursuit of authenticity and personal meaning as key drivers of dark tourism. The Anti-Communist Movement of Postriba serves as a focal point for such engagement, reflecting the cultural and emotional resonance described by Lennon (2017) and Stone (2013).

However, a recurring theme from the survey was the varied familiarity with historical context among tourists, which reflects the educational potential and challenges of dark tourism noted by Frew (2012) and Logan & Reeves (2009). Respondents who indicated a lack of detailed historical knowledge but expressed curiosity support the argument that educational content is vital for deepening tourist engagement and enhancing the overall experience (Kennell & Šuligoj, 2024). This highlights an opportunity for local tourism stakeholders to integrate more informative guides and context-rich materials into dark tourism itineraries. Doing so would not only meet the educational needs of tourists but would also align with the educational component emphasized by Stone (2006), who argued that dark tourism can play a significant role in transmitting historical knowledge and ensuring cultural remembrance.

The sentiment analysis revealed positive, neutral, and some cautious attitudes toward dark tourism, resonating with Light's (2017) exploration of the uneasy relationship between heritage and dark tourism. While positive sentiments reflected enthusiasm for engaging with Albania's history through dark tourism, neutral and cautious responses suggested a need for improved informational resources to overcome barriers to engagement. This aspect echoes Biran & Hyde's (2013) discussions on the potential negative consequences of dark tourism, such as superficial experiences or commodification, which can arise when sites are not sufficiently contextualized or when tourists lack a deep understanding of their significance.

Economic considerations were also a significant theme in this study, with some respondents expressing a preference for affordable or cost-free tours. This finding aligns with research by Kennell & Šuligoj (2024), who noted that dark events and tourism experiences can influence local economies, particularly in regions that may not typically attract significant tourist attention. The potential for economic growth through dark tourism in Northern Albania could be substantial, provided that it is developed ethically and sustainably. The balance between economic benefit and respect for the historical narrative is critical, as highlighted by Macdonald (2013) and Timothy (2011), who warned against the risks of commodifying tragedy for profit.

This study supports the notion that dark tourism can serve as an effective means of preserving historical memory and promoting educational tourism, as emphasized by Smith (2006) and Harrison (2013). However, it also underscores the importance of carefully curating these experiences to avoid potential ethical pitfalls. The promotion of the Anti-Communist Movement of Postriba as a dark tourism site should, therefore, be approached with sensitivity, ensuring that it honors the memory of those involved and educates visitors about the broader historical and cultural context.

In conclusion, this discussion reinforces the idea that dark tourism in Northern Albania holds significant potential for cultural education and economic development. The findings align with existing literature on the motivations and challenges of dark tourism, highlighting areas for improvement such as enhanced educational content and varied tour formats to meet diverse tourist needs. By addressing these aspects, Albania can foster a respectful and engaging dark tourism sector that not only draws visitors but also contributes meaningfully to historical preservation and local heritage awareness.

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## **MUSEUMS AND DIGITAL CULTURE IN THE SHKODER CITY**

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### ***ABSTRACT***

Since we live in the digital age, in which technology and innovation have penetrated every cell of our society, their implementation in sustainable tourism development is a necessity and a clear strategy for developing this sector as an important part of the Albanian economy. Digital technologies offer a great opportunity for museums to involve the audience as active coproducers of cultural heritage expressions and experiences. The real challenge of integrating technologies into museum practice is understanding how digital cultures of communication affect the display, creation, and conception of cultural heritage.

The main purpose of this article is to explore the role of digital technology in the practice of museums in Shkodër. Additionally, the current problems encountered in the maintenance and management of these museum-cultural institutions in the city of Shkodra should be studied.

Museums in Shkodër are important heritage destinations in our city, where in addition to the values they carry, there is a need for innovations in asset management and government policies, paying more attention to sustainability and conservation. To conduct this study, the collection and processing of secondary and primary data were carried out. Secondary data were provided by reviewing the literature concerning the development of museums and the implementation of technology. Additionally, data concerning the resources, assets, and artefacts that a museum manages and the implementation of DAM were obtained. The primary data were obtained through interviews with museum leaders in Shkodër and technology experts about these technology institutions; the tools used; resources, assets, and artefacts; and the implementation of the DAM. From

the analysis of the data, it is evident that the digital management of cultural assets constitutes a more direct approach to tourists and, at the same time, preserves, conserves, and promotes national cultural values, which affects the approach of local tourism towards massification and sustainable tourism. On the basis of the problems encountered in museum institutions in Shkoder, where outdated infrastructure prevails, the implementation of these innovative development practices supported by technology should always be accomplished on the basis of the conditions and capacities of these institutions.

**Keywords:** *Sustainable Tourism, Digitization, DAM, Museum, Heritage.*

**JEL classification:** (L83, Z39, M15)

## **1. Introduction**

Shkodër, a historic city in northern Albania, boasts a rich cultural heritage and vibrant artistic traditions. The city's museums play a crucial role in preserving and highlighting this legacy, and the integration of digital technologies offers new opportunities to enhance these practices. These institutions not only offer insights into the region's past but also play a vital role in the contemporary cultural landscape.

In recent years, the rise of digital culture has introduced new dynamics into the way museums engage with their audiences. Digital technologies are transforming traditional museum practices, offering innovative ways to enhance visitor experiences and expand the reach of cultural institutions. This shift is particularly relevant for Shkodër's museums, as they navigate the integration of digital tools into their operations and exhibit strategies.

The main purpose of this article is to explore the role of digital technology in the practice of museums in Shkoder. Exploring the intersection of museums and digital culture in Shkodër city and examining how local museums need to leverage digital technologies to modernize their offerings and engage with both local and global audiences. Additionally, the current problems encountered in the maintenance and management of these museum-cultural institutions in the city of Shkodra should be studied. In Shkodër, only one museum uses technology to improve the visitor experience and help preserve and present the cultural heritage of the National Museum of Photography "Marubi", whereas the museum of Witness and Memory uses minimal amounts of technology.

Through this exploration, it seeks to offer insights into how digital culture shapes the future of museum practices and contributes to the vibrant

cultural scene of this historic city. The display and exhibition of historical relics can promote the harmonious development of society. However, there are many defects in traditional museums. The collection in the museum is scattered. The exhibition needs a specific time and place to open, and the exhibition mode is boring and lacks entertainment, which severely limits the museum's dissemination of history and culture. To improve the public's number of visits, museums need to keep pace with the times. Using augmented reality technology can digitize the information in the museum and integrate it with the user's real environment, which solves the limitation of time and space for most users to visit the museum and greatly increases the entertainment of users to visit the museum. In addition, the application of blockchain technology in digital museums can effectively ensure the security of museum cultural relic data and quickly restore the information of lost cultural relics <sup>1</sup>.

The hypothesis for this research is that implementing digital asset management (DAM) technology in Shkodra museums significantly improves the organization, accessibility, and preservation of digital assets, leading to enhanced operational efficiency, enriched visitor experiences, and better preservation of cultural heritage.

## 2. Literature Review

Tourism is a major economic driver, generating income, creating jobs, and fostering infrastructure development. It supports local economies by attracting foreign investment and promoting the growth of related sectors, such as hospitality, transportation, and retail. In addition to its economic impact, tourism serves as a platform for cultural exchange, enabling travelers to experience diverse traditions, customs, and histories. This cultural interaction fosters mutual understanding and appreciation, contributing to global peace and cooperation. Museums are vital institutions in the preservation and dissemination of cultural heritage. They house invaluable collections of artefacts, artworks, and historical documents that provide insights into the past and inform contemporary society. Museums serve as educational centers, offering programs, exhibitions, and resources that engage the public and promote lifelong learning. By attracting tourists, museums also contribute to the economic

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<sup>1</sup> Hu, W., Han, H., Wang, G., Peng, T., & Yang, Z. (2023). Interactive Design and Implementation of a Digital Museum under the Background of AR and Blockchain Technology. *Applied Sciences*, 13(8), 4714.

vitality of their locales, making them integral to the tourism industry. Museums and similar institutions serve as vital sources of information and inspiration for future generations. Their mission, as noted by <sup>2</sup>, is to manage and disseminate their collections of artifacts. This task is challenging owing to the extensive scope of these collections and the diverse audiences they serve. Despite these challenges, museums are entrusted by key stakeholders—including states, regions, and cities—with the responsibility of presenting their collections to the public at the local, national, and global levels <sup>3</sup>. This interaction between museums and the public has only expanded with the introduction of the internet and the digital technological advancements that are seen today <sup>4</sup>. As noted by scholars such as José van Dijck, digital culture permeates every aspect of our lives—at home, at work, and in public spaces. The rapid spread of digital and connected technologies in contemporary society has also impacted institutions such as museums <sup>5</sup>. Consequently, museums have been compelled to adapt and demonstrate to the public that they are not lagging in development but are, in fact, leading to the adoption and mastery of new emerging technologies <sup>6</sup>. According to the International Council of Museums, “The museum is a nonprofit institution, its main mission is to serve the society and its development, open to the public, which appropriates, preserves, communicates, and exhibits the tangible and intangible heritage of humanity and education, study and leisure purposes. The words “in the service of society and its development” are relevant to the modern museum, which has redefined its mission as a populist mission, including locals and foreigners, young and old. Given that the main goal of museums is to provide everyone with access to their information through as many channels as possible, the focus is on quantity by reaching as many visitors as possible, offering the largest number of interpretive and educational

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<sup>2</sup> Lewis, G. (2004). The Role of Museums and the Professional Code of Ethics. In P. J. Boylan (Ed.), *Running a museum: A practical handbook* (pp. 1–16). International Council of Museums, ICOM

<sup>3</sup> Crooke, E. (2008). *Museums and Community: Ideas, Issues and Challenges* (1st ed.). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203371015>

<sup>4</sup> Taher, H. (2020). Digitalization at Museums: A study on the various effects digitalization have had on museums and how museums can develop new digital interactions for their visitors.

<sup>5</sup> Dijck, J. van, Poell, T., & Waal, M. de. (2018). *The platform society: Public values in a connective world*. Oxford University Press.

<sup>6</sup> Verma, P. (2017, October 16). How Technology is Transforming the Museum Experience. Dell Technologies. <https://www.delltechnologies.com/en-us/perspectives/howtechnology-is-transforming-the-museum-experience/>



tools (analogue and digital) and presenting the largest amount of information. The internet offers the ideal medium to accomplish all of this, and as a result, museums have begun to transform their websites, online access, and digitization of collections into tools that are shaping the future <sup>7</sup>. The convergence of tourism, museums, and digitalization holds immense potential for enhancing cultural heritage preservation, visitor engagement, and economic development. As digital technologies continue to evolve, museums increasingly adopt innovative solutions to create richer, more immersive experiences for visitors. Collaborative efforts between cultural institutions, technology providers, and policymakers are essential for overcoming challenges and maximizing the benefits of digital transformation.

### **1.1 Analysis of museum digitalization**

#### **A. Impact on Visitor Experience and Engagement**

**Virtual Reality and Augmented Reality:** Studies have demonstrated that virtual reality (VR) and augmented reality (AR) can significantly enhance visitor engagement by providing immersive and interactive experiences. For example, Parry (2010)<sup>[8]</sup> highlights that VR can transport visitors to historical events or reconstruct lost artifacts, offering a deeper understanding of the exhibits. Augmented reality, as discussed by Gkatsou, A <sup>9</sup>, overlays digital information onto physical exhibits, enriching the visitor experience by adding layers of context and interactivity. **Digital Exhibits and Interactive Displays:** Digital exhibits have been found to increase visitor interaction and satisfaction. The work of Hawkey <sup>10</sup> underscores that interactive digital displays can capture visitors' attention and make learning more engaging by allowing them to interact with the content.

#### **B. Preservation and Accessibility**

**Digital Archives and Collections:** The digitization of museum collections has been a significant focus. According to Barrueco & Termens <sup>11</sup>, digital archives not only preserve artifacts but also make them more accessible to

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<sup>7</sup> Kamberi, A. (2021). Albanian National Museums: How to Overcome the Digital Gap Towards a Better National Heritage Promotion. *European Journal of Multidisciplinary Studies*, 6(2), 113-123.

<sup>8</sup> Parry, R. (Ed.). (2010). *Museums in a digital age* (Vol. 10). Routledge.

<sup>9</sup> Gkatsou, A. (2018). Enhancing the visitor experience in museums with Augmented Reality (Master's thesis, Universidade do Porto (Portugal)).

<sup>10</sup> Hawkey, R. (2004). Learning with digital technologies in museums, science centres and galleries.

<sup>11</sup> Barrueco, J. M., & Termens, M. (2022). Digital preservation in institutional repositories: a systematic literature review. *Digital Library Perspectives*, 38(2), 161-174.

researchers and the public. Digitization projects, such as those undertaken by the Smithsonian Institution, have demonstrated the benefits of making high-resolution images and detailed information available online.

**Global Reach and Accessibility:** Digitalization has broadened the reach of museums, allowing them to engage with a global audience. The work of Pouloupoulos & Wallace <sup>12</sup> shows that online access to museum collections can democratize cultural heritage by making it accessible to individuals who cannot visit in person.

**C. Challenges and Considerations Technological and Financial Constraints:** Despite the benefits, digitalization presents challenges. Studies by Hijazi & Baharin <sup>13</sup> and Li, Liew & Su <sup>14</sup> note that implementing advanced digital technologies can be costly and require significant technical expertise. Museums must balance their investment in technology with their financial resources and strategic priorities.

### **1.2 Digital asset management (DAM) in Museums**

Digital asset management (DAM) and digital asset management systems are often overlooked topics that are becoming crucial for the continued operation of museums. The evidence shows an increasing need for DAM systems to handle the expanding collection of digital assets. Digital asset management systems first gained attention in 1995 within the moving image sector when filmmakers began incorporating digital technology into their work <sup>15</sup>. As more museums began experimenting with digital formats, it became evident that many of them used digital asset management systems (DAMs) as image repositories. Two notable examples from the early 2000s are the Museum Victoria in Melbourne, Australia, and the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City. In 2003, Museum Victoria established an "Image Strategy Working Group" to develop a framework for managing and preserving images and audio-visual material in its care <sup>16</sup>.

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<sup>12</sup> Pouloupoulos, V., & Wallace, M. (2022). Digital technologies and the role of data in cultural heritage: The past, the present, and the future. *Big Data and Cognitive Computing*, 6(3), 73.

<sup>13</sup> Hijazi, A. N., & Baharin, H. (2022). The Effectiveness of Digital Technologies Used for the Visitor's Experience in Digital Museums. A Systematic Literature Review from the Last Two Decades. *International Journal of Interactive Mobile Technologies*, 16(16).

<sup>14</sup> Li, Y. C., Liew, A. W. C., & Su, W. P. (2012, June). The digital museum: Challenges and solution. In *2012 8th International Conference on Information Science and Digital Content Technology (ICIDT2012)* (Vol. 3, pp. 646-649). IEEE.

<sup>15</sup> Gibson, David. "Digital Asset Symposium: Museum of Modern Art, New York City, April 25, 2008." *The Moving Image*

<sup>16</sup> Broomfield, John. "Digital Asset Management Case Study - Museum Victoria." *Journal of Digital Asset Management* 5.3 (2009): 116-25. ProQuest

This group included key stakeholders from various object departments, as well as individuals involved in media production and copyright. The project was formally implemented in 2009, six years after its initial inception.

According to Megan McGovern, before implementing a digital asset management (DAM) system, a museum should investigate three key factors: Scope, Mission and Vision, and Values and Guiding Principles<sup>17</sup>. The scope of the project involves identifying the digital assets the museum owns and what they wish to include in the system. These assets may encompass photographs, text documents, databases, movies, audio, and web pages<sup>18</sup>. They can be further categorized into born-digital assets, created directly on a computer, and digitized analogue material. Additionally, it is crucial to determine which departments will supply these assets, which may include archives or libraries, administrative departments, curatorial departments, registrars, or outside contributors. Defining the scope is vital, as an undefined scope can lead to an unwieldy and expensive system. While software capabilities and computing power have significantly advanced since the first DAMs were deployed, these considerations remain essential.

When digital asset management (DAM) systems were first introduced, most were not connected to the internet, as the Worldwide Web was still in its infancy. However, as both DAM systems and museums have evolved, with more institutions putting their collections and archives online, DAMs have expanded their capabilities<sup>19</sup>. These advancements now include features such as cloud storage, artificial intelligence, machine learning, pixel tracking, and automated processes, which are often integrated into subscription-based pricing models. Cloud storage allows museums to store their data offsite, providing greater flexibility and security.

### **1.3 DAM for Museums**

Implementing a digital asset management (DAM) system in a museum setting can significantly enhance the management, preservation, and accessibility of museum collections. How can museums in Shkodër or any other location benefit from and implement a DAM system?

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<sup>17</sup> McGovern, Megan. "Digital Asset Management: Where to Start." *Curator: The Museum Journal* 56.2 (2013): 237-254.

<sup>18</sup> Kaplan, Deborah. "Choosing a Digital Asset Management System That is Right for You." *Journal of Archival Organization* 7.1-2 (2009): 33-40. Taylor and Francis Online, doi:10.1080/15332740902897360

<sup>19</sup> Bertacchini, Enrico, and Federico Morando. "The Future of Museums in the Digital Age: New Models for Access to and use of Digital Collections." *International Journal of Arts Management* 15.2 (2013): 60,72,87-88. ProQuest.

Benefits of the DAM for Museums <sup>20</sup>.

**Efficient Management:** A DAM system allows for centralized storage, organization, and retrieval of digital assets, including photographs, documents, videos, and audio recordings. This improves efficiency in managing collections and related metadata.

**Enhanced Accessibility:** Digital assets can be easily accessed by museum staff, researchers, and the public, both onsite and remotely. This increases the reach and impact of museum collections.

**Preservation:** Digitizing physical artifacts and storing them in a DAM system helps preserve them for future generations. Digital preservation ensures that even if a physical item deteriorates, a digital record remains.

**Metadata Management:** DAM systems facilitate the tagging and organization of digital assets with detailed metadata, making it easier to search, categorize, and interpret the collections.

**Collaboration:** Museum staff can collaborate more effectively via a DAM system. It allows multiple users to access and work on the same digital assets simultaneously, streamlining project workflows.

**Public Engagement:** Museums can enhance public engagement by providing digital access to collections. Online exhibitions, virtual tours, and interactive digital content can attract a broader audience.

#### **1.4 Methodology**

This study employed a mixed-methods approach, integrating both secondary and primary data to comprehensively analyse the role of digital technology in museum practices in Shkoder, Albania.

##### **Secondary Data Collection**

Secondary data were gathered through an extensive literature review. This involved reviewing academic journals, books, articles, and case studies related to museum digitalization, cultural heritage, and the integration of technology in museums. The focus was on both global trends and localized studies relevant to Albania, specifically Shkoder. Key areas of exploration included the development of museums; the implementation of technology, resources, assets, and artifacts managed by museums; and the application of digital asset management (DAM) systems.

##### **Primary Data Collection**

Primary data were obtained through semistructured interviews with key stakeholders, including museum directors, curators, and digital project

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<sup>20</sup> Brandt, S. A., & Hassan, F. (2000). Dams and cultural heritage management. World Commission on Dams: Cape Town, South Africa.

managers in Shkodër. These interviews were designed to gather insights into the experiences, perceptions, challenges, and benefits of integrating digital technologies in museums. The specific museums selected for detailed case studies included the Marubi National Museum of Photography, the Shkodër Historical Museum, and Rozafa Castle. The interviews covered topics such as the use of digital tools, resources, assets, artifacts, and the implementation of DAM systems.

#### Case studies

Detailed case studies were conducted on the selected museums to analyse their digital initiatives. This included examining virtual tours, interactive exhibits, digital archives, and the overall impact of these initiatives on visitor engagement and operational efficiency. Museum reports, digital platform evaluations, and interviews with museum staff provided additional data for these case studies.

#### Digital and Web Analysis

A digital and web analysis was conducted to assess the effectiveness and reach of the digital platforms used by Shkoder's museums. This involved analysing the digital presence of these museums, including their websites, social media platforms, and digital exhibits. Metrics such as website traffic, social media engagement, and user interaction with digital content were evaluated to measure the impact and engagement levels of these digital initiatives.

#### Ethical considerations

The study ensured that ethical considerations such as informed consent and confidentiality were addressed throughout the data collection process. The participants were informed about the purpose of the research, and their consent was obtained before the interviews were conducted.

#### Data analysis

The collected data were analysed via qualitative data analysis methods, specifically thematic analysis for interviews and focus group data. This approach allowed the identification of common themes, patterns, and insights related to the integration of digital technology in museum practices. By combining these methodologies, this study aimed to provide a comprehensive understanding of how digital culture impacts museums in Shkoder, offering insights into both the operational aspects and broader cultural implications of digitalization in the museum sector.

### **1.5 Albania digital gap with museums**

The Albanian National Museum Network comprises 21 museums of various types located in both coastal and inland areas of Albania. According to Law No. 27/2018 on cultural heritage, which was approved on May 17, 2018, and the subsequent museum classification, the National Network of Albanian Museums includes the following:

- Thirteen museums with collections were housed in dedicated museum buildings. Some of these have been reclassified as central museums under the jurisdiction of national museums.
- Eight open-air museums, classified as National Archaeological Parks, spread across Albania.

The thirteen museums with specific buildings are distributed as follows: Tirana (3), Durrës (1), Kruja (2), Korça (3), Berat (2), Vlorë (1), and Shkodër (1). The eight National Archaeological Parks, or open-air museums, include Butrinti, Finiq, Antigonea, Amantia, Orikumi, Bylis, Apollonia, and Shkodër - Lezha. In addition to the national network, there are twelve local museums managed by local governments. However, these local museums face challenges in terms of promotion, online accessibility, and visitor engagement <sup>21</sup>.

The Onufri Museum of Berat is the first national museum in Albania to offer a virtual tour through digital means. Visitors can enjoy a virtual experience with a multilingual audio guide. This tour not only provides a meaningful experience but also ensures equal access for everyone, regardless of their location. The Onufri National Museum represents a pioneering step in adopting new art technology, transforming a one-dimensional experience into a comprehensive audio-visual escapade. This project was funded by USAID and the Embassy of Sweden in Tirana and was implemented by Creative Business Solutions through the IntoAlbania Project.

Another significant aspect of the Onufri Museum is its automation process, which allows museum staff to dedicate more time and resources to enhancing the visitor experience, providing better content, and improving online presence.

In this context, it is important to mention the establishment of an online

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<sup>21</sup> Kamberi, A. (2021). Albanian National Museums: How to Overcome the Digital Gap Towards a Better National Heritage Promotion. *European Journal of Multidisciplinary Studies*, 6(2), 113-123.

archive for the National Museum of Photography: Marubi. Currently, the online archive includes 100,000 images, representing approximately 20% of the photography material from the Marubi National Museum of Photography archive. The digitization work is ongoing and needs further progress (Kamberi 2021).

### **1.6 Museums in Shkodër**

Shkodër, a historic city in northern Albania, is celebrated for its rich cultural heritage and vibrant arts scene. Its museums play a crucial role in preserving and showcasing this heritage, reflecting the city's historical significance and artistic traditions. For example, the Marubi National Museum of Photography is renowned for its extensive collection of historical photographs that document Albania's past, whereas the Shkodër Historical Museum<sup>22</sup> provides insights into the region's archaeological and historical developments. These institutions are pivotal in maintaining the city's legacy, and with the advent of digital culture, they are now utilizing technology to enhance visitor experiences and broaden their audience. This integration of technology allows for interactive exhibits, virtual tours, and digital archives, making Shkodër's cultural treasures more accessible to a global audience. Through these efforts, the city's museums are not only preserving the past but also ensuring that Shkodër's vibrant cultural scene continues to thrive in the digital age. Moreover, virtual tours and online resources have allowed museums in Shkodër to reach a global audience beyond physical visits. This digital expansion not only preserves the past but also ensures that Shkodër's cultural scene remains vibrant and accessible in the digital age. By leveraging technology, these museums continue to contribute to the city's cultural preservation while adapting to contemporary trends.

#### **1.6.1 Marubi National Museum of Photography**

This museum is dedicated to the work of the Marubi dynasty, which pioneered photography in Albania. It houses a vast collection of photographs that document the social and cultural history of Albania from the late 19th century onwards. The archive was founded in 1970 as a state initiative for the citizenship of the work of photographers, who until that time were engaged in private activity. Its manager was Gegë Marubi, who, among other things, carried out the systematization and registration of all photographic materials of 500,000 negatives, which included the activity of

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<sup>22</sup> "Shkodër Historical Museum". Museum Website.

18 photographers growing up in Shkodra <sup>23</sup>. The collections cover a wide historical period and testify, among other things, to the first traces of photography in Albania. The other techniques and other colors of this scope present a wide variety: from the technique of collodion, gelatin with silver salt on glass plates and film plans, to infrared photography and roll films on celluloid.

Another important part of the preserved materials in the archive is various artifacts, authors' registers, albums and their techniques in private studios before the process of nationalization.

The museum offers digital archives and virtual tours, allowing visitors to explore its extensive photographic collections online. Interactive displays and multimedia presentations provide deeper insights into the history of photography and the stories behind the images. The online archive contains 51,000 photographs with known information, i.e., approximately 10% of the photographic material found in the museum archive. Work on digitization continues.

The Marubi National Museum of Photography has developed a digital archive accessible online, allowing users to explore high-resolution images of historical photographs. The Shkodër Historical Museum has introduced virtual tours, enabling remote visitors to experience exhibits through interactive 3D models. Analytics indicate a 30% increase in online engagement with the Marubi Museum's digital archives since the launch of their new website.

Social media engagement metrics show that posts related to digital exhibitions receive higher interaction rates than traditional content does.

Compared with similar-sized museums in the region, Shkodër's museums are moderately advanced in their digital offerings. However, there is room for improvement in areas such as mobile app development and augmented reality features, as evidenced by best practices in other European museums.

### **1.6.2 Historical Museum of Shkodër**

The Historical Museum of Shkodra began to be organized in 1947 and took full shape in 1949.

The museum was originally built on the basis of the old collections of the Jesuit and Franciscan assemblies established since the end of the 19th century, as well as the collections of Shkodra families. Then, they were added through donations, purchases, chance finds and archaeological excavations. During the following years, other museums and house-

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<sup>23</sup> Mancini, R. (2015). *Monumenta Historiae Patriae: Marubi's Photographic Documentation (1858 - 1970) and the Birth of the Albanian Nation*. Berlin, Munich, Boston, Gruyter, Photo Archives and the Idea of Nation, 126.



museums were built, forming a museum network of 7 museum centers in the city of Shkodra. With the deep reforms that were undertaken at the beginning of the 1990s, especially with the return of the properties of the former owners, the houses where the museums were set up were privatized, and the museum network was disbanded, leaving only the Central Museum where all the museum objects were collected. of previous centers.

In 1996, the Historical Museum of Shkodra was transferred to the restored monumental residence (a characteristic Shkodra house named "Oso Kuka"), where it is still located today.

Its function is to promote history and local and national cultural traditions to the citizens of the community inside and outside the country. However, throughout his life, he also carried out research activities at the local level, activating many collaborators, specialists and lovers of culture. Within the city, he cooperates successfully with L. Gurakuqi University, the "Marin Barleti" library, the Art Gallery and the "Migjeni" Theater, and with other sister institutions in Albania and the region.

The museum periodically organizes commemorative activities, conferences and seminars with different themes. It currently publishes the magazine "Kumtari" and has undertaken the publication of 10 volumes with the materials of the seminar "Shkodra in the centuries", which includes studies in the fields of history, archaeology, ethnology, folklore, linguistics, literature and arts. The museum consists of the following sections: ethnography, archaeology, visual art and the library, the latter serves as a fund for scientific studies carried out by the staff working in its activity.

Has approximately 1500 archeological objects

2000 Ethnographic objects

2000 Numismatics items

The following is shown in the exhibition:

6 Traditional costumes

200 archeological objects

200 ethnographic objects

While this museum focuses primarily on historical materials and documentaries, it may have used technology to create interactive exhibits that help educate visitors about the World War II period and resistance movements. The museum uses digital kiosks and QR codes to provide detailed information about exhibits. Plans for a virtual tour and an online catalogue of its collections need to be developed to make the museum's resources accessible to a global audience.

### **1.6.3 Rozafa Castle Museum**

Situated on a hill overlooking Shkodër, Rozafa Castle is a historic fortress with a museum that showcases the region's history and legends. The Rozafa Castle Museum is housed in a 15th-century structure known as the "Capitaneria," which served as the residence of the captain (the Venetian ruler). The museum's large doors open to its first and second floors, where various exhibits showcase the ancient grandeur of the castle.

On the first floor, the famous legend of the city's founding is presented, telling the story of Rozafa, a young mother from Shkodra, who sacrifices herself by immuring herself into the city walls to ensure their strength and durability. This hall also features archaeological artefacts, including vessels and fragments of ceramic pieces from prehistoric, ancient, and medieval periods. The oldest items date back to the Early Bronze Age (2000 years BC), marking the beginning of life on this hill.

### **Conclusions**

Museums are vital institutions in the preservation and dissemination of cultural heritage. They house invaluable collections of artefacts, artworks, and historical documents that provide insights into the past and inform contemporary society. Museums serve as educational centers, offering programs, exhibitions, and resources that engage the public and promote lifelong learning. By attracting tourists, museums also contribute to the economic vitality of their locales, making them integral to the tourism industry.

In Shkodër, only one museum uses technology to improve the visitor experience and help preserve and present the cultural heritage National Museum of Photography "Marubi", whereas museums of the "Historical Museum of Shkodër" and "Rozafa Castle Museum" use technology at minimum. Museums in Shkodër actively use social media platforms to engage with the public, share information about exhibitions and events, and promote cultural heritage. They also use these platforms to reach younger audiences and encourage community involvement. No museums in the city use DAM.

Research on museum digitalization and digital asset management (DAM) has led to several key conclusions, highlighting both the benefits and challenges of integrating these technologies into museum operations. The main conclusions drawn from recent studies and articles are as follows:

**Broader Audience Reach:** Digitalization allows museums to make their collections accessible to a global audience. By putting digital collections

online, museums can reach people who cannot visit them in person, thus democratizing access to cultural heritage. Technologies such as augmented reality (AR) and virtual reality (VR) enhance visitor engagement by providing immersive and interactive experiences. These technologies make learning more engaging and memorable.

### **Recommendation**

Only one museum in Shkoder uses technology; other museums in Shkodër need to start offering virtual tours and online exhibitions, allowing people from around the world to explore their collections and learn about Albanian culture and history remotely. Museums need to incorporate interactive displays and multimedia elements such as touch screens, video presentations, and audio guides to create more engaging and educational experiences for visitors.

Some recommendations on museum digitalization and digital asset management (DAM) from Shkodra museums are as follows:

- Museums should create a comprehensive digital strategy that aligns with their overall mission and goals. This strategy should outline objectives, target audiences, and the specific technologies to be implemented.
- Successful digitalization requires buy-in from leadership. Museum directors and senior management should champion digital initiatives and allocate appropriate resources for their implementation and maintenance.
- Staff training is crucial for the effective use of DAM systems. Museums should invest in ongoing training programs to ensure that employees are proficient in using new technologies.
- Adequate financial resources are essential for implementing and sustaining digital initiatives. Museums should explore diverse funding sources, including grants, partnerships, and sponsorships, to support their digital projects.
- Ensuring that digital systems can integrate with existing museum infrastructure and other digital platforms is crucial for seamless operation and data sharing.

- Interactive technologies such as augmented reality (AR) and virtual reality (VR) can be incorporated to enhance visitor engagement and provide immersive learning experiences.
- Trends in digital technology and museum practices should be continuously monitored to ensure that the institution remains at the forefront of innovation and can adapt to changing visitor expectations.
- Foster Partnerships: Collaborate with other museums, cultural institutions, and technology providers to share knowledge, resources, and best practices. Partnerships can also facilitate joint projects and funding opportunities.
- These recommendations highlight the importance of strategic planning, resource allocation, technology adoption, and continuous improvement in successfully integrating digitalization and DAM systems in museums.

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## **EXPLORING THE DETERMINANTS OF TOURIST SATISFACTION IN ALBANIA'S GASTRONOMIC TOURISM: EMPIRICAL INSIGHTS**

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### ***ABSTRACT***

This study examines the factors influencing satisfaction in Albania's gastronomic tourism sector (Brokaj, 2014), focusing on key variables such as gastronomic tourism initiatives, quality of offerings, cultural preservation, and digital presence. Data were collected through a single questionnaire, with distinct sections designed for tourists and industry professionals (restaurant owners and chefs). A total of 105 responses were analyzed. The primary factors influencing satisfaction include food quality, cultural authenticity, and tourism initiatives, while demographic variables and social media presence play secondary roles.

The study also reveals significant differences in satisfaction levels between locals and international tourists. While tourists emphasized the importance of food quality and authentic culinary experiences, locals expressed greater concern with the preservation of culinary traditions and sustainability efforts. These differences highlight the varying expectations and priorities between tourists and locals within the context of gastronomic tourism (Bojana Kalenjuk Pivarski, n.d.).

Despite several limitations, including potential sampling bias, data collection challenges, a limited temporal scope, language barriers, and concerns regarding generalizability, efforts were made to mitigate these issues through diverse sampling, careful questionnaire design, and bilingual support. Future studies could benefit from longitudinal approaches to capture long-term trends. Notwithstanding these limitations, the study

offers valuable insights for stakeholders in Albania's gastronomic tourism sector, underscoring the need to improve the quality of offerings and enhance professional engagement. This research contributes to the emerging field of gastronomic tourism in Albania and provides practical recommendations for fostering sustainable development in the sector.

**Keywords:** *Culinary, Satisfaction, Expenditure, Gastronomic, Tourism,*  
*JEL classification: Z32, L83, O15.*

## **1 Introduction**

In recent years, gastronomic tourism has evolved beyond culinary enjoyment into a deeper exploration of culture, history, and identity (Gheorghe et al., 2014). Albania, located in the heart of the Balkans, offers a rich tapestry of traditions and flavors, making it a promising destination to leverage gastronomic tourism for economic growth and cultural preservation.

Albania's culinary culture reflects centuries of historical influences, geographic diversity, and socio-economic shifts. From ancient Illyrian practices to Ottoman and Mediterranean legacies, its cuisine showcases a diverse fusion of flavors and techniques shaped by extensive cross-cultural exchanges (Nagy et al., 2017). This dynamic history has positioned Albania as a unique case for studying the interplay between gastronomy and tourism in a rapidly globalizing world.

The rising interest in gastronomic tourism offers an opportunity to investigate how contemporary influences, such as changing consumer preferences and tourism trends, impact Albania's culinary culture (Brokaj, 2014). This research examines critical factors like food quality, cultural authenticity, and promotional efforts to uncover how gastronomic tourism shapes perceptions and satisfaction among visitors, while also influencing the evolution of Albania's culinary identity (Kinouchi et al., 2008).

Through empirical analysis involving data from surveys and interviews, this study aims to provide valuable insights into the transformative role of gastronomic tourism. By exploring its effects on cultural heritage and sustainable tourism development, the research offers practical recommendations for policymakers, tourism stakeholders, and cultural advocates to harness Albania's gastronomic potential for both preservation and growth (Dosti et al., 2021); (Dollani et al., 2016).

### **1.1 Study Objective and Research Question**

The main objective of this research is to analyze the impact of gastronomic tourism on the satisfaction of tourists visiting Albania. Specifically, the



study aims to identify the key factors that influence tourists' experiences, focusing on aspects such as food quality, service, cultural authenticity, and the role of modern promotional tools. By investigating these factors, the study seeks to provide a comprehensive understanding of how they shape tourist satisfaction and how Albania's gastronomic tourism sector can evolve to enhance these experiences.

This research will focus on contemporary factors that influence satisfaction levels in gastronomic tourism, contributing to the sustainable development of the tourism sector and the preservation of culinary heritage.

#### **1.1.1 Research Question**

The research question guiding this study is:

- What factors influence the satisfaction of tourists engaged in gastronomic tourism in Albania?

Drawing from previous studies, including Correia et al. (2008) several critical factors influencing the Perceived Satisfaction with Gastronomic Tourism have been identified. These factors, summarized below, provide valuable insights into the key considerations for the development and utilization of Gastronomic Tourism to shape the Culinary Evolution in Albania:

1. Implementation of Gastronomic Tourism Initiatives: This metric, highlighted by Boyne et al. (2003), denotes the importance of initiatives in support of development of Gastronomic Tourism.
2. Cultural Preservation Efforts: Dollani in (2016) underscored the importance of preserving one country's Cultural Heritage, including that of Culinary culture.
3. Tourist Demographics: (Kivela & Crotts, 2006) (2006) highlight as a critical factor the demographics such as age, income, gender etc.
4. Quality of Gastronomic Offerings: (Meneguel et al., 2019) (2019) emphasizes the importance of quality in the overall satisfaction of tourist.
5. Digital and Social Media Presence: this is becoming a prominent factor in promoting Gastronomic Tourism and sharing experience other than improving and rating the service as well describes Vukolic et al., (2022).

By addressing these factors, institutions can effectively leverage the increase of Gastronomic Tourism to support the culinary evolution and overall satisfaction with Albanian Cuisine.

#### **1.1.2 Hypotheses**

The main hypothesis of this study posits that gastronomic tourism initiatives, cultural preservation efforts, tourist demographics, the quality of gastronomic offerings, and the digital and social media presence all significantly influence the perceived satisfaction with gastronomic tourism

in Albania. Additionally, the study examines how specific demographic factors, such as age, income, gender, nationality, profession, and level of education, influence variations in perceived satisfaction, as outlined in the methodology section on the research question and hypotheses.

### **1.2 Literature Review**

Different authors have written on the topic, particularly as tourism has surged to unprecedented levels, with globalization being a significant factor, as articulated by Weibing and Xingqun in their work from (2006). Authors from the region, the Balkans, have provided significant data and findings such as the study by Kalenjuk Pivarski et al., from (2023), providing valuable insights into gastronomic heritage and prompting pertinent questions regarding cultural preservation efforts. Another notable aspect of this study encompasses the emphasis on sustainability, highlighting the significance of ingredients and, consequently, the quality of offerings. Another study on the quality and need to present selected ingredients comes from Albania, by Brokaj, in (2014), presenting a valuable finding that not only the quality of the offerings is vital, but the authentic experience itself was found to be the primary motivational factor. Linking the quality of offerings with tourist satisfaction, restaurants play a pivotal role. Bertan in the year of the secular pandemic (2020) conducted an important study on the impact of restaurants in the development of Gastronomic Tourism.

The study unequivocally establishes the crucial role played by restaurants. In regards to the role of the Community, another important role impacting it is the technology reaching unprecedented heights and the virtual world connecting the globe, where a significant role is played by social media, as presented by different authors like Görgényi et al., (2017) and Vukolic et al., (2022).

In conjunction with precedent studies and evaluations, the study by Correia et al., conducted in (2008), has been particularly significant for this research, especially in its examination of tourist satisfaction within gastronomic tourism. This has served as the cornerstone for establishing the foundation of this study, expanding it to more stakeholders, restaurant (Snyder, 2019) owners, chefs, locals other than only tourists. The aforementioned study has provided a solid foundation for determining the sample population and designing the distributed questionnaire.

## **2 Methodology**

The previously mentioned studies illustrate the possibility of assessing Perceived Satisfaction with Gastronomic Tourism and its connection with

factors such as gastronomic tourism initiatives, cultural preservation efforts, tourist demographics, quality of gastronomic offerings, digital and social media presence and other relevant metrics. (Snyder, 2019)

## **2.1 Empiric Analysis**

### **2.1.1 Research questions and hypotheses**

Based on the above-mentioned discussion, this study seeks to answer the following questions:

- What factors influence the satisfaction of tourists engaged in gastronomic tourism in Albania?
- How does the urban or rural location of consumers influence their perceived satisfaction with gastronomic tourism?
- What is the relationship between tourists' nationality and their perceived satisfaction with gastronomic tourism?
- What is the relationship between professionals in the gastronomic sector and their perceived satisfaction with gastronomic tourism?
- How does the level of education influence perceived satisfaction with gastronomic tourism?

Consistent with the research questions raised, the following hypotheses are derived:

- H1: Gastronomic tourism initiatives, cultural preservation efforts, tourist demographics, quality of gastronomic offerings, digital and social media presence influence the Perceived Satisfaction with Gastronomic tourism.
- H2: There is a significant relation between nationality and perceived Gastronomic Satisfaction
- H3: There is a significant relation between urban/rural location and perceived Gastronomic Satisfaction
- H4: There is a significant relation between professionals on the sector and perceived Gastronomic Satisfaction
- H5: There is a significant relation between the level of instruction and perceived Gastronomic Satisfaction

### **2.1.2 Method**

#### **Subjects & Procedure**

Data were collected through a single online questionnaire, distributed to tourists visiting Albania in 2023-2024 and locals in the sector. The questionnaire, created using Google Forms, was available in English and

distributed through social networks (e.g., WhatsApp) and QR codes at tourist points across the country. Out of the 200 distributed questionnaires, 105 responses were collected. The majority of respondents (54.6%) were female, with the average age falling within the 36-45 years range. Of the respondents, 51.4% were international tourists, while the remaining participants were Albanian locals, primarily restaurant owners or chefs.

The questionnaire was designed with specific sections tailored for tourists and professionals. Sections aimed at tourists focused on their gastronomic experiences, satisfaction, and expectations, while sections addressed to professionals (restaurant owners, chefs, etc.) centered on their perspectives regarding gastronomic tourism initiatives, sustainability, and cultural preservation efforts. The responses were coded and processed using the statistical program SPSS® according to its specifications (Kahn, 2006).

### **Independent Variables**

Drawing on existing literature, this study selected research questions based on seven key dimensions: Implementation of Gastronomic Tourism Initiatives, Cultural Preservation Efforts, Tourist Demographics, Quality of Gastronomic Offerings, Digital and Social Media Presence, and Local Community Engagement. The study utilized Parasuraman's et al. SERVQUAL gap model (1985), examining perceived and expected values, along with the gap between these values. Here, we present the factor and reliability analyses for the perceived measures.

**Implementation of Gastronomic Tourism Initiatives** - (Gheorghe et al., 2014) To measure Gastronomic Initiatives, four items were included in the questionnaire. A principal component analysis, using eigenvalue (Landon et al., 2020) greater than one criterion, revealed a simple structure with factor loadings ranging from 0.629 to 0.830 with a median of 0.688. (Solomon & Rosner, 1954) This factor explained 52.155% of the total variance (Williams, 1956). The results of the reliability analysis indicated a Cronbach alpha of 0.962. Given the exploratory nature of this study, such value is considered acceptable (Peterson, 1994), and using Cronbach Alpha when item deleted shows the 4 items are important as Alpha decreases with the removal of each one. The KMO and Bartlett's test of sampling adequacy, at 0.658 indicates that the sample is acceptable, although there is room for improvement.

**Table 1: Items Used to Measure Gastronomic Initiatives (N=105)**

Items	Factor Loadings
1. You found variety and Gastronomic events while in Albania.	0.629
2. There is a clearly defined national or regional gastronomic tourism policy in place	0.643
3. There are effective marketing campaigns promoting gastronomic tourism experiences in Albania	0.830
4. Culinary tourism facilities such as food markets and gastronomic centers are readily available and well-maintained	0.650

Note. All questions were rated on a scale 1(totally disagree) to 5(totally agree).

**Cultural Preservation Efforts:** (Dollani et al., 2016) To measure ‘the preservation efforts importance, four items were included in the questionnaire. A principal component analysis, using eigenvalue (Landon et al., 2020) greater than one criterion, revealed a simple structure with factor loadings ranging from 0.761 to 0.848 with a median of 0.795. This factor explained 64.107% of the total variance (Williams, 1956). The results of the reliability analysis indicated a Cronbach alpha of 0.811. Given the exploratory nature of this study, such value is considered quite good (Peterson, 1994), furthermore the Cronbach’s Alpha if Item is deleted shows all items are important in the variable. The KMO and Bartlett's test of sampling adequacy, at 0.685 indicates that the sample is perfectly acceptable.

**Table 2: Items Used to Measure Preservation Efforts Variable (N=105)**

Items	Factor Loadings
1. Efforts to promote traditional Albanian cuisine through gastronomic tourism have positively contributed to the preservation of cultural heritage	0.761
2. Initiatives aimed at documenting and preserving traditional culinary practices and recipes have enhanced the authenticity of gastronomic experiences in Albania.	0.768

3. Efforts to support and promote local food producers and suppliers have helped preserve traditional ingredients and farming practices in Albania.	0.822
4. The integration of cultural elements such as storytelling, music, and folklore into gastronomic experiences has enhanced the preservation and celebration of Albanian cultural heritage.	0.848

Note. All questions were rated on a scale 1(totally disagree) to 5(totally agree).

**Tourist Demographics:** (Pasaco-González et al., 2023) To measure the demographics importance, four items were included in the questionnaire. A principal component analysis, using Eigenvalue(Landon et al., 2020) greater than one criterion, revealed a simple structure with factor loadings ranging from 0.643 to 0.744 with a median of 0.712. This factor explained 45.636% of the total variance (Williams, 1956). The results of the reliability analysis indicated a Cronbach alpha of 0.597. Given the exploratory nature of this study, such value is considered acceptable (Peterson, 1994). The KMO and Bartlett's test of sampling adequacy, at 0.594 indicates that the sample needs improvement.

**Table 3: Items Used to Measure Tourist Demographics**

**Variable(N=105)**

Items	Factor Loadings
1. Younger tourists (aged 18-35) are more likely to actively seek out gastronomic experiences during their visit to Albania	0.716
2. Tourists from countries known for their culinary heritage (e.g., Italy, France) are more discerning and demanding when it comes to gastronomic experiences in Albania.	0.744
3. Tourists with higher income levels are more willing to spend on gastronomic experiences and are generally more satisfied with the quality of culinary offerings in Albania.	0.708
4. Tourists with adventurous culinary preferences are more likely to seek out authentic and unique gastronomic experiences in Albania.	0.643

Note. All questions were rated on a scale 1(totally disagree) to 5(totally agree).

**Quality of Gastronomic Offerings:** (Brokaj, 2014)To measure ‘quality, four items were included in the questionnaire. A principal component analysis, using eigenvalue (Landon et al., 2020)greater than one criterion, revealed a simple structure with factor loadings ranging from 0.727 to 0.747 with a median of 0.805. This factor explained 52.108% of the total variance (Williams, 1956). The results of the reliability analysis indicated a Cronbach alpha of 670. Given the exploratory nature of this study, such value is considered acceptable (Peterson, 1994). The KMO and Bartlett's test of sampling adequacy, at 0.613 indicates that the sample is acceptable.

**Table 4: Items Used to Measure Quality Variable(N=105)**

Items	Factor Loadings
1. The gastronomic offerings in Albania are characterized by fresh, locally sourced ingredients and authentic flavours.	0.809
2. Culinary establishments in Albania pay attention to presentation and creativity in their dishes, offering visually appealing and innovative gastronomic experiences.	0.847
3. Albanian gastronomic establishments prioritize the use of high-quality ingredients, contributing to the overall excellence of gastronomic offerings.	0.727
4. The quality of service in Albanian gastronomic establishments, including attentiveness, professionalism, and friendliness, enhances the overall dining experience	0.802

Note. All questions were rated on a scale 1(totally disagree) to 5(totally agree).

**Digital and Social Media Presence:** (Görgényi et al., 2017)To measure ‘influence of DSM, four items were included in the questionnaire. A principal component analysis, using eigenvalue (Landon et al., 2020) greater than one criterion, revealed a simple structure with factor loadings ranging from 0.476 to 0.745 with a median of 0.739. This factor explained 42.015% of the total variance (Williams, 1956). The results of the reliability analysis indicated a Cronbach alpha of 0.531.Given the exploratory nature of this study, such value is considered acceptable (Peterson, 1994). The KMO and Bartlett's test of sampling adequacy, at

0.504 indicates that the sample needs improvement.

**Table 5: Items Used to Measure D&S Media Presence Variable(N=105)**

Items	Factor Loadings
1. Gastronomic establishments in Albania have a strong presence on digital platforms such as websites, mobile apps, and online review sites	0.476
2. Albanian gastronomic tourism is actively promoted and engaged with on social media platforms, fostering interaction and awareness among potential tourists.	0.734
3. There is a significant amount of user-generated content related to Albanian gastronomic experiences on social media platforms, reflecting positive engagement and satisfaction	0.745
4. Tourists can easily access information about gastronomic experiences in Albania through digital channels, facilitating trip planning and decision-making.	0.601

Note. All questions were rated on a scale 1(*totally disagree*) to 5(*totally agree*).

**Dependent Variable:** Perceived Satisfaction with Gastronomic Tourism dependent

**Satisfaction:** (Correia et al., 2008) To measure ‘satisfaction’, four items were included in the questionnaire. A principal component analysis, using eigenvalue(Landon et al., 2020) greater than one criterion, revealed a simple structure with factor loadings ranging from 0.740 to 0.917 with a median of 0.831. This factor explained 69.839% of the total variance (Williams, 1956). The results of the reliability analysis indicated a Cronbach alpha of 0.855. Given the exploratory nature of this study, such value is considered acceptable (Peterson, 1994). The KMO and Bartlett's test of sampling adequacy, at 0.774 indicates that the sample is perfectly acceptable.

**Table 6:Items Used to Measure Satisfaction Variable(N=105)**

Items	Factor Loadings
1. Please rate your overall satisfaction with your gastronomic tourism experience in Albania.	0.853
2. How satisfied were you with the quality and taste of the food offerings during your gastronomic experiences in Albania?	0.917
3. Did you feel that the gastronomic experiences you had in Albania were authentic and representative of the local culinary culture?	0.822
4. To what extent did you feel that the gastronomic experiences in Albania provided value for the money spent?	0.740



Note. All questions were rated on a scale 1(totally disagree) to 5(totally agree).

### 3 Findings

To explore the potential factors impacting consumer Satisfaction with Gastronomic Tourism in Albania, we performed multiple regression analysis (Queen & Smith, 1993), using respectively Consumer(Tourist) satisfaction (perceived, expected, and the gap between perceived and expected) as the dependent variables. The five dimensions: gastronomic tourism initiatives, cultural preservation efforts, tourist demographics, quality of gastronomic offerings, digital and social media presence were used as the independent variables. In the first model, we entered the five perceived dimensions as the independent variables and student satisfaction as the dependent variable.

$$\widehat{Sat} = 11.814 + 0.485In + 0.280Cult - 0.69Dem + 0.426Qty - 0.203DSM$$

<i>se</i> =	(2.927)	(0.0131)	(0.177)	(0.127)	(0.170)	(0.163)
<i>t</i> =	(0.4754)	(0.3688)	(-0.291)	(-0.66)	(0.366)	(-0.154)
<i>p</i> =	(0.228)	(0.092)	(0.0081)	(0.241)	(0.005)	(0.195)

The results indicated that the model was not that significant  $F(6,63)=3.95$ ,  $p=0.006$ ; Demographics, and Digital Social Media variables were not that significant. Dropping the variables that were not significant and re-running the regression analysis, the model was found to be highly significant ( $F(3,108)=9.213$ ,  $p=0.001$ ); adjusted  $R^2$  was 28.2%. The Durbin-Watson value is 2.145, close to the ideal value of 2, suggesting no autocorrelation in the residuals. Consequently, hypothesis H1 was supported given that several dimensions, such as Initiatives, Quality of offerings and, and Cultural Preservation have a significant impact on Tourists satisfaction.

$$\widehat{Satisfaction} = 8.901 + 0.481In + 0.398Cult + 0.526Qty$$

<i>se</i> =	(2.092)	(0.129)	(0.160)	(0.153)
<i>t</i> =	(4.624)	(3.470)	(2.281)	(2.332)
<i>p</i> =	(0.000)	(0.001)	(0.002)	(0.001)

To test whether or not there are significant relationships between Nationality and satisfaction, a simple regression analyses was performed, using age Nationality as the independent variable and satisfaction as the dependent variables. The results of the simple regression analyses indicated that there was a significant relationship between Nationality and Gastronomic satisfaction for  $\alpha=5\%$ , ( $F(1, 68) = 32.666$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ) Consequently, hypothesis H2 was supported, satisfaction among other nationalities is higher.

To test whether or not there is a significant difference in Gastronomic satisfaction based on gender, t-test was performed (Rosner, 1982). The

results indicated that there was a difference; in fact, mean female Satisfaction ( $M = 0.5571$ ,  $SD = 0.50031$ ) was higher than mean satisfaction for male ( $M = 0.4429$ ,  $SD = 0.50031$ ); and the difference was statistically significant ( $t(68) = 7.046$ ,  $p = 0.000$  (two-tailed)). Consequently, hypothesis H3 was supported.

To test whether or not there is a significant difference in Gastronomic satisfaction based on whether a professional on the sector or tourist, t-test was performed (Rosner, 1982). The results indicated that there was a difference; in fact, mean Tourist Satisfaction ( $M = 0.9423$ ,  $SD = 0.23379$ ) was higher than mean satisfaction for professionals ( $M = 0.5714$ ,  $SD = 0.23379$ ); and the difference was statistically significant ( $t(68) = 7.046$ ,  $p = 0.001$  (two-tailed)). Consequently, hypothesis H4 was supported.

To test whether or not there is a significant difference in Gastronomic satisfaction based on the level of instruction, t-test was performed (Rosner, 1982). The results indicated that there was a difference; in fact, mean Gastronomic satisfaction for Master/Doctorate ( $M = 51.427$ ,  $SD = 50.340$ ) was higher than mean student satisfaction for Bachelor ( $M = 48.571$ ,  $SD = 50.340$ ); however, the difference was statistically significant for  $\alpha = 5\%$  ( $t(69) = 2.000$ ,  $p = 0.000$  (two-tailed)). Consequently, hypothesis H5 was supported.

## **4 Conclusions and Recommendations**

### **4.1 Conclusions**

**Model Significance:** The initial multiple regression model showed limited significance with  $F(6,63) = 3.95$ ,  $p = 0.006$ , indicating that the overall fit of the model was not strong. However, after removing non-significant variables (Demographics and Digital Social Media), the refined model was highly significant with  $F(3,108) = 9.213$ , ( $p = 0.001$ ), and an adjusted  $R^2$  of 28.2

This indicates that Initiatives, Quality of Offerings, and Cultural Preservation significantly impact Tourist Satisfaction in Gastronomic Tourism in Albania.

The limited influence of less significant variables on satisfaction, however, can be attributed to the small sample size and the nascent stage of gastronomic tourism in Albania. At this stage, pricing is not perceived as a critical factor influencing decision-making, and the economic impact of gastronomic tourism remains difficult to measure. The vision for long-term economic growth in this sector is still developing. Nevertheless, this finding is of considerable importance, as it highlights an opportunity for Albania to refine its economic strategies. Businesses can leverage these

insights to create a more structured and sustainable approach to gastronomic tourism, fostering a more positive perception and raising expectations among stakeholders.

#### 4.1.2 Significant Factors

The refined model revealed that Initiatives ( $p = 0.001$ ), Quality of Offerings ( $p = 0.001$ ), and Cultural Preservation ( $p = 0.002$ ) are key determinants of consumer satisfaction. The regression equation is:

$$\widehat{Satisfaction} = 8.901 + 0.481In + 0.398Cult + 0.526Qlty$$

This underscores the importance of targeted initiatives and maintaining high-quality gastronomic offerings while preserving cultural heritage to enhance tourist satisfaction. The media presence and international projects to preserve culture reaches now the masses and raises awareness

#### 4.1.3 Nationality and Satisfaction

The regression analysis showed a significant relationship between Nationality and Gastronomic Satisfaction ( $F(1, 68) = 32.666$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ), supporting Hypothesis H2. This suggests that satisfaction levels vary significantly among different nationalities, with some nationalities reporting higher satisfaction levels.

#### 4.1.4 Gender Differences

The t-test results indicated a significant difference in satisfaction based on gender, with female tourists reporting higher satisfaction ( $M = 0.5571$ ,  $SD = 0.50031$ ) compared to male tourists ( $M = 0.4429$ ,  $SD = 0.50031$ ) ( $t(68) = 7.046$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ). Hypothesis H3 is supported, indicating gender-based differences in satisfaction levels.

#### 4.1.5 Professionals vs. Tourists

A significant difference in satisfaction was found between professionals in the sector and tourists, with tourists reporting higher satisfaction ( $M = 0.9423$ ,  $SD = 0.23379$ ) than professionals ( $M = 0.5714$ ,  $SD = 0.23379$ ) ( $t(68) = 7.046$ ,  $p = 0.001$ ). Hypothesis H4 is supported, suggesting that tourists have a higher level of satisfaction compared to industry professionals which is an important factor to consider, meaning the professionals need to be addressed and need a change in perspective. The change in tourism is sudden and the professionals need the means to manage this opportunity. This is an important finding for the local governmental and a key area to focus on.

#### 4.1.6 Level of Instruction

The t-test results indicated a significant difference in satisfaction based on the level of instruction. Tourists with higher education levels (Master/Doctorate) reported higher satisfaction ( $M = 51.427$ ,  $SD = 50.340$ ) compared to those with a Bachelor's degree ( $M = 48.571$ ,  $SD = 50.340$ )

( $t(69) = 2.000$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ). Hypothesis H5 is supported, highlighting that higher educational attainment is associated with greater satisfaction.

#### **4.2 Recommendations**

Enhance key factors and focus on enhancing the three critical factors: Initiatives, Quality of Offerings, and Cultural Preservation. Developing strategic initiatives to promote gastronomic tourism, ensuring the quality of food and services, and preserving the cultural heritage can significantly boost tourist satisfaction.

##### *Tailor marketing strategies:*

Recognize and cater to the diverse preferences of tourists from different nationalities. Customized marketing strategies can help address the unique needs and expectations of tourists from various backgrounds, leading to higher satisfaction levels.

##### *Gender-sensitive approaches:*

Develop gender - sensitive approaches in gastronomic tourism. Understanding the specific preferences and expectations of female tourists can help in designing better experiences and services that cater to this segment.

##### *Engage industry professionals:*

Engage with industry professionals to understand their perspectives and identify areas for improvement. Although tourists report higher satisfaction, insights from professionals can help in refining the offerings and addressing any gaps in service quality.

##### *Educational programs:*

Promote educational programs and workshops that highlight the cultural and historical significance of gastronomic tourism. This can enhance the overall experience for tourists and elevate their satisfaction levels, particularly for those with higher educational backgrounds.

##### *Continuous improvement:*

Implement a continuous feedback mechanism to gather insights from tourists regularly. Use this feedback to make data-driven decisions and continuously improve the gastronomic tourism offerings in Albania.

This study needs continuity and improvement regarding the sample size, and the growing tourist arrival numbers in Albania provide a great opportunity. It also can refine the factors and include more professionals. Overall, it has given a good starting point to understand and step forward in improving the tourist's satisfaction that indicates an improvement in the Albanian culinary culture.

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## DEVELOPMENT OF HISTORICAL CENTERS. CASE STUDY: SHKODËR HISTORICAL CENTER

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### ABSTRACT

The paper addresses the inclusion of museum cities or historical centers in the chronology of legal regulations, starting from the communist period, which is recognised as the first legal regulation of this type. Through this paper, we aim to provide a comprehensive overview of the legal foundations over the years, showing the evolutions in the field of cultural heritage, as well as explaining the reasons why historical centers have their current appearance. The main focus of the case study in this paper is the historical center of Shkodra and its changes over the years.

The aim of this paper is to present the concept of historical centers as historical identity and as potential for economic development. This is because the historical centers of cities and villages have a unique value that impact both of these aspects.

The methodology used includes the review of literature, laws, or decisions of the time, and an overview of the relevant regulations of historical centers after the year 2000, where it is clear that with the numerous changes in sub-legal acts, there is an attempt to give the deserved attention.

This paper answers the question of whether the change in legislation regarding historical centers are sufficient and whether these areas, having values of particular importance, are properly managed, or whether these decisions have been effective in preserving this shared cultural interest. In conclusion, we reach the conclusion that to better meet the growing needs and economic development of the area, and without altering the identity of the area, it is essential that the work done so far is continued and improved in the direction of policies that prevent the alienation of the image, while giving more economic development to the area.

**Keywords:** *Cultural heritage, Historical center, Regulations, Shkodër.*

## Introduction

The concept of historical centers or museum cities, as they were initially known, is a relatively new concept for our country, originating in the 1960s. This paper addresses the material cultural heritage, primarily the architecture of the architectural-urban assemblies of the cities or villages of Albania, a heritage which we see evolving from the concept of cultural monument to the recent reconceptualization as a cultural asset, where an integral part includes the street along with the elements of urban furnishings.

## General overview of legislation on Historical Centers

Referring to the current cultural heritage law, the concept of a historical center is the distinguishable urban territory, representative of a historical period or a phase of the city's/village's development, composed of elements of material cultural heritage, which include, besides the urban structure, architectural, environmental, cultural, historical elements, landscape, within and around the area, archaeological evidence, panoramas, urban profiles, perspectives, and reference points<sup>1</sup>. In principle, each historical center has its protected area which acts as a buffer zone, reinforcing the preservation of the special values for which these historical centers are designated as such. Historical centers are present in the villages of Bënjë, Dhërmi, Kaninë, Vuno, Qeparo, Theth, Rehovë, as well as in the cities of Gjirokastrë, Përmet, Korçë, Pogradec, Tirana, Shkodër, and Himarë. It is worth noting that 2014 is not the genesis or the beginning of the creation of the concept of historical centers as a whole. Referring to the literature on historical centers, such a concept is a derivative of museum cities, introduced in Albania in the 1960s by UNESCO<sup>2</sup>. This is closely related to the fact that during these years, Albania continuously sought to improve legislation in the field of cultural heritage, leading to the establishment of the Institute of Cultural Monuments in 1965, with extensive activities in tracking, protecting, studying, documenting, restoring, and publishing monuments<sup>3</sup>. The increased attention in this field, which also marks the act

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<sup>1</sup> Pika 48 e nenit 5 të ligjit nr.27/2018 “Për Trashëgiminë Kulturore dhe Muzetë”.

<sup>2</sup> Riza, E (2008), *Qendra Historike dëshmi historiko-kulturore dhe mbijetesa e tyre në shoqërinë bashkëkohore*, Monumentet, fq. 6-16.

<sup>3</sup> Kosta, S. (1986/1), *20 vjet veprimtari për mbrojtjen, studimin dhe restaurimin e monumenteve*, fq.1.



assigning the declaration of museum cities, is the Decision of the Central Committee dated 07.07.1959 "On the patriotic - revolutionary traditions of our people and the measures for their further recognition and development"<sup>4</sup>. In fulfillment of this obligation, the first legal act was also approved, which provides special protection for the cities of Gjirokastrë and Berat, the old part and the underground of the city of Durrës, and the Old Bazaar of the city of Krujë, through the Decision of the Council of Ministers no.172, dated 02.06.1961 "On the Declaration of Museum Cities".

For the city of Berat, the act "On the Approval of the Regulation on the administration of the museum city of Berat" was approved through the Decision of the Council of Ministers no.172, dated 02.06.1961. This act defines the division of the museum city into three zones, the museum zone, the protected zone, and the free zone along with the respective zoning. The museum zone was considered the most important part of the historical center and was preserved in its entirety as an urbanistic, architectural, and environmental complex where new constructions or demolition of existing buildings were not allowed without the approval of the State University of Tirana<sup>5</sup>. The protected zone represented the complementary urbanistic, architectural, and environmental value, playing a particularly important role, allowing new constructions in specific cases, but always preserving the values for which they are placed under protection<sup>6</sup>. The free zone was part of the museum city but not part of the historical center. In this zone, new constructions were allowed but under the conditions of not compromising the general characteristics of the museum city along with the cultural monuments<sup>7</sup>.

Unlike the declaration of cultural monuments, which was the competence of the Ministry of Education and Culture, museum cities, due to their complex character, were initially declared by the Council of Ministers, as in the case of Berat. The declaration of a museum city has consequences for urbanistic and economic development, conditioning its expansion<sup>8</sup>, later this competence passed to the Ministry of Education and Culture through the approval of decree no.4874, dated 23.09.1971 "On the protection of cultural monuments and rare natural assets," where the regulations of the

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<sup>4</sup> Pika 2 e kreut II.

<sup>5</sup> Neni 11.

<sup>6</sup> Neni 12.

<sup>7</sup> Neni 13.

<sup>8</sup> Papa, M. (1975/2), *Mbrojtja e qyteteve muze dhe ansambleve me vlerë arkitekturale*, Monumente të Kulturës në Shqipëri, fq.95.

museum cities of Gjirokaštër and Korçë were approved.

With the Decision of the Ministry of Education and Culture dated 12.7.1973, the regulations "On the protection, restoration, and administration of the museum city of Gjirokaštër" and "On the protection and restoration of ensembles and other buildings with historical, architectural, and urbanistic value in the city of Korçë"<sup>9</sup> were approved.

In 1976, the regulation "On the protection and restoration of the historical center of the city of Elbasan" of the Ministry of Education and Culture, approved on 23.4.1976<sup>10</sup>, was approved, dividing it into a museum zone and a protected zone.

The regulations of Korçë, Gjirokaštër, and Elbasan were analogous to the provisions of the regulation of Berat, with the difference in the regulation of the museum zone, where in the museum zone of Gjirokaštër, Korçë, and Elbasan, no new construction was allowed.

With the Decision of the Council of Ministers no.249, dated 1.7.1980 "On the protection of neighborhoods and architectural-historical ensembles in the cities of Korçë, Elbasan, Shkodër, Vlorë, Tirana," the museum zone and the protected zone with the respective zoning of the city of Korçë are reconfirmed, the museum zone with the respective zoning of the city of Elbasan is reconfirmed. For the city of Shkodër, the museum zone with the respective zoning is declared, for the city of Vlorë it is placed under state protection, and for the city of Tirana, the museum zone and the protected zone with the respective zoning are declared for the first time.

### **The current development of Historical Centers**

Currently, in the territory of the Republic of Albania, we have 15 approved historical centers, each of which has its legal regulation, adapted to the typology of buildings, architecture, categories of cultural assets (first or second category), historical development, etc. The historical centers of cities have had their changes over the years, improving their provisions. Unlike the historical centers of villages, which generally do not have changes since most of them have been approved in recent years, expanding the map of historical centers in Albania as increased attention. Below, we will list, grouped by counties, the recent legal regulations for architectural-urban ensembles and historical centers.

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<sup>9</sup> Revista *Mbrojtja e Monumenteve*, 5-6, 1973, fq.3 - 17.

<sup>10</sup> Revista *Mbrojtja e Monumenteve*, 3, 1978, fq.33 - 38.

- Berat District

As mentioned earlier, the city of Berat had the first legal regulation, which served as a foundational document, setting principles as the basis for the protection of historical centers declared later. The county of Berat has one historical center, which is that of the city of Berat. Currently, the historical center of Berat is governed by the Decision of the Council of Ministers No. 767, dated 12.11.2014, "On the declaration of a 'Historical Center' for a zone in the museum city of Berat and the approval of the regulation 'On the protection, integrated conservation, and administration of the 'Historical Center' and the protected zone of the city of Berat"<sup>11</sup>, which repeals the Decision of the Council of Ministers No. 826, dated 28.12.2005, "On the declaration of a 'Historical Center' for a zone in the museum city of Berat and the approval of the regulation for the administration of this center"<sup>12</sup>. Besides state protection, the city of Berat has also been placed under the protection of UNESCO since July 8, 2008, as part of the world cultural heritage.<sup>13</sup>

- Gjirokastrës District

The city of Gjirokastra was added to the World Cultural Heritage list on July 8, 2008<sup>14</sup>. Currently, the historic center of the city is regulated by the Council of Ministers Decision No. 619, dated 07.07.2015 "On the declaration of the Historic Center of an area in the city of Gjirokastra and the approval of the regulation for the protection, integrated conservation, and administration of the historic center and the protected area in the city of Gjirokastra"<sup>15</sup>. This act has repealed the Council of Ministers Decision No. 832, dated 11.12.2003 "On the approval of the regulation for the administration of the museum city of Gjirokastra"<sup>16</sup>, with the changes of 2007<sup>17</sup>.

To this district is added the historic center of Përmet, approved by the Council of Ministers Decision No. 32, dated 18.01.2017 "On the declaration of the historic center of the city of Përmet and the approval of

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<sup>11</sup> Fletorja zyrtare e Republikës së Shqipërisë nr.180, datë 26.11.2014.

<sup>12</sup> Fletorja zyrtare e Republikës së Shqipërisë nr.104, datë 31.12.2005.

<sup>13</sup> <https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/569>

<sup>14</sup> Ibid

<sup>15</sup> Fletorja zyrtare e Republikës së Shqipërisë nr.122, datë 16.07.2015.

<sup>16</sup> Fletorja zyrtare e Republikës së Shqipërisë nr.107, datë 31.12.2003.

<sup>17</sup> Fletorja zyrtare e Republikës së Shqipërisë nr.76, datë 26.06.2007.

the regulation for its administration and the surrounding protected area"<sup>18</sup> as well as the historic center of Bënja, approved by the Council of Ministers Decision No. 776, dated 02.11.2016 "On the declaration of the historic center of the village of Bënja and the approval of the regulation for its administration and the surrounding protected area."<sup>19</sup>

- Korça District

The historic center of the city of Korçë has undergone numerous changes. In 2002, the Council of Ministers Decision No. 516, dated 24.10.2002 "On the expansion of the historic center of the Municipality of Korçë"<sup>20</sup> was approved, which was repealed by the Council of Ministers Decision No. 455, dated 23.06.2005 "On the declaration of the 'Historic Center' and 'Urbanistic, architectural, traditional ensemble' of several areas of the city of Korçë, as well as the approval of the regulation for their administration." This was again repealed by the Council of Ministers Decision No. 238, dated 23.03.2011 "On the declaration of the historic center of the city of Korçë and the approval of the regulation for its administration," amended by the Council of Ministers Decision No. 109, dated 10.02.2016 "On an amendment to Decision No. 238, dated 23.03.2011 of the Council of Ministers 'On the declaration of the historic center of the city of Korçë and the approval of the regulation for its administration'." Currently, the Council of Ministers Decision No. 207, dated 15.03.2017 "On the declaration of the Historic Center of the city of Korçë and the approval of the regulation for its protection, integrated conservation, and administration of the surrounding protected area" is in force.<sup>21</sup>

In addition to Korçë, we also have Voskopojë as a historic center, which was declared in 2003<sup>22</sup> and underwent changes in 2007<sup>23</sup>. Currently, the Council of Ministers Decision No. 60, dated 29.01.2020 "On the declaration of the cultural heritage 'Historic urban ensemble,' its protective area, and the archaeological zone 'B' of the village of Voskopojë and the approval of the plan for their preservation, protection, and administration" is in force.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Fletorja zyrtare e Republikës së Shqipërisë nr.9, datë 25.01.2017.

<sup>19</sup> Fletorja zyrtare e Republikës së Shqipërisë nr.227, datë 23.11.2016.

<sup>20</sup> Fletorja zyrtare e Republikës së Shqipërisë nr.70, datë 12.11.2002.

<sup>21</sup> Fletorja zyrtare e Republikës së Shqipërisë nr.55, datë 21.03.2017.

<sup>22</sup> Fletorja zyrtare e Republikës së Shqipërisë nr.74, datë 19.08.2003.

<sup>23</sup> Fletorja zyrtare e Republikës së Shqipërisë nr.143, datë 26.10.2007.

<sup>24</sup> Fletorja zyrtare e Republikës së Shqipërisë nr.9, datë 31.01.2020.

In 2015, Bilisht was declared a historic center through the Council of Ministers Decision No. 553, dated 18.06.2015 "On the declaration of the museum ensemble of the city of Bilisht and the approval of the regulation for its administration."<sup>25</sup>

Also in 2015, the Council of Ministers Decision No. 554, dated 18.06.2015 "On the declaration of the Historic Center of the city of Pogradec and the approval of the regulation for its administration" was approved.<sup>26</sup>

Most recently, the Council of Ministers Decision No. 54, dated 25.01.2017 "On the declaration of the historic center of the village of Rehovë, Ersekë and the approval of the regulation for its administration and the surrounding protected area" was approved.<sup>27</sup>

- Vlora District

Vlora also has an expanded map of protected historical centers. Himara was declared a historical center by the Decision of the Council of Ministers No. 28, dated January 20, 2016, "On the declaration of the Historical Center of the city of Himara and the approval of the regulation for its administration and the surrounding protected area."<sup>28</sup>

The village of Kanina has undergone several changes over the years, with its historical center first being declared in 2017 through the Decision of the Council of Ministers No. 581, dated October 13, 2017, "On the declaration of the historical center of the village of Kanina and the surrounding protected area, and the approval of the regulation for its administration"<sup>29</sup>, which was later revoked by the Decision of the Council of Ministers No. 729, dated September 16, 2020, "On declaring the cultural property 'Historical Center' of the village of Kanina, its protective zone, and the approval of the plan for their preservation, protection, and administration"<sup>30</sup>, with some changes in 2021.<sup>31</sup>

The village of Qeparo was approved as a historical center by the Decision of the Council of Ministers No. 636, dated September 7, 2016, "On the declaration of the historical center of the village of Qeparo and the approval of the regulation for its administration and the surrounding protected area."<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Fletorja zyrtare e Republikës së Shqipërisë nr.108, datë 26.06.2015.

<sup>26</sup> Fletorja zyrtare e Republikës së Shqipërisë nr.115, datë 03.07.2015.

<sup>27</sup> Fletorja zyrtare e Republikës së Shqipërisë nr.15, datë 02.02.2017.

<sup>28</sup> Fletorja zyrtare e Republikës së Shqipërisë nr.7, datë 27.01.2016.

<sup>29</sup> Fletorja zyrtare e Republikës së Shqipërisë nr.184, datë 17.10.2017.

<sup>30</sup> Fletorja zyrtare e Republikës së Shqipërisë nr.168, datë 18.09.2020.

<sup>31</sup> Fletorja zyrtare e Republikës së Shqipërisë nr.27, datë 19.02.2021.

<sup>32</sup> Fletorja zyrtare e Republikës së Shqipërisë nr.171, datë 15.09.2016.

The village of Vuno was approved as a historical center by the Decision of the Council of Ministers No. 30, dated January 20, 2016, "On the declaration of the historical center of the village of Vuno and the approval of the regulation for its administration and the surrounding protected area."<sup>33</sup>

The village of Dhërmi was approved as a historical center by the Decision of the Council of Ministers No. 29, dated January 20, 2016, "On the declaration of the historical center of the village of Dhërmi and the approval of the regulation for its administration and the surrounding protected area."<sup>34</sup>

- Tirana District

With the Decision of the Council of Ministers no. 180, dated 13.4.2000 "On declaring the main axis and historical center of the city of Tirana a cultural monument ensemble".<sup>35</sup>

Decision of the Council of Ministers no. 325, dated 12.4.2017 "On the announcement of the historical center of the city of Tirana and the approval of the regulation for its administration and the surrounding protected area".<sup>36</sup>

Decision of the Council of Ministers no. 582, dated 3.10.2018 "On the declaration of the historical center of the city of Tirana, the definition of its protective zone and the approval of the plan for conservation, protection and administration".<sup>37</sup>

- Shkodra District

Approval of the historical center of Shkodër began with the decision of the Council of Ministers no. 1183, dated August 5, 2008, "On the approval of the regulation 'On the administration of the historical center and the protected area in the city of Shkodër'".<sup>38</sup> This was implemented unchanged for nearly 12 years until it was repealed in 2020 by the decision of the Council of Ministers no. 771, dated September 30, 2020, "On the declaration of the historical center of the city of Shkodër, the designation of its protective area, and the approval of the plan for its preservation,

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<sup>33</sup> Fletorja zyrtare e Republikës së Shqipërisë nr.9, datë 29.01.2016.

<sup>34</sup> Fletorja zyrtare e Republikës së Shqipërisë nr.9, datë 29.01.2016.

<sup>35</sup> Fletorja zyrtare e Republikës së Shqipërisë nr.15, datë 21.06.2000.

<sup>36</sup> Fletorja zyrtare e Republikës së Shqipërisë nr.83, datë 20.04.2017.

<sup>37</sup> Fletorja zyrtare e Republikës së Shqipërisë nr.147, datë 16.10.2018.

<sup>38</sup> Fletorja zyrtare e Republikës së Shqipërisë nr.139, datë 05.09.2008.

protection, and administration"<sup>39</sup>, which is still in force.

A new development for this region is the declaration through the decision of the Council of Ministers no. 733, dated December 8, 2017, "On the declaration of the historical center of the village of Theth, Shkodër and the protected area around it, and the approval of the regulation for its administration"<sup>40</sup>. The approval of this regulation comes at a time when this area is starting to experience significant tourism and economic development.

### Case study: Shkodra Historical Center

Shkodra, due to its geographical position, has experienced urban and architectural development over the years. Positioned along rivers, with access to the Adriatic Sea, and having favorable terrain, it has allowed for the city's development over the centuries<sup>41</sup>. According to historical data, fortified settlements with stone walls date back to before our era. We can say that the city of Shkodra, like many other developed cities in Albania, ties its building development to the periods when the city had developed craftsmanship and trade, as well as economic development. Speaking of building typologies, in Shkodra, the type of house with a veranda<sup>42</sup> dominates, which fulfilled various needs for both living and services. The beginning of the creation of the city in its current form can be said to start during the Renaissance period or during National Independence. This is because during this period, the construction of building ensembles began in neighborhoods like "Parrucë," "Dugajt e reja," and "Gjuha dol." This change is closely linked to the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century, where the city established new economic centers, bringing a new architecture.

Referring to the general panorama mentioned above regarding the chronology of legislation for historic centers or urban-architectural ensembles, in Shkodra, the initial treatment of historic centers is found through the decision of the Council of Ministers No. 249, dated 01.07.1980, where it was placed under state protection. Among other things, "*In the city*

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<sup>39</sup> Fletorja zyrtare e Republikës së Shqipërisë nr.177, datë 07.10.2020.

<sup>40</sup> Fletorja zyrtare e Republikës së Shqipërisë nr.223, datë 20.12.2017.

<sup>41</sup> Krymbi, E. (2014): *Planifikimi hapësinor dhe rregullimi territorial i qytetit të Shkodrës*, Ervis Krymi, fq. 45, doktratura, Universiteti i Tiranës.  
<https://unitir.edu.al/doktratura-ervis-krymbi-fakulteti-i-historise-dhe-i-filologjise-departamenti-i-gjeografise-2/>

<sup>42</sup> Luzati, S. (2012), *Qyteti i Shkodrës, urbanistika dhe arkitektura gjatë Rilindjes e Pavarësisë Kombëtare*, fq.116.

of Shkodra, the buildings on both sides of the streets "Enver Hoxha" and "Branko Kadia" are declared museum zones, while part of the "Luigj Gurakuqi" street is declared a protected zone"<sup>43</sup>. The design of this zone and many individual buildings is closely linked to the name of Kol Idromenos<sup>44</sup>, as the designer of many of these buildings, without forgetting the work and technique of the craftsmen of the time, who, alongside knowledge, embraced new construction techniques.<sup>45</sup>

The urban-architectural ensemble of the historic center consists of buildings from 1 to 3 floors, where their mass consists of facades adorned with stucco details and decorations. Mainly, the coverage of the buildings was done with local tiles, whose slope generally did not exceed 25°. The eaves were equipped with horizontal and vertical copper gutters, and in some cases, they had stylized discharge elements. These buildings mainly had wooden doors, windows, and shutters, which harmonized perfectly with the decorative elements used on the stuccoed facades. Decorative iron was also characteristically applied in this zone, mostly on balconies and window grilles, mainly on the ground floors. These buildings had interconnected residential and service functions<sup>46</sup>. The ground floors housed service spaces known as "dugaj," while the upper floors served for residential purposes.

Considering these characteristic elements, architectural and historical values, this zone was placed under protection for the first time in 1980, through the aforementioned decision<sup>47</sup>. Despite being under protection, this zone has not maintained these buildings intact to the present day. Articles published over the years provide a clear panorama of the changes this zone has undergone, interventions with or without permission, and its transformation over the years. This transformation and degradation have resulted from wear over the years and unregulated interventions, such as opening new cracks, closing or changing the sizes of existing cracks, or changing the functional plan according to family needs. The first restorative intervention was made in 1983, on "Enver Hoxha" street, now known as "13 Dhjetori" street. The first legal change after the declaration was in

<sup>43</sup> Arkivi i Institutit Kombëtar të Trashëgimisë Kulturore.

<sup>44</sup> Luzati, S. (2012), *Nikola Arsen Idromeno, Personalitet i arkitekturës së Rilindjes dhe Pavarësisë Kombëtare*, fq.13-15.

<sup>45</sup> Prifti, Sh. (1/1983), "Restaurimi i rrugës "Enver Hoxha" në zonën muze të qytetit të Shkodrës, Monumentet, fq. 33 - 44.

<sup>46</sup> Prifti, Sh. (57/2018), "Restaurimi i ansamblit urbanistiko-arkitektonik i rrugës "Kardinal Mikel Koliqi" (rruga Gjuhadol, Shkodër)", Monumentet, fq.77-99.

<sup>47</sup> "Në qytetin e Shkodrës, ndërtimet në të dy anët e rrugëve "Enver Hoxha" dhe "Branko Kadia" shpallen zona-muze, ndërsa pjesa e rrugës "Luigj Gurakuqi" shpallet zonë e mbrojtur.



2008, where a regulation for the administration of the historic center and the protected zone<sup>48</sup> was approved. This regulation was approved in implementation of the cultural heritage legislation in force<sup>49</sup>. The historic center of Shkodra includes two main axes with the corresponding architectural-urban ensemble, "13 Dhjetori," "Kol Idromeno," and "Kardinal Mikel Koliqi" streets, while the protected zone includes secondary streets as well. Within this historic center, we also have first and second-category cultural monuments. A strong point of this regulation was that every intervention, starting from the study or design, approval, and then implementation, was done by specialized institutions such as the Institute of Cultural Monuments, the Regional Directorate of National Culture Shkodra, and other licensed entities in the field of heritage. It is worth noting that this regulation categorically prohibited new constructions in the historic center and specified specific criteria for new constructions in the protected zone of the historic center. Other interventions with an advertising, promotional, or temporary installation character, as well as administrative violations committed in this zone, were in accordance with law No. 9048, dated 7.4.2003 "On cultural heritage." This regulation was in force, unchanged, for nearly 12 years, until 2020, when regulation No. 771, dated 30.09.2020 "On the declaration of the Cultural Property of the "Historic Center" of the city of Shkodra, the determination of its protective zone and the approval of the plan for their preservation, protection, and administration" was approved. This regulation was approved in support of law No. 27/2018<sup>50</sup> and is still in force. Referring to the previous zoning, this regulation configures the contour of the historic center and its protective zone. In this regulation, unlike the previous one, we have a more specific treatment of all the constituent elements of this zoning. Firstly, we have a division of allowed interventions in the Historic Center, cultural monuments, and the protective zone. There is also a division between design criteria for reconstruction and the study, design, and implementation of works in the Historic Center, individual cultural monuments, and the protective zone. Comparing the two regulations, in 2020 we have a more detailed explanation of the allowed interventions. Additionally, in the 2020 regulation, as part of the allowed interventions, *there is also the rehabilitation of spaces and the filling of new surfaces that affect the values*

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<sup>48</sup> Vendim nr.1183, datë 5.8.2008, "Për miratimin e rregullores "Për administrimin e Qendrës Historike dhe të zonës së mbrojtur, në qytetin e Shkodrës".

<sup>49</sup> Ligji nr.9048, datë 7.4.2003 "Për Trashëgiminë Kulturore".

<sup>50</sup> Ligji nr.27, datë 17.05.2018 "Për trashëgiminë Kulturore dhe Muzetë".

*and compositional unity of the architectural-urban ensemble*<sup>51</sup>. The 2008 Historic Center Regulation did not allow new constructions, including the filling of new surfaces, thus being limited only to restorative and conservative interventions.

A change that the 2020 regulation brought, as a result of predicting the filling of free surfaces, is the height, where up to 10 meters from the ground level is predicted for the Historic Center<sup>52</sup>, while for the protected zone the maximum height should not exceed 12 meters up to the roof cornice<sup>53</sup>. The 2008 regulation for the protected zone predicted a height quota of up to 10 meters from the ground surface<sup>54</sup>.

An initiative of the government for the promotion, preservation, and economic development of the zone is the revitalization bonus subprogram, first implemented in 2022. This initiative had an impact not only in the field of heritage or in preserving an architectural style. Its peculiarity was that it intertwined the tourism sector with culture and architecture. The revitalization bonus is a promoter and supporter of tourism, as through restoration and revitalization, as the main focus, it gave a boost to businesses operating in the area or provided an opportunity for owners/possessors of objects in the historic center to come up with a new business idea. The proposed economic activity in the funding applications included hospitality, souvenir/antique/jewelry shops, bookstores, video stores, art galleries, local product gastronomy, tourist information points, or even travel agencies. After the 2022 implementation, where there were 2 beneficiaries who managed to finalize this project, it was seen how this kind of collaboration between the government and individuals had a positive impact on increasing the number of tourists in the area.

## **Conclusion**

Museum cities or historical centers have been in the focus of state policies since the communist period, creating instruments that would help implement these policies, such as the Institute of Cultural Monuments, and the culmination is the protection of the cities of Gjirokaštër and Berat by UNESCO in 2008.

Our country counts several historical centers in cities and villages which

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<sup>51</sup> Pika 1 ç e nenit 6.

<sup>52</sup> Pika 4 I, ii e nenit 10.

<sup>53</sup> Pika 5 ç e neni 10.

<sup>54</sup> Pika II c e nenit 8.

have a common denominator: they are cultural assets that provide identity, history, convey values and culture, and as such evoke feelings in their residents as well as visitors.

Historical centers, in addition to the cultural material they carry, are undoubtedly an economic development engine from which long-term strategies can be planned. The fact that some historical centers have been newly declared, or others have been modified and improved in regulations, explains the growing understanding that cultural heritage is an economic potential for our country.

Historical centers should be managed through an integrated plan exploiting their potential. This plan defines the goals to be achieved and the means by which they will be successfully realized for the economic development of the area while always focusing on the protection of our cultural heritage. State initiatives or funding, which have a positive impact not only on cultural heritage but also on tourism, should be promoted more. The high number of applications, as in the case of the revitalization bonus program, is clear evidence of the interest these areas have in cultural and economic developments.

In the framework of the cooperation between the central government and the respective local self-government instruments, the drafting of the PDV for this structural unit should be finalized as soon as possible, not only for the benefit of a more complete legal regulation but also to assist the development of the area in the field of construction.

There is always talk about architectural values, history, and inherited traditions, but in fact, all informal or other interventions have brought about a change in the overall image of the historical center. Not to overlook the fact that new construction techniques are not the same as those of previous years, this as a result of a significant development in the construction field.

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## **EMPOWERING HOSPITALITY: STRATEGIES FOR IMPROVING SERVICE QUALITY AND CUSTOMER SATISFACTION**

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### ***ABSTRACT***

Since hotel industry has been growing rapidly over the past decade in the Western Balkans, service quality improvement has drawn a lot of attention. Hotels are trying to increase service quality in order to increase satisfaction among employees and customers, increase customer loyalty, gain competitive advantages and increase profits. This paper investigates the multifaceted concept of service quality within the hotel industry, aiming to provide a comprehensive understanding of its dimensions, determinants and impact on customer satisfaction. Using the SERVQUAL framework, a widely recognized model for assessing customer perceptions this paper tests the relationship between service quality dimensions and customer satisfaction. With the dynamic landscape of hospitality, understanding and managing service quality becomes imperative for hotels long-term success. Using survey data collected from a sample of domestic customers travelling to hotels in the coastal region of Montenegro the following five dimensions of service quality are discussed: tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, assurance and empathy. Tangibility encompasses physical facilities, equipment and appearance where customers often show high expectations but perceive varying degrees of fulfillment. Reliability, representing the consistency and dependability of services, emerges as an important factor of customer satisfaction. Additionally, responsiveness, assurance and empathy play pivotal role in shaping customers experience. The implications of these findings are manifold for hotel managers seeking to improve service quality and customer satisfaction. By identifying specific areas of improvement based on SERVQUAL dimensions, hotels can tailor strategies and allocate resources effectively. Moreover, enhancing service quality not only fosters customer satisfaction but also strengthens the

hotel's reputation and competitive positioning in the market. In conclusion, this research highlights the importance of SERVQUAL framework as a method to measure service quality in the hotel industry for which hotels can gain valuable insights into guest perceptions, address gaps in service delivery, and cultivate enduring relationships with customers, thereby driving sustained success and profitability.

**Keywords:** *Service Quality, Domestic Customer, Hotel, SERVQUAL framework, Montenegro.*

## **1 Introduction**

Tourism plays a crucial role in the economy of Montenegro, serving as a cornerstone between economic development and sustainability. Located in the heart of the Balkans, Montenegro is renowned for its stunning landscapes, beaches along the Adriatic coast, and rich cultural heritage. Tourism generates significant revenue, providing employment opportunities and driving overall infrastructure improvement. Montenegro offers a comprehensive tourist package, from historic cities like Kotor, sandy beaches of Ulcinj, nightlife in Budva, to adventurous activities in Durmitor National Park, attracting a large number of visitors throughout the year. Furthermore, tourism promotes cultural exchange, preserving traditional practices and fostering cross-border cooperation. As Montenegro continues to enhance its tourism infrastructure and promote sustainable practices, it is strengthening its position as a premier destination to visit in the Western Balkans.

The development of tourism plays a significant role in improving the socio-economic conditions of a state. The connection between tourism and economic growth should not be underestimated. Findings indicate that the enhancement of tourism conditions and the development of tourism stimulate the economic growth of the state (Belloumi, 2010; Brida et al., 2015; Lee & Chang, 2008). Various empirical studies confirm that the economic development of states promotes the development of tourism (Dritsakis, 2012; Oh, 2005; Ridderstaat et al., 2014), while other studies indicate a bidirectional relationship between tourism development and economic growth (Samimi et al., 2011; Seetanah, 2011). On the other hand, tourism development is positively linked to employment promotion (Coban, 2012; Gómez López & Barrón Arreola, 2019; Manzoor et al., 2019), infrastructure improvement (Dritsakis, 2012), and socio-economic development (Telfer & Sharpley, 2015; Wu et al., 2012). Therefore, strategic planning and management of tourism activities are essential to

maximize the positive impact on socio-economic development while minimizing potential negative consequences.

Hotel managers face a range of challenges in maintaining and improving service quality to meet the diverse needs of customers and maintain their competitive position in the hospitality industry. A particular challenge for hotel managers is ensuring consistent service delivery (Chiang & Hsieh, 2012). Additionally, the continuous changes in customer preferences and expectations require hotel managers to be adept at anticipating shifts in social trends and technological advancements (Sohail et al., 2007).

As the key industry in Montenegro, the role of tourism should not be overlooked. Tourism significantly contributes to the country's economic growth and development. According to data from the Ministry of Economic Development of Montenegro (2022), in 2019, the direct and indirect contribution of the tourism sector was 30.9% of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP). The number of foreign tourists visiting Montenegro has shown an increase year after year following the pandemic period, with 1,670,879 foreign tourists in 2021; 2,183,975 in 2022; and 2,613,306 in 2023 (MONSTAT, 2022; 2023; 2024).

From a broad economic perspective, the number of tourist arrivals enhances the significance of tourism's impact on the economy (Kim et al., 2006). A tourist is inclined to spend on various products, accommodation, food services, transportation, attractions, and entertainment at a tourist destination, significantly contributing to the Gross Domestic Product (Gričar et al., 2016). Viewed in this light, it is crucial to assess the quality of service in Montenegrin hotels.

The aim of this paper is to empirically evaluate the relationship between service quality and customer satisfaction in Montenegrin hotels for domestic customers. Given the lack of such studies for hotels in Montenegro, this study aims to contribute to the existing literature and assist managers in assessing service quality. The remainder of the paper is structured as follows. Following this introduction, the paper presents a literature review on service quality, various models for assessing service quality in hotels, and proceeds with the proposed conceptual model and methodology. This is followed by the presentation of the empirical study results. Finally, the paper discusses the limitations, conclusions, and implications of the findings.

## **2 Literature review**

Service quality plays a crucial role in enhancing customer satisfaction and loyalty. Studies have consistently shown a positive relationship between

service quality and customer satisfaction (Cronin & Taylor, 1992; Ladhari, 2009; Parasuraman et al., 1985; Parasuraman et al., 1988; Thi et al., 2020). When customers perceive that a service meets or exceeds their expectations on certain quality dimensions, they report higher levels of satisfaction (Parasuraman et al., 1985). Moreover, satisfied customers are more likely to exhibit positive behaviors such as repeat purchases, spreading positive word-of-mouth, recommending the product, and willingness to pay a higher price for better quality service (Kotler et al., 2021). Therefore, hotels should consistently focus on delivering high-quality services to enhance customer satisfaction and ensure long-term success.

The assessment of service quality has sparked extensive debate among scholars over the years, as there is no uniform measure of service quality. Different measures are used in various industries and regions, and their analysis also varies. Among the pioneers of service quality assessment models is the SERVQUAL conceptual model by Parasuraman et al. (1985; 1988). Other models include the Technical and Functional Quality Model or Grönroos Model (Grönroos, 1984); the Attribute Service Quality Model (Haywood-Farmer, 1988); the Synthesized Service Quality Model (Brogowicz et al., 1990); the Performance Model or SERVPERF Model (Cronin & Taylor, 1992); the Ideal Value Model of Service Quality (Mattsson, 1992); the Attribute and Overall Affect Model (Dabholkar, 1996); the Antecedents and Mediator Model (Dabholkar et al., 2000); and the Service Quality and Perceived Value Model (Spreng & Mackoy, 1996). The above-mentioned models have been widely used across various industries. Numerous studies have also attempted to evaluate service quality in hotels (Akan, 1995; Akbaba, 2006; Albacete-Sáez et al., 2007; Devi Juwaheer, 2004; Getty & Getty, 2003; Khan, 2003; Oberoi & Hales, 1990; Saleh & Ryan, 1991). However, although the SERVQUAL model is one of the earliest service quality assessment models, its extensive use makes it still applicable today. Therefore, this model will be used in this study to evaluate the impact of service quality on customer satisfaction.

The SERVQUAL model developed by Parasuraman et al. (1985; 1988) comprises five different dimensions, explained below:

**Tangibles**, refer to the physical aspects of the service environment and the appearance of facilities, equipment, personnel, and communication materials. This dimension includes everything that customers can see, touch, and feel when interacting with the service provider. Tangibles encompass cleanliness, the appearance and design of facilities, the appearance and professionalism of staff, and the quality of equipment and materials used.



**Reliability**, on the other hand, refers to the hotel's ability to consistently and accurately deliver the promised services, fostering trust between the customer and the service provider. Reliability implies that the service is delivered as promised, without errors or delays, and meets or exceeds customer expectations every time. This dimension focuses on aspects such as keeping promises, fulfilling commitments, and delivering services on time.

**Responsiveness**, refers to the hotel's ability to promptly and effectively address customer needs and concerns. This dimension includes a proactive approach to customer service, where the service provider demonstrates attentiveness, willingness, and speed in assisting the customer. Responsiveness is evident in how quickly and efficiently service providers acknowledge customer requests, handle inquiries, and resolve issues or complaints.

**Assurance**, refers to the hotel's ability to convey trust and confidence to customers. Assurance involves the knowledge and courtesy of hotel staff, their ability to inspire trust through their professionalism, and ensuring safety through the service provided. Assurance includes elements such as clear communication, transparency, and the staff's ability to instill confidence in the customer.

**Empathy**, refers to the hotel's ability to understand and feel the needs, concerns, and emotions of their customers. This dimension includes actively listening to customers, showing compassion, and demonstrating a genuine understanding of customers' feelings and emotions. Empathy involves addressing customer problems based on their circumstances.

From an empirical perspective, the aforementioned dimensions have been shown to be statistically significant in increasing customer satisfaction. The most frequently mentioned dimension in the literature for its impact on customer satisfaction is tangibles (Ahmad et al., 2018; Akbaba, 2006; Ali et al., 2021; Devi Juwaheer, 2004; Getty & Getty, 2003; Jasinskas et al., 2016; Thi et al., 2020). Findings from various studies have shown as well a relationship between reliability and customer satisfaction (Al Khattab & Aldehayyat, 2011; Markovic & Raspor, 2010; Nguyen et al., 2015), between responsiveness and customer satisfaction (Ahmad et al., 2018; Al Khattab & Aldehayyat, 2011; Ali et al., 2021; Markovic & Raspor, 2010; Nguyen et al., 2015), and between assurance and customer satisfaction (Ahmad et al., 2018; Al Khattab & Aldehayyat, 2011; Ali et al., 2021; Devi Juwaheer, 2004; Markovic & Raspor, 2010). On the other hand, empathy fosters trust in the relationship between the service provider and the customer by showing that providers are not only focused on delivering

services but also on caring for the well-being and satisfaction of customers. Various studies have confirmed the relationship between empathy and customer satisfaction (Ali et al., 2021; Hossain, 2012; Markovic & Raspor, 2010; Nguyen et al., 2015).

### 3 The proposed conceptual model

As mentioned earlier, customer satisfaction is key in the hospitality industry. No hotel can survive if its efforts are not customer-oriented, especially in meeting their needs and demands. This study focuses on service quality from the perspective of domestic customers in relation to customer satisfaction. From this viewpoint, the study aims to answer the following research question:

- *What are the main dimensions of service quality that drive customer satisfaction?*

The purpose of this study is to empirically evaluate the relationship between service quality and customer satisfaction in Montenegrin hotels for domestic customers. To analyze service quality in relation to customer satisfaction, the research model of the study is constructed as shown below (Figure 1), based on the model applied by Nguyen et al. (2015) related to the SERVQUAL model by Parasuraman et al. (1985; 1988).

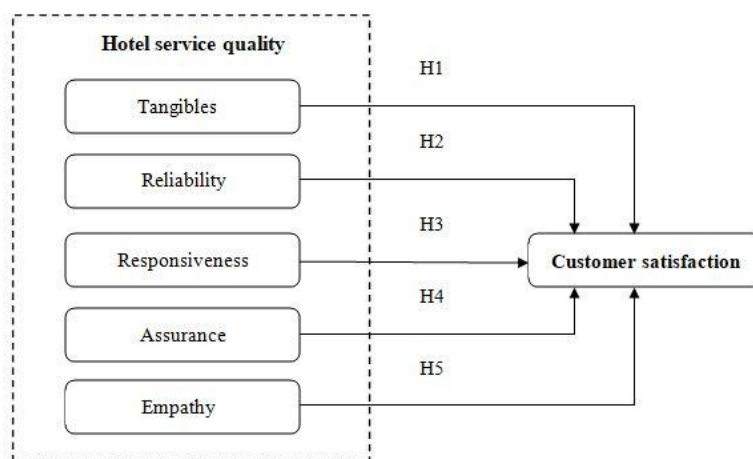


Figure 1

Proposed conceptual model

Based on the above conceptual model and the purpose of the study, we have proposed five hypotheses as follows:

H1. There is a positive relationship between the Tangibles dimension and Customer Satisfaction.

H2. There is a positive relationship between the Reliability dimension and Customer Satisfaction.

H3. There is a positive relationship between the Responsiveness dimension and Customer Satisfaction.

H4. There is a positive relationship between the Assurance dimension and Customer Satisfaction.

H5. There is a positive relationship between the Empathy dimension and Customer Satisfaction.

#### **4 Methodology**

The study was conducted during the period from June to December 2023, using data collected through self-administered surveys. The target population of the study consisted of Montenegrin travelers who stayed at a hotel in Montenegro during the study period. The sample selection was random.

The data were collected through questionnaires distributed in the Montenegrin language. An explanatory letter was sent to the owners and general managers of three-star hotels operating in the cities of Ulcinj, Tivat, Budva, and Tivar, explaining the purpose of the study. Only 20 hotels agreed to participate in the study: 9 in Ulcinj, 3 in Tivat, 5 in Budva, and 3 in Tivar. These hotels were informed that the findings were for statistical purposes only, and their anonymity would be preserved.

The questionnaires were distributed at the hotel exit, where customers were staying, on different days of the week and at various times of the day from 10:00 AM to 3:00 PM, as this was considered the standard checkout time. Participants were also informed that the findings were for statistical purposes only, and their anonymity would be maintained. Participation in the study was voluntary, and participant names and contact information were not requested to protect their privacy. The average duration of completing the questionnaire was 15 minutes, and each questionnaire was accompanied by a cover letter briefly explaining the study objectives.

The questionnaire was divided into three parts. The first part included questions related to demographic data of the respondents, such as gender, age, education, marital status, travel purpose, frequency of hotel stays, and duration of stay.

The second part of the questionnaire assessed respondents' perceptions regarding various aspects of service quality at the hotel where they stayed, using a Likert scale with five levels (1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Neither Agree nor Disagree, 4 = Agree, 5 = Strongly Agree). A modified SERVQUAL questionnaire (Parasuraman et al., 1988) with 22 service

attributes was used, grouped into five categories: Tangibles (composed of 4 attributes), Reliability (composed of 5 attributes), Responsiveness (composed of 4 attributes), Assurance (composed of 4 attributes), and Empathy (composed of 5 attributes).

The third part of the questionnaire assessed customer satisfaction regarding their personal stay at the respective hotel, based on the model suggested by Ryu et al. (2008). The Likert scale with five levels (1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Neither Agree nor Disagree, 4 = Agree, 5 = Strongly Agree) was used here as well (Ryu et al., 2008). The customer satisfaction dimension consists of 4 attributes.

A total of 130 questionnaires were distributed, out of which 12 were not used because respondents left some questions unanswered. The total sample size for the study was then 118 respondents. Data analysis was performed using the statistical software SPSS 22.0.

## **5 Study findings**

### ***5.1 Descriptive statistics***

The demographic profile of the respondents (n = 118) is presented in Table 1. The majority of respondents are male (55.10%), while the remaining (44.90%) are female. Regarding the age of the respondents, the age group 36-45 has the highest density (36.40%), followed by the age group 26-35 with 21.20% density, the age group 46-59 with 20.30%, the age group 18-25 with 12.70%, and at the end, by those over 60 years old with a density of 9.30%. The majority of respondents have completed higher education, primarily university studies (31.40%), postgraduate studies (27.10%), and doctoral studies (4.20%), while only 2.50% report having the highest educational level as elementary school, and 34.70% declare having high school as their highest educational level. Regarding marital status, 31.40% declare being single, 40.70% are married, and 28% report another status.

Respondents report that their main reason for travel is for vacations (62.70%), for work or business (25.40%), and for other reasons (11.90%). Regarding the frequency of hotel stays during a calendar year, 8 individuals report staying less than once a year, 13 individuals report staying once a year, 29 twice a year, 21 three times a year, 26 four times a year, and 21 five or more times a year. Regarding the duration of hotel stays, 39.80% stay 1-2 nights, 42.40% stay 3-4 nights, 11.90% stay 5-6 nights, 5.10% stay 7-8 nights, and 0.80% stay 9 nights or more.

### ***5.2 Factor analysis and reliability***

Factor analysis is a data analysis technique used to identify a relatively small number of components or factors (dimensions or themes) from a relatively large group of variables (Meyers, Gamst, & Guarino, 2013, p.

331). These procedures provide ways to consolidate information that is distributed among several variables into a smaller number. The study uses factor analysis with Varimax rotation.

When conducting a factor analysis, it is important to pay attention to the factor loadings of each factor. According to Hair, Tatham, Anderson, & Black (1998), the factor loadings in factor analysis should be greater than 0.70. Reliability analysis has been used to measure the internal consistency and stability of the data. The Cronbach Alpha coefficient was used to assess reliability. The lower limit for Cronbach Alpha is 0.70, although a level of 0.60 can be used in exploratory research (Hair, Tatham, Anderson, & Black, 1998). The data processed by the SPSS program are presented in Table 2. All factor loadings are higher than 0.70, and all reliabilities are higher than 0.70. The factor with the highest reliability is the Customer Satisfaction factor (0.834), followed by the Assurance factor (0.801), while the factor with the lowest reliability, although still within acceptable limits, is the Responsibility factor (0.713).

Table 1 The demographic profile of the respondents

Variables	Frequency (n = 118)	(%)
<b>Gender</b>		
Male	65	55.10
Female	53	44.90
<b>Age</b>		
18-25	15	12.70
26-35	25	21.20
36-45	43	36.40
46-59	24	20.30
60+	11	9.30
<b>Education level</b>		
Elementary school	3	2.50
High school	41	34.70
University studies	37	31.40
Post university studies	32	27.10
Doctorate	5	4.20
<b>Marital status</b>		
Single	37	31.40
Married	48	40.70
Other	33	28.00
<b>Travel reason</b>		
Vacations	74	62.70
Business or work	30	25.40
Other	14	11.90
<b>Frequency of hotel stays</b>		
Less than once a year	8	6.80
Once a year	13	11.00
Twice a year	29	24.60
Three times a year	21	17.80
Four times a year	26	22.00

Five or more times a year	21	17.80
<b>Duration of hotel stays</b>		
1-2 nights	47	39.80
3-4 nights	50	42.40
5-6 nights	14	11.90
7-8 nights	6	5.10
9+ nights	1	0.80

Source: Own calculations.

Table 2 Factor analysis results (n = 118)

Factor's name and the underlying items	Factor loadings	Reliability
<b>1. Tangibles</b> The hotel has modern and up-to-date facilities. The physical features of the hotel are visually appealing. Hotel staff members are well-dressed and appear neat. Materials related to the service are visually attractive in the hotel.	0.849 0.706 0.720 0.737	0.745
<b>2. Reliability</b> The hotel provides services within the promised schedule. When the hotel promises to do something at a specific time, it delivers on that promise. When you have a problem, the hotel shows genuine interest in resolving it. The hotel staff is reliable in handling customer issues. The hotel keeps confidential and accurate data	0.775 0.710 0.725 0.760 0.757	0.800
<b>3. Responsiveness</b> The hotel staff is willing to respond to customers' requests. The hotel staff provides prompt service to customers. The hotel staff is always ready to assist customers. The hotel staff informs accurately about the time services will be performed.	0.710 0.719 0.720 0.782	0.713
<b>4. Assurance</b> Clients feel safe during their stay at the hotel. The hotel staff is polite and friendly with clients. The hotel staff has the knowledge to respond to customer requests. Clients can trust the hotel employees.	0.752 0.780 0.800 0.834	0.801
<b>5. Empathy</b> The hotel pays special attention to its clients. The hotel staff understands the specific needs of their clients. The hotel staff prioritizes customer interests. The hotel has employees who provide personal attention. The hotel has suitable working hours for all clients.	0.754 0.708 0.780 0.757 0.706	0.794
<b>6. Customer satisfaction</b> I have been very satisfied during my stay at this hotel. I am satisfied with my choice to stay at this hotel. The overall feeling I got from the experience at this hotel puts me in a good mood. Overall, I am pleased with this hotel.	0.771 0.796 0.840 0.871	0.834

Note: All subfactors are measured on a scale from 1 - "Strongly Disagree" to 5 - "Strongly Agree."

### 5.3 Regression analysis

Considering the potential factors influencing 'Customer satisfaction', a multiple regression analysis model was constructed. 'Y' was used as the dependent variable. 'Tangibles', 'Reliability', 'Responsiveness', 'Assurance'

and 'Empathy' were used as independent variables. In the first model, five dimensions were included as independent variables, while 'Customer satisfaction' were the dependent variable. The results showed that the model had strong statistical significance ( $F(5, 112) = 112.099$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ), with a coefficient of determination adjusted  $R^2 = 82.6\%$ . However, not all partial regression coefficients were statistically significant. The correlation matrix revealed correlations among the independent variables, specifically between 'Responsiveness' and 'Empathy', as well as between 'Responsiveness' and 'Reliability', which adversely affected the regression model.

Table 3 Coefficients<sup>a</sup> from the regression analysis with five independent variables

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	$\beta$	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant)	-.600	.222		-2.697	.008
Tangibles	.199	.078	.166	2.553	.012
Reliability	.240	.104	.216	2.301	.023
Responsiveness	.154	.092	.134	1.671	.097
Assurance	.293	.076	.270	3.841	.000
Empathy	.248	.098	.217	2.519	.013

a. Dependent Variable: Customer satisfaction

After removing the statistically insignificant and correlated variable '**Responsiveness**', we generated a new regression with four independent variables: '**Tangibles**', '**Reliability**', '**Assurance**' and '**Empathy**'. The new model showed stronger statistical significance ( $F(4, 113) = 137.248$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ), with a coefficient of determination adjusted  $R^2 = 82.3\%$ . All partial regression coefficients were positive and statistically significant. Thus, the hypothesis was confirmed.

Table 4 Coefficients<sup>a</sup> from the regression analysis with four independent variables

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	$\beta$	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant)	-.556	.223		-2.497	.014
Tangibles	.217	.078	.181	2.793	.006
Reliability	.275	.103	.247	2.671	.009
Assurance	.329	.074	.304	4.471	.000
Empathy	.301	.094	.264	3.207	.002

a. Dependent Variable: Customer satisfaction

## **6 Conclusions and recommendations**

Scientific research and studies on service quality and customer satisfaction in the hotel industry have been growing in the recent years. However, very few studies in the field have been conducted in Western Balkans' countries. Limited is as well the number of studies dedicated to Montenegro. Researchers in hotel and tourism management should focus on specific issues and specific customer segments to more accurately assess service quality (Ottenbacher et al., 2009). Based on this premise, this study aims to empirically evaluate the relationship between service quality and customer satisfaction in Montenegrin hotels, focusing solely on domestic customers. By better understanding the factors that matter most to local customers, managers can make more informed decisions to enhance customer satisfaction in a growing market.

The findings of this study align with previous research in the field (Ahmad et al., 2018; Akbaba, 2006; Al Khattab & Aldehayyat, 2011; Devi Juwaheer, 2004; Getty & Getty, 2003; Hossain, 2012; Jasinskis et al., 2016; Markovic & Raspor, 2010; Nguyen et al., 2015; Thi et al., 2020), which indicate that customer satisfaction in the hotel industry is influenced by various factors. The SERVQUAL model proves to be a good measure of customer satisfaction, highlighting the importance and impact of model factors such as tangibles, reliability, assurance, and empathy on customer satisfaction. Hotels that meet or exceed customer expectations tend to have higher levels of customer satisfaction, leading to long-term benefits for the business and competitive advantages. The study reveals that reliability influences customers' perceptions of satisfaction. Clients value fulfilled promises and immediate problem resolution as positive experiences. Furthermore, the role of tangibles, such as cleanliness and physical appearance of the hotel, should not be overlooked, as they create the initial impression and affect overall service perceptions. On the other hand, safety and empathy are equally important for achieving high levels of customer satisfaction, as understanding customer needs allows us to address presented issues. Overall, this study confirms that improving service quality across all SERVQUAL dimensions enhances customer satisfaction.

Although this is an exploratory study, it provides several contributions to the literature. Firstly, it is among the first to attempt to analyze service quality in Montenegrin hotels, focusing on domestic customers, adding new insights to existing literature. Secondly, the study employs the SERVQUAL model by Parasuraman et al. (1985) in the context of hotels. Despite criticisms, the study contributes to existing literature by demonstrating the reliability of the SERVQUAL model as a trustworthy tool for measuring



and assessing customer satisfaction in hotels. Thirdly, the study is conducted in Montenegro, a small developing country in the Western Balkans. Similar studies in the Western Balkans region are scarce, but this study provides a meaningful contribution to scientific research.

In addition, the study findings have significant implications for hotel managers and owners. Firstly, hotel owners and managers may need to develop specific strategies to achieve the desired levels of service quality and customer satisfaction. With increasing competition, hotels must be prepared to offer personalized services to their customers in order to enhance overall satisfaction. Secondly, it is well-known that many hotels operate seasonally and with limited resources. However, this should not deter hotel owners/managers from differentiating themselves by providing value-added services, innovative products, or a wide range of offerings instead of relying solely on low-price strategies to satisfy customers. Thirdly, attention should be given to maintaining both internal and external environments. Well-maintained facilities are appreciated by guests, and investing in upkeep is crucial for positive guest experiences.

Despite its contributions to existing literature, the study has certain limitations. The sample size is small ( $n = 118$ ), limiting generalizability to the entire Montenegro population. Additionally, the study was conducted only in Montenegro during a specific time period. Future research could compare different states and time periods. Furthermore, the study focused solely on local customers as a growing market in Montenegro. Future studies could explore cross-cultural aspects of customer satisfaction.

Lastly, the study centered on hotels, overlooking service quality and customer satisfaction in private accommodations, which attract a significant portion of visitors in Montenegro. Future research could consider other cities and regions within Montenegro to make relevant comparisons regarding service quality. Despite these limitations, the study provides valuable insights into service quality and customer satisfaction in Montenegro, serving as a basis for more detailed field studies. Additionally, exploring how factors such as gender, age, nationality, education level, and income impact customer satisfaction would be interesting for future research.

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## **A SYSTEMATIC REVIEW OF THE TOURISM EXPERIENCE RESEARCH FROM 2009 TO 2018**

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### ***ABSTRACT***

**Context and purpose** – The aim of this chapter is to critically assess the existing body of research on tourism experience through the systematic review techniques. Since this is a relatively new and recent research topic in tourism research literatures, this investigation of secondary nature generates a structured scheme of the main research questions, context, data collection and analysis methods, and main findings of the papers published in major tourism and hospitality journals within the 2009 – 2018 time horizon.

**Methodology** - Several methods were applied in order to identify and analyses the relevant studies. As a first step, following a computerized search of the main databases, e.g. EBSCOhost, ProQuest, etc., where ‘tourist experience’ was used as the keyword in the title, abstract, and keywords of the articles, two major journals with reputable impact factor and numbers of citations were identified: Annals of Tourism Research and Journal of Travel Research. The data analysis method consisted in content analysis to identify common themes in terms of definition, research questions, theoretical framework, research design, antecedents, consequences, moderators, and type of measurement of tourist experience.

**Key findings/results** – The majority of studies (45) were related to specific tourist sites and that influenced the type of tourism experience. For example: creative experience, medieval tournament, food service experience, literary experience, spiritual experience, film-induced experience, embodied flamenco experience, nudists experience, shared media experience, mindful experience, past reference experience, staging experience, responsible/ethical experience, heritage experience, slum

experience, spiritual/religious experience, dark experience, business travel experience, co-creation experience, prior and recent experience, female experience (in Islamic destination), hiking experience, geo-based experience, student experience, host experience, memorable experience, emotional experience, museum experience, culinary experience, cruise experience, transformative experience, etc.

**Significance of research** – This chapter will provide a reference guide in relation to the main aspects of the published studies in this research field. To practitioners and tourism experience groups of interest, this systematic review will provide a comprehensive outlook of main causes and consequences and theoretical frameworks under which tourism experience has been investigated.

**Keywords:** *tourism experience, types of experience, methodology, sampling, data analysis.*

## **1 Introduction**

The concept of tourist experience has evolved significantly since the 1970s, reflecting shifts in consumer motivations and destination choices. Pine and Gilmore's seminal work on the 'experience economy' (1999) laid the foundation for understanding experiences as economic offerings, while Otto and Ritchie (1996) narrowed this focus to tourism services. Recent developments in hospitality and tourism have transitioned from a supply-driven to a demand-driven perspective, emphasizing the co-creation of value between tourists and service providers (Kong & Johnston, 2011; Minkiewicz et al., 2014). This aligns with the resource-based theory, positioning tourists as active participants in crafting their experiences (Campos et al., 2018; Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004; Vargo et al., 2014).

From a consumer standpoint, extensive literature supports the link between tourist experiences and outcomes such as revisit intentions, loyalty, word-of-mouth recommendations, and emotional satisfaction (Barnes et al., 2014; Biran et al., 2011; Brunner-Sperdin et al., 2012; Kruja, 2017; Ma et al., 2013; Mathis et al., 2016; Pearce & Kang, 2009; Robinson & Clifford, 2012; Sharpley & Jepson, 2011; Tussyadiah & Zach, 2012). The tourist experience also plays a crucial role in shaping destination image (Kruja, 2018; Morrison, 2013; Pike, 2012, 2002; Pike & Page, 2014; Stepchenkova & Mills, 2010). From the supply perspective, firms strive to differentiate themselves by creating memorable experiences that foster emotional connections with customers (Binkhorst & Dekker, 2009; Brunner-Sperdin et al., 2012). The tourism industry, therefore, focuses on



delivering positive, memorable experiences (Kim, 2014; Tung & Ritchie, 2011; Park & Santos, 2017).

Various theoretical frameworks have been employed to understand tourist experiences, including consumer involvement theory (Beatty et al., 1988; Pearce & Kang, 2009), survival theory of tourist consumption (McIntyre, 2007), and flow theory (Csikszentmihalyi, 2014). Psychological theories such as appraisal theory (Scherer, 2005; Scherer et al., 2001), categorization theory (Rosch & Lloyd, 1978), script theory (Tomkins, 1987), intimacy theory (Trauer & Ryan, 2005), motivation theory (Snepenger et al., 2006), and mindfulness theory (Chen et al., 2017; Moscardo, 2009) have also been applied. However, the generalizability of these studies is limited due to diverse methodologies and the multifaceted nature of tourist experiences.

The current state of tourist experience research is characterized by a predominance of qualitative methodologies, including phenomenological, grounded theory, and ethnographic approaches. While these methods provide valuable insights, they have not converged toward a universal concept of tourist experience (Ritchie et al., 2011). A systematic synthesis of previous research is needed to address questions such as the number of studies examining tourist experience in explicit travel contexts, the use of qualitative methods in measuring destination image or developing attribute lists, the application of structured approaches, the range of data analysis methods, and the inclusion of variables beyond tourist experience, revisit intentions, loyalty, word-of-mouth recommendations, and emotional satisfaction.

Recent studies have sought to address these gaps. For instance, Rusu et al. (2023) conducted a systematic literature review of 167 articles on tourist experience, proposing a holistic definition and identifying dimensions, factors, and evaluation methods. They emphasized the need for a comprehensive understanding of tourist experience, considering the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and the growing awareness of sustainable tourism practices.

Additionally, Bernaki and Marso (2023) proposed an integrated conceptual framework of destination experience, highlighting the antecedents, formation, and consequences of tourist experience along the travel journey. They discussed various measures and emerging research methods to capture the components of destination experience, aiming to assist destination marketing organizations in catering to tourists' needs and preferences.

These recent developments underscore the importance of synthesizing

existing research and adopting holistic approaches to understand and enhance tourist experiences. By integrating diverse theoretical frameworks and employing both qualitative and quantitative methodologies, researchers can develop a more comprehensive understanding of tourist experiences, ultimately informing strategies to improve destination competitiveness and visitor satisfaction.

## **2 Methods**

In line with established literature review methodologies on tourist experience (Ritchie & Hudson, 2009; Tung & Ritchie, 2011), this research aims to narratively review existing scholarship on tourism experiences to critically assess prominent themes and methodologies. Given that the field of tourist experience research remains relatively emergent, this study serves as a secondary investigation designed to systematize the core research questions, contexts, data collection and analysis methods, and main findings from key publications between 2009 and 2018. The chosen time frame adheres to precedents in prior comprehensive reviews and allows for the inclusion of the most impactful studies in recent decades.

To identify and analyze relevant studies, a multi-step approach was undertaken. Initially, a computerized search across major academic databases, such as EBSCOhost and ProQuest, was conducted. Using "tourist experience" as the primary keyword in titles, abstracts, and keywords, highly cited and reputable journals with significant impact factors were prioritized. Specifically, *Annals of Tourism Research* and *Journal of Travel Research* were selected for their prominence and influence in the field.

The data analysis utilized a structured content analysis approach to extract and identify common themes. These included definitions of tourist experience, key research questions, theoretical frameworks, research designs, antecedents, consequences, moderators, and methods of measurement. By employing content analysis, patterns were distilled to understand how research has evolved in addressing the complexities of tourist experiences.

The resulting synthesis is presented in a structured format, detailing: orientation (demand vs. supply), country and site specifics, methodologies employed, sampling techniques, types of experiences studied, data collection and analysis methods, and research findings. Furthermore, the analysis examined the extent to which studies utilized structured (S) or unstructured (U) approaches. Column A of the accompanying table denotes

whether methods were structured or unstructured. For studies that applied structured approaches, Column B highlights the independent variables assessed, while Column C reports sample sizes used in the research.

This approach ensures a comprehensive overview of how tourist experience has been examined, highlighting gaps in existing literature and setting the stage for future research advancements in this evolving field.

### **3 Findings**

The findings from the comprehensive review of 51 articles on tourist experience research reveal a strong emphasis on affective and experiential attributes in defining the concept. Most studies describe tourist experiences as meaningful, extraordinary, multi-sensory, emotional, unique, memorable, personal, subjective, transformational, authentic, sacred, social, and intimate, with significant ties to self-identity. This highlights the rich and multifaceted nature of tourist experiences, which are often deeply personal and emotionally engaging.

A notable pattern emerges when examining the types of tourist experiences analyzed, as the majority of studies (45 out of 51) focused on specific tourist sites. These contexts shaped the kinds of experiences being investigated, ranging from creative tourism and medieval tournaments to food services, literary tourism, spiritual and film-induced experiences, embodied cultural performances like flamenco, and even niche experiences such as nudist tourism and mindful travel. Other unique categories included past-referenced experiences, staged events, responsible tourism, heritage tourism, dark tourism, business travel, co-created experiences, gender-specific travel in culturally sensitive destinations, hiking, geo-based tourism, student travel, museum visits, culinary journeys, cruises, and transformative adventures. The diverse range of experiences underscores the field's complexity and the varied ways tourists engage with destinations.

Geographically, the majority of the research focused on tourist destinations in Europe, the United States, and Asia, reflecting a wide but concentrated exploration of global tourism contexts. Methodologically, the field is characterized by a reliance on unstructured techniques for defining and measuring tourist experiences. These unstructured approaches highlight the exploratory and often experimental nature of much of the research, which seeks to understand the nuanced and subjective aspects of tourist engagement.

Qualitative methods dominate the research landscape, with studies

frequently involving tourists either as direct participants or observational subjects. The use of phenomenological and ethnographic approaches is widespread, as these methods allow for an in-depth exploration of the lived experiences of tourists. Survey methodologies are also utilized but to a lesser extent. In terms of data collection, in-depth interviews are the most commonly used method, followed by questionnaires. This preference for qualitative data collection methods aligns with the field's focus on capturing detailed and rich descriptions of tourist experiences.

Data analysis techniques predominantly involve theme identification through content analysis, providing a way to distill and interpret qualitative data. More advanced methods, such as factorial analysis and structural equation modeling, are occasionally employed to examine relationships and underlying constructs. The research also displays a clear demand-oriented focus, with tourists serving as the primary unit of analysis. This consumer-centric approach emphasizes understanding tourism experiences from the perspective of the traveler.

Lastly, sampling techniques in these studies often involve purposive and snowball sampling. These methods are typical of exploratory research, enabling researchers to gather insights from specific groups of tourists relevant to their study objectives rather than striving for representativeness. This methodological orientation reflects the ongoing need for a deeper understanding of tourist experiences and the challenges of generalizing findings in this complex and evolving field.

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## EMPLOYEE MOTIVATION AFFECTS THE PERFORMANCE OF THESE EMPLOYEES AT WORK

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### ABSTRACT

Working in organizations increasingly needs to coordinate teamwork and pay attention to the individual commitment of each employee. As one of the most important assets in the results of the work of the organization the human factor and the management of special human resources. Human potential seeks to be valued for the motivations it carries and the behavior they give as a consequence. Therefore, by paying attention to motivation in a practical sense, managers can achieve the expected results from working in the organization. They strive to create a conducive work environment so that employees are not dissatisfied with the work environment. But this does not mean that they are necessarily satisfied. But what is the connection between job satisfaction and motivation and organizational suitability and good job performance? Is there a relationship between the above variables and if so how is this relationship and what impact does it have on the organization's climate and the product or result at work?

Since this is a wide-ranging issue that affects many dimensions, we will focus only on the analysis of motivation and performance.

In this perspective the hypothesis has been raised: Employee motivation affects the performance of these employees at work.

**Keywords:** *performance, motivation, organization, human potential, competence.*

### Introduction

Performance, according to MotoWidlo, "is neither a behavior nor just the result of behavior, it is a property of behavior." It is the value expected from the organization of what the individual accomplishes in his work. So the

organization attributes value to behaviors that help achieve the set objectives. If we look at performance only according to the results of the individual we have ignored the contextual factors that help or deter the individual in accomplishing his work. This definition helps us to see performance associated with individual determinants and avoids creating black (misunderstood) areas between psychological factors and performance outcomes. While competence is a multidimensional factor that explains performance by the ability of the individual to adapt to the work context he faces. Competencies refer to the different dimensions of behaviors and cognitions that are expressed through appropriate actions in a given professional context. Competence assessment means examining elements of different natures such as personality, mental skills, motivation, knowledge etc. In some companies, performance appraisal is also done including human potential appraisal.

Potential assessment involves assessing an individual's ability to develop as yet undiscovered competencies. This aspect enables the organization to identify when and how much development opportunity its human capital has. Practice more and more frequent in the organization in order for the latter to have an optimal and timely management of human resources. But the evaluation of potential is seen differently by the evaluators of different organizations. His perception is closely related to the finality of the evaluation (for salary increase, for career administration, for training, for mobility ...). We should not confuse the concept of performance with that of result. "Generally defined, a performance is a realization, a result is one that comes from realization. So the result is the consequence of the performance and not the performance itself.

According to Podsakoff performance has several dimensions such as: 1) Altruism, 2) Sportiness, 3) Organizational conformism 4) Organizational loyalty 5) Civic virtue 6) Personal development 7) Individual initiative. In this context, the psychological factors of performance should also be analyzed. Here we can distinguish the psychological connection between the individual, his work and the organization. Therefore, in the framework of psychological determinants, we analyze -motivation.-satisfaction, -implication, etc. that are essential to explain the process of performance at work will be help to study the hypothesis of our work.

The interest of managers is to give the variables "Personality a central place in relation to performance and the importance of feelings and emotions at work as influential elements in professional performance. Frequent use of personality assessment tests by evaluators in the organization proves conviction for the most part most of them that personality is significantly

related to performance at work. Meta - analysis shows the predictive character of personality influence on performance.

A growing literature shows that feelings can influence cognitive processes (e.g., motivation at work and performance in certain activities). Mitchell and Daniels show that feelings can have a positive effect on creativity, simplifying decision making, pro-social behaviors, adapting to stressful events, using a constructive approach to conflict resolution. Humor has a positive effect on the development of the feeling of auto efficiency from the moment a task or an activity is well mastered.

### **Hypothesis**

This study is based on an assumption that links a fact to a dependent phenomenon. So the hypothesis presented during the study aims to show whether the results are proportional dependence between the social fact and the concrete phenomenon. The compatibility of this focuses on the cause-and-effect relationship, which reveals empirical data as evidence of interaction. The well-being social fact in this study is represented by the existence of the phenomenon of the interaction of motivation with the performance of employees at work.

Hypothesis: "Motivated people have a higher performance at work"

Independent variable: "Motivation"

Dependent variable: "Performance at work"

Measuring instrument

The main method used to collect the survey data is the questionnaire and the semi-structured interview based on two focus groups, with employees and management staff. Two different questionnaires were implemented, one for employees and one for managers. The same was done with the interview. Each of the questionnaires had three sections. The first section of 10 questions provides general demographic information, the second section contains 10 questions to identify the elements of motivation at work and the third section contains 10 questions about performance appraisal. work of each of the champions. Specifically, managers evaluate the performance of employees based on the result and employees evaluate their performance in the context of job satisfaction, rewards or even their own continuity in that job position.

The questionnaire was formulated in such a way as to be understandable

and self-administered by the respondents.

The questions are standardized, formulated in accordance with the aims and objectives of the paper. The questionnaire consists of 3 sections with 10 closed questions. The processed results were administered and processed with SPSS.

### **Sampling**

The survey included 150 employees of 15 "Call Center" units in Shkodra, Lezha and MalWsi e Madhe. At the same time 30 managers of these 15 units. Workers were selected randomly and in fair proportion in both shifts of work functioning in these units. The questionnaires were implemented in advance in a unit which was not part of the sample. The results were analyzed by an organizational psychologist, an evaluator of this organizational unit and language teacher to avoid misinterpretations and understand the possibility of clear transmission of the message so as not to complicate the respondents. During the sampling both authors of the paper were present and assisted in the administration of tests for both employees and managers of this unit.

After analysis the tests took their final form and were administered by us. At this stage they were explained the purpose of the survey and the preservation of anonymity. Upon completion the tests were collected to undergo data processing by an IT specialist. The obtained results were analyzed and served us for drafting the conclusions of the study.

### **Ethical issues**

Study ethics issues are very important and require compliance with a set of rules which allow a research study to be conducted. During this study, efforts were made to respect issues such as the validity and reliability of the evidence collected and the results achieved. Which is one of the essential criteria of the values carried by the research work. Objectivity is another important element on the basis of which all research work and conclusions are based. The exclusion of subjectivity and prejudicial attitudes constitute the guiding ethic of this research. Even the confidential communication between the researchers and the respondents of the sample selected for the study, is based on a communication relationship as objective as possible and without influencing each other in giving the most realistic answers possible.

## Study Results

### Section 1

The first part of the questionnaire refers to general personal and demographic data of the interviewees. Regarding gender, age, and education From a sample of 150 employees about 66% of them are female and 34% male, who agreed to conduct interviews and provide information about the questionnaire presented to them. While for managers 80% were women and 20% men. All managers agreed to be interviewed. In this section, from the analysis of the answers to the questions of demographic character, no connection between age, gender and performance is noticed. It is worth noting a faint impact of educational level on performance. This impact fades from the threat of the time factor that does not favor the analysis of this element as many employees see this work as a seasonal job until their stabilization in the profession for which they have completed higher education.

### Section 2

In the second part the questions are focused on motivation in the workplace. In this section of questions it was revealed how motivated employees are and how much this motivation serves to mobilize them in achieving a positive performance. For managers, the questions were directed to the stimulating and motivating managerial policies that they implemented.

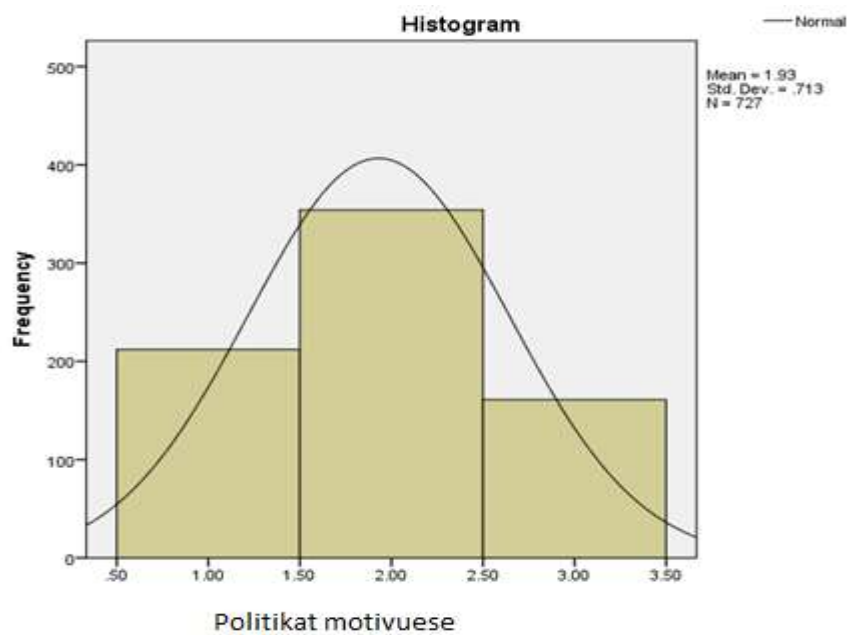
From the answers received it turned out that 60% of them were very satisfied with the work they were doing, 18% were slightly satisfied, while 14% were not at all satisfied. While 80% of managers reported stimulus policies, 18% neutral motivation policies and 2% non-motivational policies themselves.

When asked about motivation, 66% of them answered positively, 28% answered that they are less motivated and 06% answered negatively. Related to this with the question to employees whether they felt better on the working day or the day off, 66% say they feel better at work and 34% of them feel better on the day off. These percentages tell us that there is a logical link between employees who feel motivated and those who feel better on the work day and those who are not motivated and are more satisfied when they are on vacation. These percentages confirm that their responses to motivation have been honest and logical, converging with

the% of policies implemented by managers in accordance with the policy of the organization / unit where they operate.

### Frequency

Neutral policy	$F(204.119) = 42.4, p = 0.00$
Negative policy	$F(172.558) = 42.8, p = 0.00$
Stimulus policy	$F(0.751) = 35.6, p = 0.473$
Educational level	$F(2.557) = 542.5, p = 0.08$



### Test of Homogeneity of Variances

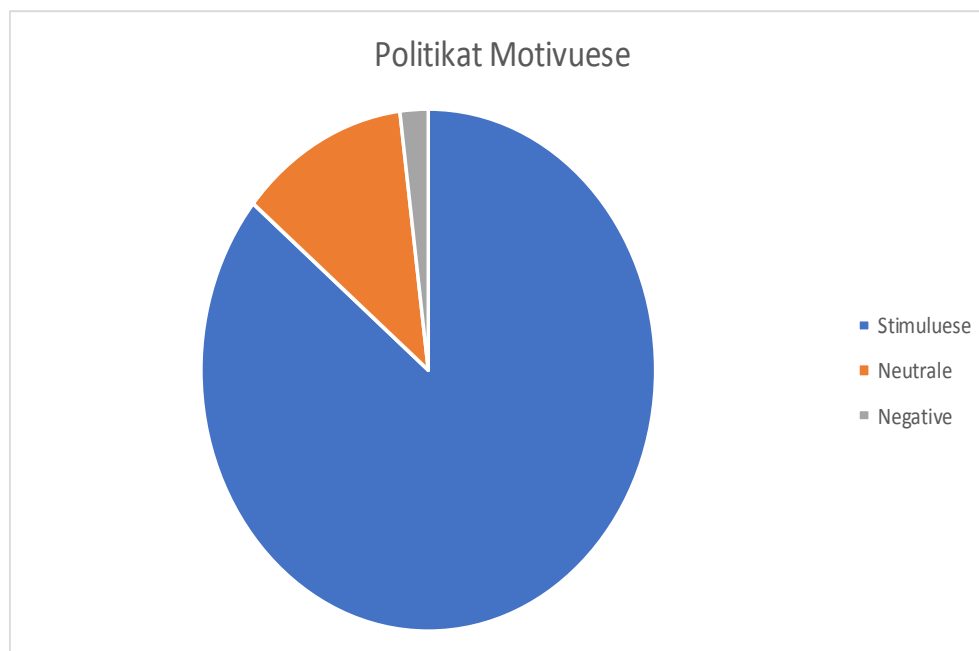
Motivation points

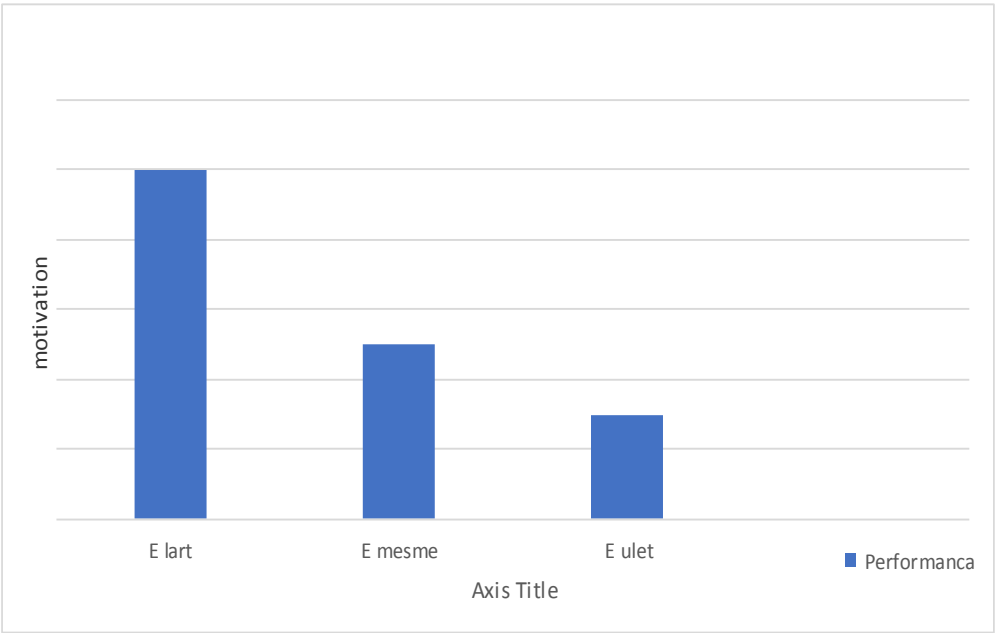
Level Statistic	df1	df2	Sig.
76.553	2	743	.00



Stimulating scores		Negative scores	Indifferent scores	Education scores
.034	Problem solving scores (scores )	-.851**	-.145*	-.741**
.631		.000	.000	.036
208	727	124	186	209

### Correlation Analysis

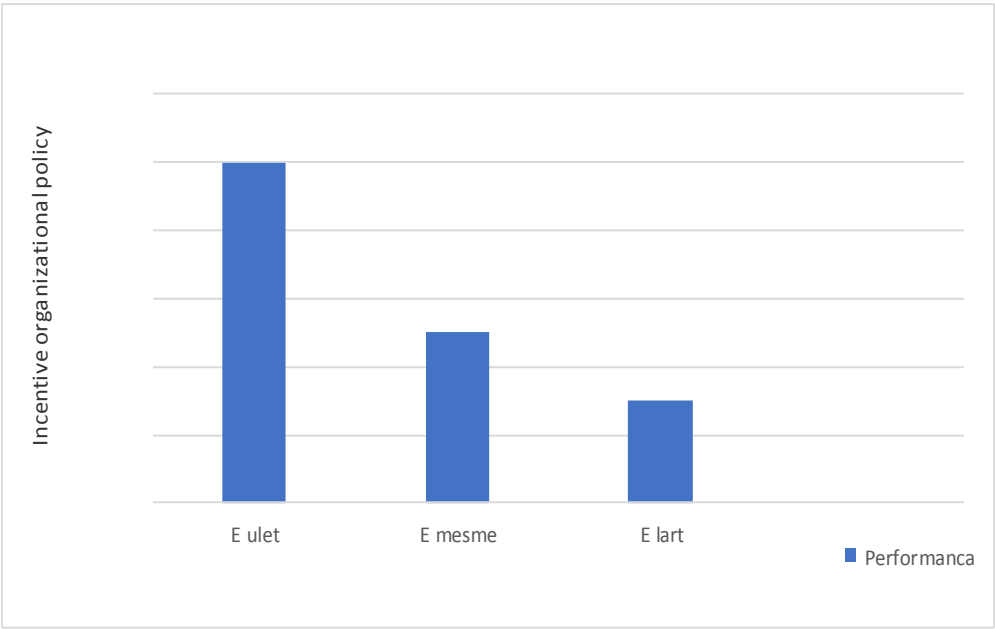




High

Medium

Low



High

Medium

Low

From the implementation of the interviews, the main topics on which the questions were built were extracted.

Topic	Needs	Motivations
Success	Xxx	Xxxxx
Social relations.	Xxxxxx	Xxxxx
Flexibility in relationships with others	Xx	Xxx
Mobility	Xxxx	Xxxx
Career promotion	Xx	Xxxxxx
Rewards	Xxxxx	Xxxxxx
Personal well-being	Xxx	Xxxxx

Topic	Experienced feelings	How do they feel it now
Success	Xxxx	Xxxxx
Social relations.	Xxxx	Xxxx
Flexibility in relationships with others	xx xx	Xxx
Mobility	Xxxx	Xxxx
Career promotion	Xxxx	Xxxx
Rewards	Xxxxx	Xxxxx
Personal well-being	Xxx	Xxxx

Respond	Keywords of Item 1	Keywords of Item 2	
R <sub>1</sub>	Organizational conformism	Abilities	
R <sub>2</sub>	Dimension	Autonomy	
R <sub>3</sub>	Human	Importance of duty	
R <sub>4</sub>	Equality	Feedback	
R <sub>5</sub>	fault	Consequence	
R <sub>6</sub>	Punishment-Reward	Respect	
R <sub>7</sub>	Both sides of the coin	Perfection	
R <sub>8</sub>	Commun#ication	Uninformed	
R <sub>9</sub>	Oblige#tions	Talent	
R <sub>10</sub>	Raised	Behavior	
R <sub>11</sub>	Fix#ed	Performance	
Total			

### Section 3

Questions based on the manager's response to employee performance appraisals and the questionnaire that managers were asked to measure their performance in relation to the desired outcomes at the organizational level are part of this section.

Almost all employees answer this section of questions positively, only 6% of them answer negatively. They seem to be aware of the impact their performance has on the growth and development of the company. Employees are clear about the importance they have in its development and are convinced that only if their goals match the goals of the company will we have a high performance on their part which will lead to the fulfillment of the objectives that managers have decided. Thus from this the answers received from this section we conclude that employees are clear about the relationship that motivation has with performance and they think that these two variables are in direct proportion to each other. So if we motivate we promote a high performance by employees and if we do not motivate we make this performance to be at low levels (if the realized performance generates internal and external compensations a feeling of satisfaction will be presented or vice versa). In the same lines result the attitudes of managers in addition to the fact of increased influence here and maintaining a balance between employees and the global policy of the organizational unit.

Based on the interpretation of factor analysis we conclude that there is a significant relationship between the variables under study. This brings the confirmation of the hypothesis raised for this study. From the interpretation of the results we come up with the following recommendations and suggestions;

#### **Recommendation**

##### **For managers**

Understand that their primary role is to manage performance and that low levels of motivation may be among the key factors when performance is low.

##### **Reward performance**

By rewarding outside good performance you can change someone's expectations. External rewards are managed by someone else consisting of

salary increase, increase in duty and other secondary benefits. If high rewards are for excellent performance then employees will try harder.

**Rich tasks**

Enrichment of tasks leads to enrichment of group activities which in turn leads to the development of self-managing teams. So only a stimulating job that provides opportunities for personal achievement, recognition and responsibility would motivate employees. Managers who tend to eliminate the factors that bring dissatisfaction can bring some relief.

Give importance to moderate variables:

Motivational variables are; individual's salary level, amount of education and seniority. Employees with high salaries and reliance on their personal experience, in contrast individuals with longer working hours in the existing organization rely more on collaborators as the object of comparison.

Give and treat employees based on the principle of fairness.

If from the comparison of reports we conclude that there is equal treatment we say that there is a situation where the situation is perceived as a right where justice prevails. But if the ratio is not equal then one can be seen as rewarded or not rewarded. From this can be derived proposals relating to unequal pay for unequal work. In part-time wages, the overpaid employee will produce more than the equal paid employee, so he will increase the quantity or quality of production increase the input part of the ratio to thus bring equality.

The most important thing to understand from this theory and especially from managers is the continuous nature of the development of the social comparison process, which makes the motivation process itself dynamic and changeable.

**Set goals**

Goal setting is a basic process that is directly or indirectly part of the vast majority of motivation theories. Goal setting is based on the idea that behavior is governed by values and goals. Thus if a manager values honesty he / she will decide as a goal to hire only honest employees. For this they will make every effort to check the references and test the honesty of the candidates.

Personal feedback, ie when the manager is able to monitor the progress of the work himself, is a stronger motivator than the feedback provided from outside.

Be careful, evaluate skills and opportunities.

Employee performance is a function of skills and motivation interactions. But still in the above report is something that is missing, the opportunity to realize, because even though the employee is willing and has the skills may appear difficulties that hinder performance, so the above equation can be met if the skills and opportunities are assessed.

Sketching the task.

This is based on the creation of those jobs that people want to accomplish as they consider themselves an integral part of it.

### **Suggestions for employees**

- Employees need to be involved in their organizations in order to work motivated and intense. Only in this way will they contribute so that the organization is more efficient and this efficiency is also perceived as their individual part.
- Achieve the implication of identifying the individual with a particular organization and his or her participation in that organization.
- Motivation explains the orientation of the individual's efforts in his work.
- Fostering the employee's confidence in his / her capacity to mobilize his / her motivation.
- Promoting self-regulation as factors that allow for the growth and support of efforts by allowing the individual to choose new and difficult objectives.
- Affective implication in the organization affects performance.
- Strong trust leads to acceptance of the organization's objectives and values.
- Nurture the will to make significant efforts on behalf of the organization,
- Grow a strong desire to stay as a member of the organization

### **General guidelines on how to use job motivation in performance service:**

Create a work environment that offers internal reward. This can be achieved by making work more challenging and interesting while increasing employee autonomy and responsibility.

Set clear and challenging goals. The manager should provide subordinates

with an explanation of the level of performance expected of them and should do so as measurably as possible. These objectives must be achievable. Unattainable results have a zero expectation but also very difficult objectives have very low expectations.

Remove barriers to performance. By providing the right resources, training employees, and removing unnecessary bureaucracy you can raise expectations. Clarify what is called good performance because there are many ways to achieve a goal. By clarifying expectations for employee performance the manager fulfills a very important function of his job.

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- Dynamic environments Wikipedia.org/Wiki/Job-performance higher payments or supplementary bonuses. While Herzberg was introduced, (Barrick & Mount, 1991; Salgado, 1997; Barrick et al. 2001).
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## **THE PERCEPTIONS AND CAREER GOALS OF "LUIGJ GURAKUQI" UNIVERSITY STUDENTS ON EMPLOYMENT IN THE TOURISM INDUSTRY**

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### ***ABSTRACT***

The study of the perceptions of "Luigj Gurakuqi" University students regarding employment in the tourism and hotel industry aims to shed light on their preferences and expressions in this field of work. The main purpose of this study was to deeply analyze the interest and perceptions of students towards a career in the tourism industry, including the assessment of opportunities for growth and advancement within this sector, as well as the factors they consider important for success in this field. To achieve these goals, the study uses a structured methodology that includes a literature review and a quantitative method.

In the literature review, an analysis of the existing literature was made to gain a better understanding of the context and to identify relevant studies related to student perceptions and preferences regarding employment in the tourism industry. The study methodology involves the use of a structured questionnaire to obtain demographic data and perceptions from students. After data collection, statistical analysis was used to identify relationships and trends in the collected data.

The results of the study have provided a description of students' perceptions regarding employment in the tourism industry, including the analysis of the influence of other factors such as age, gender, place of residence, and field of study on career goals. From this analysis, the conclusions of the study have provided a valuable contribution to better understand the expectations and needs of students regarding careers in the tourism and hospitality industry.

**Keywords:** employment, perceptions, tourism, labor market.

## **I. Introduction**

The tourism sector has generated economic development, employment and self-employment opportunities. In terms of employment generation, according to the Ministry of Tourism, tourism accounted for 7.7% of total national employment with 85,500 jobs. Indirectly, tourism accounts for 23.9% of employment with 267,000 jobs. Since 2021, about 80 students have participated in the incentive programs for professional practices, a figure that is still far from the region's demand. On the other hand, since 2021, tourism has seen an increase in numbers by at least 30% in the entire region. The World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC) predicts that Albanian tourism will grow at a positive rate. The tourism and hospitality industry is the largest and fastest growing industry in the world.<sup>1</sup> Due to the oriented nature, some academics suggest the need for educated, skilled and dedicated staff to maintain high service standards.<sup>2</sup>

Given that most interactions between employees and customers are face-to-face, with the service purchased and consumed at the same time; the standard of service provided is a major concern.

Attitude, performance and behavior of employees are the keys that determine service quality, which affects customer satisfaction and loyalty.<sup>3</sup> This satisfaction was achieved with the employees' positive attitude towards their work.<sup>4</sup> As current students are future employees to enter the field of tourism and hospitality; it can be anticipated that changes in perception may emerge as a result of increased interest, so they may differ from current employees who, somehow, do not have formal tertiary qualifications. There are several experience providers in the field of tourism and hospitality; thus industry leaders do not value a tertiary qualification (especially a degree), refuse to hire graduates and choose to hire experienced people instead.<sup>5</sup>

Here, questions are raised about the students who are about to graduate from the Shkodër Faculty of Economics, who will enter the field of the tourism industry, their perceptions and how these perceptions are formed. A lot of previous research has been done on the attitudes of economics faculty students, mainly tourism and hospitality and hotel management,

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<sup>1</sup> Baum, T., 2006.

<sup>2</sup> Kusluvan, S. & Kusluvan, Z., 2000) (Omar, M. B., 2014).

<sup>3</sup> Heskett, J. L., Jones, T. O., Loveman, G. W., Sasser Jr., W. E. & Schlesinger, L. A., 1994) (Kandampully, J., 2007).

<sup>4</sup> Rosentbluth, H., 1991) (Zeithaml, V. A. & Bitner, M. Jo., 1996).

<sup>5</sup> Airey, D. & Frontistis, A., 1997) (Costley, W., 2011) (Harkison, T., Poulston, J. & Kim, J. H., 2011).

towards working in the tourism and hospitality industry.<sup>6</sup> however outside the Albanian context.

This study aims to improve the current understanding of students' perceptions and attitudes about a career in the tourism and hospitality industry within Albania and abroad, as future employees and managers, aiming to understand the causes and factors that are attracting or repelling students in this industry.

### **1.1. Purpose and objectives**

The purpose of this study is to analyze the perceptions of students of "Luigj Gurakuqi" University regarding employment in the tourism and hotel industry in Albania. This analysis will include their assessment of interest in working in this sector, assessment of opportunities for growth and career advancement within the tourism industry, as well as the factors they consider important for their career success in this field.

The objectives of the study are:

- ☐ To analyze the perceptions of "Luigj Gurakuqi" University students regarding employment in the tourism and hotel industry in Albania.
- ☐ To identify how students evaluate the possibility of employment in the tourism industry.
- ☐ To determine students' perceptions of career growth and advancement opportunities within the tourism industry.
- ☐ To identify the factors that students rate as most important to succeed in their careers in the tourism industry.
- ☐ To study how other factors, such as emotional adjustment and readiness to adapt and move, influence students' intentions to pursue a career in the tourism industry.

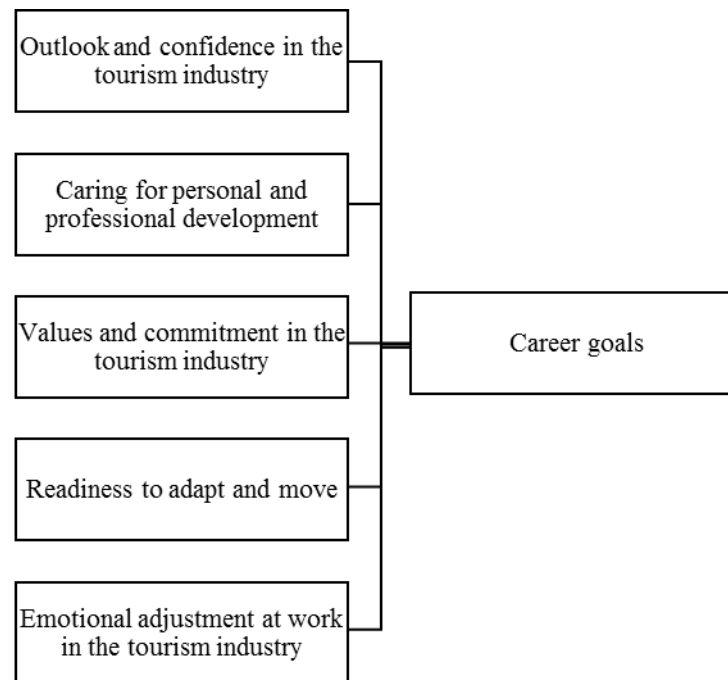
Through the analysis of the data collected with this questionnaire, it is intended to provide a deeper understanding in the perceptions and expectations of the students of "Luigj Gurakuqi" University regarding their career in the tourism and hotel industry in the country.

### **1.2. Conceptual model and hypotheses**

First, the relationships between variables such as: age, gender and place of residence in the interest to work in the tourism industry will be analyzed. Also, based on the relevant literature, five variables that influence career goals were analyzed, which will be analyzed throughout this paper.

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<sup>6</sup> Kuslivan, S. & Kuslivan, Z., 2000) (Chellen, H. & Nunkoo, R., 2010) (Jenkins, A. K., 2001) (Roney, S. A. & Öztin, P., 2007).



Based on the questionnaire on students' perceptions regarding employment in the tourism and hospitality industry, some suggested hypotheses

**Question:** Is there a statistically significant relationship between age and interest in working in tourism

H1: There is a statistically significant relationship between age and interest in working in tourism.

**Question:** Is there a statistically significant difference in your interest to work in the tourism industry according to other demographic factors, such as gender, place of residence, field of study?

H2a: There is a statistically significant difference in your interest to work in the tourism industry by gender.

H2b: There is a statistically significant difference in your interest to work in the tourism industry by place of residence.

H2c: There is a statistically significant difference in your interest to work in the tourism industry according to the field of study.

**Question:** What are the potential factors that influence career goals?

H: There is a statistically significant relationship between the dimensions and career goals.

These hypotheses will be tested through data analysis in SPSS.

## II. Literature review

The tourism and hospitality industry worldwide has faced the problem of attracting and retaining qualified employees, thus leading to a shortage of qualified staff and a continuous increase in the number of businesses in the tourism and hospitality industry.<sup>7</sup>

According to Ahmad with b.p. (2009) this industry has long been associated with a poor image and lack of understanding of the opportunities offered.<sup>8</sup> Traditionally there has been a career philosophy, which claims that many characteristics commonly found in the tourism and hospitality industry can contribute to the skills shortages currently facing the industry.<sup>9</sup> These characteristics include a young transient workforce, low levels of formal qualifications, low wages, part-time workers, a high ratio of low-skilled jobs, many hours spent outside working hours, large numbers of migrants and turnover of highly qualified staff. These characteristics add to the problems associated with recruiting and retaining qualified staff.

Tourism needs adequately trained professionals to face the current and future challenges facing the sector. Staff attitudes, performance and behavior are crucial to customer satisfaction and loyalty.<sup>10</sup> Pfeffer (2005) underlines that fierce competition among international companies has led businesses to use staff as a strategic advantage over rivals.<sup>11</sup>

Since the continued prosperity of tourism depends to a large extent on well-educated, motivated and dedicated people who are satisfied with their work; it is important that tourism students have a positive attitude towards working in their field. The image of the industry is critical to its future success and competitiveness, especially when competing with other industries. Therefore, to achieve competitive advantage through destinations; qualified graduates of the faculties of tourism and hospitality and related branches must have a positive attitude towards work in this

<sup>7</sup> Deery, M. & Shaw, R., 1999; Dermady, M. & Holloway, R., 1998; Ferris, G. R., Berkson, H. M. & Harris, M. M., 2002; King, C., Madera, J., Lee, L., Murillo, E., Baum, T. & Solnet, D., 2021; El-Houshy, S. S., 2018; Ashton, A. S., 2018.

<sup>8</sup> Ahmad, J. A., Atlas, R. & Kibat, S. A. (2009). Student's perception and attitudes towards working in the tourism industry: a case study of diploma in tourism management. Selangor Malaysia: Uitm Sarawak).

<sup>9</sup> Ayres, H. (2006). Career development in tourism and leisure: An exploratory study of the influence of mobility and mentoring. *Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Management*, 13(2), 113–123).

<sup>10</sup> Richardson, S. (2009). Undergraduates' perceptions of tourism and hospitality as a career choice. *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, 28(3), 382–388).

<sup>11</sup> Pfeffer, J. (2005). Producing sustainable competitive advantage through the effective management of people. *The Academy of Management Executive* 19 (4), 95–108)

field.<sup>12</sup> It is necessary to understand the perceptions and attitudes of students to find out whether they intend to work in the tourism industry after graduation or not. Insights into the factors that can produce positive or negative industry valuation can be gained. An employer can indicate corrective actions for students to have a more positive attitude. In addition, professors can learn about the problems, successes, and key skills needed to ensure graduates enter the field with the most appropriate skills.

### **2.1. Student perceptions and attitudes towards the tourism industry**

Studies into the perceptions and attitudes of tourism and hospitality graduate students reported that students perceive the industry as having poor pay, low stability, long working hours and poor working conditions.<sup>13</sup> Students' attitudes determine their commitment to the industry, in addition to the job categories available<sup>14</sup>, their commitments are also associated with factors such as gender<sup>15</sup>, his or her previous work experience<sup>16</sup>, and influences from family members and/or friends in the field<sup>17</sup>. Birdir (2002) surveyed students of different age groups at the University of Mersin in Turkey to find out why some students did not want to work in the field after graduation. The main reason stated was the lack of excellent education to enable success in this field. Irregular working hours was the second main reason. Another study in the Netherlands and the UK found that a high percentage, specifically over 70% of students in their first year of hospitality studies aspire to work in the field, but as students progressed in their grades; this aspiration decreased to 13%.<sup>18</sup> Richardson (2010a) studied perceptions of the tourism industry and compared the outcomes of domestic and international students in Australia. Compared to international students, domestic students had more negative perceptions towards fieldwork.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>12</sup> Pfeffer, J. (2005). Producing sustainable competitive advantage through the effective management of people. *The Academy of Management Executive* 19 (4), 95–108.

<sup>13</sup> Aksu, A. A. & Köksal, C. D., 2005; Barron, P. & Maxwell, G., 1993; Chellen, H. & Nunkoo, R., 2010; Kim, B., Mc Cleary, K. W. and Kaufman, T., 2010; Kusluvan, S. & Kusluvan, Z., 2000; Richardson, S., 2010a; Richardson, S., 2010b.

<sup>14</sup> Richardson, S., 2008; Lin, M. Y., Chiang, C. F. & Wu, K. P., 2018.

<sup>15</sup> Chuang, N. K. & Jenkins, M. (2010). Career decision making and intention: A study of hospitality undergraduate students. *Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Research* 34(4), 512–530.

<sup>16</sup> Domonte, T. & Vaden, A. G. (1987). Career decisions in hospitality management. *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, 11(1), 51–63.

<sup>17</sup> Airey, D. & Frontistis, A. (1997). Attitudes to careers in tourism: An Anglo–Greek comparison. *Tourism Management*, 18(3), 149–158.

<sup>18</sup> Jenkins, A. K. (2001). Making a career of it? Hospitality students' future perspectives: an Anglo-Dutch study. *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management*, 13(1), 13–20.

<sup>19</sup> Richardson, S. (2010a). Tourism and hospitality students' perceptions of a career in the industry: A comparison of domestic (Australian) students and international students studying in Australia. *Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Management*, 17(1), 1–11.

The fear of local students for a career in this field was that the factors they considered important in a career were missing. Students seek job security, promotion prospects, increased earnings, suitable starting salary and reasonable workload; none of which the local students believed the tourism industry could offer.<sup>20</sup> A New Zealand study focused on the attitudes and expectations of tourism graduates from a pre- and post-entry perspective.<sup>21</sup> This study noted that a glamorous element that the industry initially portrayed to potential students later turns into a negative perception of the industry due to its seasonality and high turnover characteristics.<sup>22</sup>

Some research completed on student perceptions of the tourism and hospitality industry reveals that some perceptions are not as bad as first assumed, and that in some countries (Mauritius, Australia and Turkey) students are interested in entering the field.<sup>23</sup> In Mauritius, Chellen and Nunkoo (2010) found that over 80% of respondents were satisfied that they had chosen to study tourism and that they would like to work in the field, with 61% of respondents not planning to work in any industry other. Also a study on university perceptions of tourism in Turkey found that approximately 65% wanted to work in the field after graduating and surprisingly a higher percentage (76%) of respondents had work experience in the industry.<sup>24</sup> Australian school students were also interested in entering management (58%), particularly those whose family or friends are already employed in the industry.<sup>25</sup> Analyzing students' commitment to industry; it was found in the Mauritius study that student engagement towards the tourism and hospitality industry was generally positive. Students perceived the industry as respected, with an opportunity to learn new things, a good investment in their career development, having promotion opportunities and that the positive sides of employment in this field outweigh the negatives. Finally, questions were also raised as to whether the advantages of the tourism industry outweigh the disadvantages. Interestingly, Roney and Öztin (2007) found exactly this, with almost half of their respondents believing that "the advantages of working in tourism outweigh the

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid

<sup>21</sup> Dewar, K., Sayers, J and Meyer, D. (2002). Hopes, dreams, and reality: An investigation into the expectations and experiences of tourism graduates. *Journal of Teaching in Travel & Tourism*, 2(1), 1-18.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid

<sup>23</sup> Petrova, P. & Mason, P. (2004). The value of tourism degrees: a Luton-based case study. *Education and Training*, 46(3), 153-161.

<sup>24</sup> Roney, S. A. & Öztin, P. (2007). Career perceptions of undergraduate tourism students: a case study in Turkey. *Journal of Hospitality, Leisure, Sports and Tourism Education*, 6.

<sup>25</sup> Ross, G. F. (1992). Tourism management as a career path: vocational perceptions of Australian school leavers. *Tourism Management*, 13, 242-247.

disadvantages". The image of the low paying tourism and hospitality industry was not supported, but like other literature as students progressed in their studies or undertook work experience their perception became more negative.<sup>26</sup> However, Richardson's (2009) results contrast with this as 44% of his respondents felt that the disadvantages outweighed the advantages. There is evidence that not all students are aware of the low pay and long working hours.<sup>27</sup> This can attract employees to the field, however, once they work; they will be exposed to these negative traits, which could potentially lead them to leave the job. In essence, however, one should expect the negative aspects of anything to be balanced by the positives. This suggests that it should be expected that the perception of the industry is likely to have some negative, at the same time, attribute some positive. Negative and positive perceptions must balance each other; therefore, the industry is not famous in a negative way. The conclusion that can be drawn from this research regarding the perceptions of higher education students can be summarized by Roney and Öztin who suggest that "the general notion of employment in tourism appears to be neither positive nor negative"<sup>28</sup>. Likewise, Baum (2006) draws a similar conclusion stating that the case cannot be proven anyway. Despite being a mix of positive and negative perceptions; it can also be argued that perceptions are representative of the context from which they are researched further emphasizing the importance of studying perceptions from a variety of contexts. The industry's image is critical to its future success and competitiveness, especially as it competes with other industries<sup>29</sup>. It is necessary to distinguish where these perceptions are formed, to develop ways to overcome the negative ones.

### **III. Methodology**

#### **3.1. Study design**

The current study seeks to understand students' perceptions and preferences regarding careers in the tourism and hospitality industry. To achieve the goals and objectives, the study uses a structured methodology that includes literature review and the use of a structured questionnaire to collect the

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<sup>26</sup> Roney, S. A. & Öztin, P. (2007). Career perceptions of undergraduate tourism students: a case study in Turkey. *Journal of Hospitality, Leisure, Sports and Tourism Education*, 6.

<sup>27</sup> Petrova, P. & Mason, P. (2004). The value of tourism degrees: a Luton-based case study. *Education and Training*, 46(3), 153-161.

<sup>28</sup> Roney, S. A. & Öztin, P. (2007). Career perceptions of undergraduate tourism students: a case study in Turkey. *Journal of Hospitality, Leisure, Sports and Tourism Education*, 6, pp. 9.

<sup>29</sup> Baum, T. (2006). *Human resource management for tourism hospitality and leisure*. London: Thomson.



necessary data from the students. Statistical analysis will then be used to identify trends and relationships in the data. The methodology is adapted to the purpose of the study, which is to understand the perceptions and preferences of students regarding careers in the tourism industry. The established hypotheses are clear and tested through data analysis to prove the influence or not of various factors on students' preferences and perceptions.

In reviewing the literature, the study presents a summary of previous research regarding student perceptions of the field of tourism and hospitality at an international level. This summary is important to set the context and to compare the results of the study in Albania with those of other countries.

While the quantitative method was used to present concrete quantitative data on the perceptions of the students of "Luigj Gurakuqi" University, from four study branches: Finance, Business Administration, Tourism and Informatics, through the questionnaire developed in the university premises.

### **3.2. Description of the questionnaire and data collection process**

After reviewing the relevant literature, a questionnaire with 12 closed questions was drawn up, 6 of which are demographic in nature, another 5 that evaluate the perceptions of the participating students on the possibility of employment in the tourism industry and the last one that evaluates career goals in the industry of tourism through the likert scale.

### **3.3. Description of the study population and statistical techniques used for analysis**

100 students of "Luigj Gurakuqi" University participated in this study, from four study branches: Finance, Business Administration, Tourism and Informatics, through the questionnaire developed in the university premises. Of these 100 students, most of the participants were from the Informatics branch, specifically 43%, 27% from the Finance-Accounting branch, 16% from the Tourism branch and 14% from Administration-Business. The data collected from this questionnaire were initially entered into SPSS, where they were then analyzed based on the research questions and hypotheses raised at the beginning of this study. According to the calculation, the average age of the participants is estimated to be around 19 years. While the distribution by age in percentage shows that the age leading the representation in this population is 19 years old with 46% of the participants and 37% of them belong to the age of 18. Also, 68% of the participants were female and 32% were male. As for the place of residence, 87% of the respondents were from Shkodra, 6% from Malësia e Madhe, 4%

from Vau i Dejes and 3% others.

#### **IV. Results and discussions**

This section of the study analyzes the relationship between age and interest in working in the tourism industry, gender and preference for areas of work in tourism, level of interest in working in tourism and place of residence, as well as preference to work in tourism and branch of studies.

##### **1. Regression equation between age and interest to work in tourism**

**Question:** Is there a statistically significant relationship between age and interest in working in tourism

**Hypothesis H1:** There is a statistically significant relationship between age and interest in working in tourism.

To check if there is a statistically significant relationship between age and interest in working in tourism, we used simple regression analysis, where the independent variable was age and the dependent variable was interest in working in tourism. The results showed that there is a statistically significant relationship ( $F(1, 98) = 9.263, p=0.003$ ). Furthermore, the slope coefficient and Pearson's correlation coefficient have a negative sign and are statistically significant. This means that the students of "Luigi Gurakuqi" University, the older they are, the less interested they are in working in tourism. Thus, hypothesis H1 was confirmed.

##### **2. Comparison of interest by gender, place of residence and field of study**

**Question:** Is there a statistically significant difference in your interest to work in the tourism industry according to other demographic factors, such as gender, place of residence, field of study?

**H2a:** There is a statistically significant difference in your interest to work in the tourism industry by gender.

**H2b:** There is a statistically significant difference in your interest to work in the tourism industry by place of residence.

**H2c:** There is a statistically significant difference in your interest to work in the tourism industry by field of study.

To check if there is a statistically significant difference in the interest to work in tourism according to gender, we performed a t-test for two-way control. The results showed that there is no difference: in fact, interest in women ( $M=1.455, SD=0.530$ ) is lower than for men ( $M=1.468, SD=0.507$ ), but this difference was not statistically significant ( $t(98)=-0.115, p=0.909$ ). Thus, hypothesis H2a was not confirmed.

To check if there is a statistically significant difference in the interest to work in tourism according to the place of residence, and the field of study, we performed the ANOVA analysis. Respectively, it resulted: for the place of residence ( $F(3, 96)=0.531$ ,  $p=0.662$ ), for the field of study ( $F(3, 96)=6.078$ ,  $p=0.001$ ). Based on these results, hypothesis H2b was not confirmed, while H2c was confirmed.

### 3. Factor Analysis

**Question:** What are the potential factors that influence career goals?

**Hypothesis:** There is a statistically significant relationship between the dimensions and career goals.

#### Independent Variables

Based on the combinations of some existing literature, five dimensions are used in the study: Perspective and confidence in the tourism industry, Care for personal and professional development, Values and commitment to the tourism industry, Willingness to adapt and relocate, and Emotional adjustment in the work in the tourism industry. Based on the Parasuraman model (1985), we will only present the data obtained from factor analysis and reliability analysis.

**Perspective and Confidence in the Tourism Industry:** To measure "Perspective and Confidence in the Tourism Industry," six questions were included in the questionnaire. From the factor analysis, using the eigenvalue greater than one criterion, one factor was extracted with element 'weights' ranging from 0.705 to 0.831 with an average of 0.755. This factor explained about 75.4% of the total variance. The reliability analysis results showed a Cronbach's Alpha of 0.739. Given the nature of this study, the result is acceptable.

**Table 1: Elements Used to Measure the Indicator 'Perspective and Confidence in the Tourism Industry' (N=100)**

Elements	Weights
1. I believe that the tourism industry offers promising career opportunities.	0.752
2. I consider work in the tourism industry to be financially fulfilling.	0.705
3. I believe that technological advancements positively impact the role of work in the tourism industry.	0.790
4. I believe that the tourism industry will need many specialized employees in the future.	0.831
5. I appreciate the career development potential that the tourism industry offers in Albania.	0.745
6. I am willing to work in the tourism industry to achieve my professional goals.	0.707

Note: All questions were measured on a scale from 1 - Very Poor to 5 - Very Good.

**Care for Personal and Professional Development:** To measure the variable 'Care for Personal and Professional Development,' three questions were included in the questionnaire. From the factor analysis, using the eigenvalue greater than one criterion, one factor was extracted with element weights ranging from 0.812 to 0.915 with an average of 0.875. This factor explained 76.7% of the total variance. The reliability analysis results showed a Cronbach's Alpha of 0.847. Given the nature of this study, the result is acceptable.

**Table 2: Statements Used to Measure the Indicator 'Care for Personal and Professional Development' (N=100)**

Statements	Weights
1. I think I am academically well-prepared for a career in the tourism industry.	0.812
2. I believe there are many opportunities for growth and advancement in a career in the tourism industry.	0.915
3. I am interested in pursuing further education or specific training for the tourism industry.	0.897

**Note:** All statements were measured on a scale from 1 - Strongly Disagree to 5 - Strongly Agree.

**Values and Commitment in the Tourism Industry:** To measure the variable 'Values and Commitment in the Tourism Industry,' four questions were included in the questionnaire. From the factor analysis, using the eigenvalue greater than one criterion, one factor was extracted with element 'weights' ranging from 0.757 to 0.857 with an average of 0.811. This factor explains 81.1% of the total variance. The reliability analysis results showed a Cronbach's Alpha of 0.640. Given the nature of this study, the result is acceptable.

**Table 3: Statements Used to Measure the Indicator 'Values and Commitment in the Tourism Industry' (N=100)**

Statements	Weights
1. Sustainability and responsible tourism practices are important factors in considering my career.	0.843
2. I consider the balance between private life and work in the tourism industry to be satisfactory.	0.857
3. I believe that integrity and professional ethics are important qualities for success in my career in the tourism industry.	0.757
4. I believe that practical experience is important for success in the tourism industry.	0.788

**Note:** All statements were measured on a scale from 1 - Strongly Disagree to 5 - Strongly Agree.

**Adaptability and Mobility Readiness:** To measure the variable 'Adaptability and Mobility Readiness,' two questions were included in the questionnaire. From the factor analysis, using the eigenvalue greater than one criterion, one factor was extracted with element weights of 0.766 each. This factor explains approximately 58.7% of the total variance. The reliability analysis results showed a Cronbach's Alpha of 0.29. Given the nature of this study, the result is acceptable.

**Table 4: Statements Used to Measure the Indicator 'Adaptability and Mobility Readiness' (N=100)**

Statements	Weights
1. I appreciate the opportunity to work in a diverse and multicultural environment.	0.766
2. I am willing to explore job opportunities abroad to broaden my perspective and gain experience in the global tourism industry.	0.766
<b>Note:</b> All statements were measured on a scale from 1 - Strongly Disagree to 5 - Strongly Agree.	

**Emotional Adaptation in the Tourism Industry:** To measure the variable 'Emotional Adaptation in the Tourism Industry,' two questions were included in the questionnaire. From the factor analysis, using the eigenvalue greater than one criterion, one factor was extracted with element weights of 0.833 each, with an average of 0.833. This factor explains approximately 69.4% of the total variance. The reliability analysis results showed a Cronbach's Alpha of 0.555. Given the nature of this study, the result is acceptable.

**Table 5: Statements Used to Measure the Indicator 'Emotional Adaptation in the Tourism Industry' (N=100)**

Statements	Weights
1. I consider work in the tourism industry to be emotionally fulfilling.	0.833
2. I see work in the tourism industry as an opportunity to build strong emotional connections with clients and positively impact their travel experience.	0.833

**Note:** All statements were measured on a scale from 1 - Strongly Disagree to 5 - Strongly Agree.

### **Dependent Variable**

In this study, the dependent variable is career aspirations.

**Career Aspirations:** To measure the variable 'Career Aspirations,' three questions were included in the questionnaire. From the factor analysis, using the eigenvalue greater than one criterion, one factor was extracted with element weights ranging from 0.692 to 0.781, with an average of 0.737. This factor explains 52.8% of the total variance. The reliability analysis results showed a Cronbach's Alpha of 0.541. Given the nature of this study, the result is acceptable.

**Table 6: Statements Used to Measure the Indicator 'Career Aspirations' (N=100)**

Statements	Weights
1. I have a clear plan for the steps I will take after completing my studies.	0.781
2. I feel interested in facing current trends and challenges in the tourism industry.	0.692
3. I am well-prepared to enter the job market in the tourism industry.	0.703

**Note:** All statements were measured on a scale from 1 - Strongly Disagree to 5 - Strongly Agree.

## RESULTS

During the observation of potential factors influencing career aspirations, a multiple regression analysis model was constructed. 'Career Aspirations' was used as the dependent variable. 'Perspective and Confidence in the Tourism Industry', 'Care for Personal and Professional Development', 'Values and Commitment in the Tourism Industry', and 'Emotional Adaptation in the Tourism Industry' were used as independent variables. In the first model (a), four dimensions were included as independent variables (excluding readiness for adaptation), while aspirations were the dependent variable. The results showed that the model had strong statistical significance ( $F(4, 95) = 7.086$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ), with a coefficient of determination  $R^2 = 23\%$ . However, not all partial regression coefficients were statistically significant. The correlation matrix revealed correlations among the independent variables, specifically between 'Perspective and Confidence in the Tourism Industry' and 'Care for Personal and Professional Development', as well as between 'Perspective and Confidence in the Tourism Industry' and 'Values and Commitment in the Tourism Industry', which adversely affected the regression model.

**Correlations**

		pb	k	vl	p	s
pb	Pearson Correlation	1	.744**	.705**	.203*	.231*
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000	.000	.043	.021
	N	100	100	100	100	100
k	Pearson Correlation	.744**	1	.683**	.081	.290**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000		.000	.422	.003
	N	100	100	100	100	100
vl	Pearson Correlation	.705**	.683**	1	.223*	.323**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000		.026	.001
	N	100	100	100	100	100
p	Pearson Correlation	.203*	.081	.223*	1	.381**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.043	.422	.026		.000
	N	100	100	100	100	100
s	Pearson Correlation	.231*	.290**	.323**	.381**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.021	.003	.001	.000	
	N	100	100	100	100	100

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

After removing the statistically insignificant and correlated variables, we generated a new regression with two independent variables: 'Emotional Adaptation in the Tourism Industry' and 'Values and Commitment in the Tourism Industry'. The new model showed stronger statistical significance ( $F(2, 97) = 12.48$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ), with a coefficient of determination  $R^2 = 20.5\%$ . Both partial regression coefficients were positive and statistically significant. Thus, the hypothesis was confirmed.

**Coefficients<sup>a</sup>**

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	1.165	.373		3.120	.002
	vl	.219	.081	.250	2.694	.008
	p	.319	.091	.325	3.502	.001

Dependent Variable: s

**V. Conclusions**

Student perceptions in tourism are crucial for tourism entrepreneurs and hospitality providers to understand the elements that graduates seek in their careers. By offering these attributes, the tourism and hospitality industry, not only in Albania, can enhance employment attraction for future skilled workers. Based on this, this study analyzed several influencing variables to uncover more about these perceptions.

It was confirmed that there is a statistically significant relationship between age and interest in working in tourism. This means that older students at the University "Luigj Gurakuqi" are less interested in working in tourism.

It was confirmed that there is no statistically significant difference in interest in working in the tourism industry based on gender.

It was confirmed that there is no statistically significant difference in interest in working in the tourism industry based on place of residence.

It was confirmed that there is a statistically significant difference in interest in working in the tourism industry based on the study branch.

Finally, from the multiple linear regression analysis, 'Emotional Adaptation in the Tourism Industry' and 'Values and Commitment in the Tourism Industry' have a positive impact on students' career aspirations towards the tourism industry. This validates the hypothesis formulated at the beginning of the study.

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## **THE IMPACT OF IPARD II PROGRAMME ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF RURAL TOURISM IN ALBANIA**

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### ***ABSTRACT***

The development of rural tourism stands as a key goal within the IPARD II Programme, an initiative by the European Union aimed at bolstering rural development in candidate and potential candidate countries. This study evaluates the impact of Measure 7 of the IPARD II Programme in Albania, focusing on its support for investments in non-agricultural activities, particularly rural tourism. Utilizing a quantitative approach, this research conducts a desk-based study, analyzing data provided by the Agricultural and Rural Development Agency (ARDA). The data encompasses various metrics including project numbers, grant amounts, project types, locations, and anticipated versus actual outcomes such as income, employment, profitability, and environmental performance. Albania possesses a rich rural heritage offering diverse opportunities for tourism development, yet faces challenges such as poverty, unemployment, and environmental degradation. The IPARD II Programme, through Measure 7, seeks to address these challenges by supporting farm diversification and business development. The economic, social, and environmental impacts of Measure 7 on rural tourism in Albania are explored, aiming to provide insights for policy and practice.

Methodologically, this paper employs a quantitative analysis of ARDA data, focusing on indicators such as income generation, job creation, and environmental sustainability. Results indicate positive outcomes across these domains. Economic impact assessment reveals increased income and profitability for rural businesses engaging in tourism. Socially, Measure 7 has significantly improved social conditions by enhancing living standards, fostering social cohesion through community empowerment, and creating inclusive employment opportunities, especially for women and youth. Environmentally, the measure fosters sustainability through the adoption of

eco-friendly practices and renewable energy sources. In conclusion, the IPARD II Programme, specifically Measure 7, emerges as a significant driver of rural tourism development in Albania. Its contributions extend beyond mere economic gains, encompassing social empowerment and environmental stewardship. This research underscores the potential of rural tourism to stimulate rural economies, foster social inclusion, and preserve natural resources. The findings bear implications for both the rural tourism sector in Albania and the broader implementation of the IPARD II Programme, highlighting the importance of continued support for rural development initiatives to unlock the full potential of Albania's rural tourism sector.

**Keywords:** Rural, IPARD Programme, Measure 7, Empowerment, Development

## 1. Introduction

Albania's tourism strategy for 2014-2020 places a significant emphasis on the development of rural tourism as a key component of the country's broader tourism development goals. The strategy aims to transform Albania into an attractive, authentic, and hospitable destination in Europe by capitalizing on its abundant natural, cultural, and historical resources. Specifically, the strategy focuses on enhancing the rural tourism sector by identifying and promoting rural areas with significant tourism potential (Ministry of Tourism and Environment, 2021).

The strategic plan includes the development of 30 distinct tourism destinations, with a significant number of these destinations dedicated to rural, cultural, and nature-based tourism. This approach highlights Albania's commitment to showcasing its rural heritage and natural landscapes, which include activities like hiking, horseback riding, and cultural festivals in villages. These rural destinations are planned to be developed with comprehensive marketable products and structured plans that include infrastructure improvements, service enhancements, and promotional activities to attract both domestic and international tourists (Ministry of Tourism and Environment, 2021). Additionally, the strategy recognizes the importance of sustainable practices in rural tourism development. This includes the preservation of traditional villages and landscapes, the promotion of local crafts and products, and the integration of eco-friendly practices into tourism activities to maintain the ecological integrity of rural areas (OECD, 2020). By focusing on rural tourism, Albania aims to

diversify its tourism offerings, distribute economic benefits to more remote areas, and provide tourists with a unique and immersive experience that highlights the country's rich cultural heritage and natural beauty. This targeted approach within the national tourism strategy ensures that rural areas receive the necessary attention and investment to develop into key components of Albania's tourism industry (European Commission, 2019). For the 2021-2027 period, Albania's tourism strategy is poised to continue its emphasis on rural tourism, with a goal to enhance and expand upon the initiatives set forth in earlier strategies. Here's a focused approach on how the strategy could evolve:

- *Sustainable Rural Tourism Development:* Building on the sustainable tourism foundation, the new strategy would likely focus on further integrating eco-friendly practices specifically within rural tourism. This could involve more significant investments in sustainable infrastructure in rural areas, such as eco-lodges and renewable energy projects, to minimize the environmental impact and enhance the appeal of these destinations (MDPI, 2022).
- *Expansion of Rural Tourism Experiences:* Albania's rich cultural and natural assets provide ample opportunities for diverse rural tourism offerings. The strategy might aim to further diversify these offerings by developing themed tours, such as agricultural tours, culinary experiences, and historical site tours, which showcase the unique aspects of rural Albanian life.
- *Infrastructure Improvements in Rural Areas:* To make rural destinations more accessible and tourist-friendly, strategic improvements in infrastructure would be crucial. This could include better roads, improved public transportation networks, and enhanced internet connectivity that allows rural businesses to connect with potential tourists.
- *Digital Marketing and Online Presence:* Emphasizing the digital promotion of rural tourism destinations to reach a broader audience is expected to be a key component. This might involve creating comprehensive digital platforms that offer virtual tours, booking capabilities, and detailed information about rural tourism locations.
- *Community Involvement and Empowerment:* Encouraging local community involvement in rural tourism could be a continued focus, ensuring that tourism development benefits local residents and preserves traditional cultures. Programs might be developed to train local residents in hospitality management, tour guiding, and other relevant skills.

- *Collaborative Efforts for Rural Tourism Development:* Strengthening partnerships between the government, non-governmental organizations, and the private sector could be emphasized to foster an integrated approach to rural tourism development. This collaborative effort would aim to pool resources, share knowledge, and coordinate actions to maximize the impact of tourism on rural economic development.
- *Targeted Marketing Strategies:* Recognizing the unique appeal of rural areas, the strategy might include targeted marketing campaigns that highlight the tranquility, natural beauty, and cultural richness of Albania's countryside. These campaigns could aim to attract tourists looking for authentic and immersive experiences away from urban centers.

Rural tourism represents a vital component of Albania's strategy to leverage its abundant natural and cultural resources for sustainable development. This form of tourism not only capitalizes on the unique landscapes and traditions of rural areas but also promises significant economic, social, and environmental benefits. Despite its potential, rural tourism in Albania faces numerous challenges, including limited infrastructure, insufficient investment, and the need for enhanced capacity in hospitality management (FAO, 2018).

The IPARD II Programme, specifically Measure 7, targets these issues by providing necessary funds and support for projects that aim to develop and diversify non-agricultural activities in rural regions. This measure is designed to foster economic growth, enhance social inclusion, and promote environmental sustainability through strategic investments in rural tourism (European Commission, 2019).

The importance of this research lies in its ability to provide empirical insights into the actual impacts of Measure 7, enabling stakeholders to understand the extent to which the Programme meets its objectives and contributes to the broader goal of rural development in Albania.

## **2. Literature Review**

### ***2.1 Rural Tourism and Economic Development***

Rural tourism is increasingly recognized as a vital component of economic development strategies, particularly in developing countries. Several studies have highlighted its potential to diversify income sources for rural communities, enhance economic stability, and reduce rural depopulation (Smith & Jenner, 2023; Lee, 2022). For instance, research by Smith and Jenner demonstrates that rural tourism not only bolsters local economies



through direct spending but also stimulates growth in related sectors such as agriculture, craft industries, and transport services. Similarly, Lee's findings suggest that strategic investment in rural tourism infrastructure significantly improves regional economic indicators.

In the context of Albania, Satka (2019) discusses how the unique cultural and natural resources of rural areas provide a solid foundation for developing tourism. However, the author also notes challenges such as inadequate infrastructure and limited marketing capabilities, which can hinder economic benefits. These observations align with the goals of the IPARD II Programme, which aims to mitigate such barriers through targeted financial and infrastructural support.

### ***2.2 Social Impacts of Rural Tourism***

The social implications of rural tourism are multifaceted, encompassing job creation, social inclusion, and community empowerment. According to Liu, Chiang, and Ko (2023), rural tourism has been effective in creating new employment opportunities, particularly for women and youth, thereby promoting social equity and reducing migration to urban areas. Additionally, Domi (2023) emphasizes the role of rural tourism in preserving local traditions and strengthening community ties, which contributes to social cohesion and cultural sustainability.

Research specific to Albania indicates that while rural tourism has led to improved living standards and enhanced social networks, persistent gaps in gender inclusion and youth engagement remain (European Commission, s.d.). These findings underscore the importance of designing rural tourism initiatives, like those under Measure 7 of the IPARD II Programme, that explicitly address social disparities.

### ***2.3 Environmental Sustainability in Rural Tourism***

The environmental dimension of rural tourism is critically important, particularly as it relates to sustainable land use and conservation practices. Studies by the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (2021) highlight that environmentally sustainable practices in rural tourism can lead to significant reductions in ecological footprints and promote the conservation of biodiversity. Moreover, research by the European Commission on sustainable rural tourism advocates for the integration of renewable energy sources and eco-friendly technologies to ensure long-term environmental sustainability (European Commission, s.d.). In line with these insights, the IPARD II Programme's support for projects incorporating green technologies and sustainable practices represents a crucial step forward for environmental stewardship in Albania's rural tourism sector. The initiative not only aligns with global sustainability goals

but also enhances the appeal of Albania's tourism offerings.

### ***2.4 Gap in Literature***

While substantial research has been conducted on the economic and social benefits of rural tourism, fewer studies have systematically evaluated the combined impact of specific rural development programs, such as IPARD II, across economic, social, and environmental dimensions. This gap highlights the need for comprehensive evaluations that can inform policy adjustments and enhance the effectiveness of similar programs in the future.

## **3. Methodology**

The study employs a desk-based research approach, utilizing data from the Agricultural and Rural Development Agency (ARDA). This data encompasses comprehensive information on the beneficiaries of Measure 7, including details on the number of projects, the amount of grants and type of investments, geographical distribution, and targeted outcomes. The primary data points analyzed include:

- **Project Funding:** Total investment and grant amounts to each project.
- **Type and Location of Investments:** Categorization of projects by type and their respective locations within Albania.
- **Economic Indicators:** Expected and actual incomes, profitability metrics such as Net Present Value (NPV) and Internal Rate of Return (IRR).
- **Social Indicators:** Employment creation, with a particular focus on opportunities for women and youth.
- **Environmental Indicators:** Implementation of eco-friendly practices and investments in renewable energy (European Commission, n.d.; ARDA, n.d.).

Quantitative analysis techniques are applied to evaluate the impact of the IPARD II Programme. Descriptive statistics provide an initial overview of the data, identifying central tendencies and variability in economic, social, and environmental outcomes. Further analysis involves:

- **Trend Analysis:** Examining changes over time in income levels, employment rates, and environmental impact metrics.
- **Comparative Analysis:** Assessing the performance of projects against their initially stated goals and across different regions and types of investments.

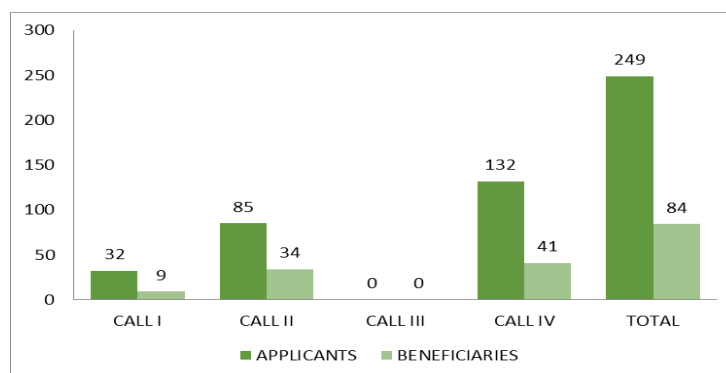
- **Impact Evaluation:** Utilizing inferential statistics to determine the causal effects of the Programme on the key outcome variables (European Commission, n.d.; Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, 2021).

#### 4. Results

Overall, across all four calls, the programme received a total of 249 applications, with 84 being approved as beneficiaries. This results in a cumulative acceptance rate of approximately 34%. The data highlights the competitive nature of the IPARD II Programme and the significant interest it has generated among potential applicants. The varying acceptance rates across different calls underscore the programme's dynamic response to the availability of funds and the quality of applications received.

Figure 1 illustrates the number of applicants and beneficiaries for the IPARD II Programme, Measure 7, focused on rural tourism across four calls for applications. In the first call, there were 32 applicants, out of which 9 were approved as beneficiaries. This indicates a relatively selective process with approximately 28% of applicants being accepted. The second call saw a significant increase in interest, with 85 applications received. Out of these, 34 were successful, resulting in a higher acceptance rate of about 40% compared to the first call. Notably, the third call had no applicants or beneficiaries. This absence of data is attributed to the fact that there was no budget allocated for Measure 7 during this call. As a result, potential applicants were unable to submit proposals, leading to a temporary halt in the programme's activities for this measure. The fourth call, however, witnessed the highest level of interest with 132 applicants. Of these, 41 were selected as beneficiaries, which translates to an acceptance rate of about 31%. Despite the high number of applications, the selection process remained rigorous, reflecting the programme's commitment to supporting high-quality projects.

Figure 1. IPARD II Programme, Measure 7, Sector of Rural Tourism: Applicants and Beneficiaries



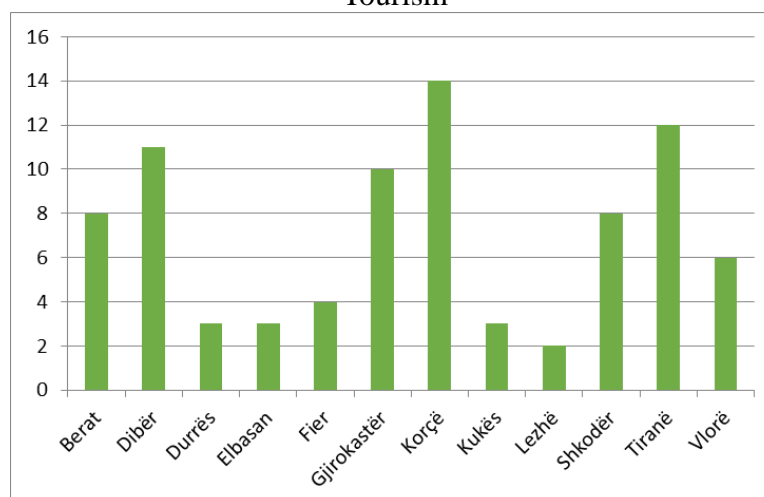
Source: ARDA (Agricultural and Rural Development Agency)

There is a diverse geographical spread of IPARD II Measure 7 beneficiaries, with a concentration in areas with strong tourism potential and cultural significance. This distribution underscores the programme's role in fostering rural tourism development across a wide range of Albanian regions, contributing to regional economic growth and the preservation of cultural heritage.

The figure 2, depicting the geographical distribution of IPARD II Measure 7 beneficiaries, highlights the regional reach and impact of the programme on rural tourism across various districts in Albania. Korçë stands out with the highest number of beneficiaries, totaling 14. This indicates a strong concentration of successful rural tourism projects in this region, likely due to its rich cultural heritage and natural attractions which make it an appealing destination for rural tourism development. Dibër follows with 9 beneficiaries, reflecting significant engagement in rural tourism activities in this area. Similarly, Gjirokastër and Tiranë each have 8 beneficiaries, showing a notable presence of IPARD II-supported projects. The historical and cultural assets of Gjirokastër, coupled with the administrative and economic significance of Tiranë, contribute to their high participation rates. Berat has 7 beneficiaries, aligning with its status as a UNESCO World Heritage Site, which attracts considerable tourism interest. Fier and Kukës both have 5 beneficiaries, while Elbasan and Vlorë each account for 4 beneficiaries. These numbers suggest a moderate level of rural tourism activity supported by the IPARD II Programme in these regions. The districts of Durrës, Shkodër, and Lezhë have fewer beneficiaries, with Durrës and Lezhë having 2 and 3 respectively, and Shkodër with 6

beneficiaries. This lower engagement may be attributed to various factors, including the availability of other tourism infrastructure or differing regional priorities.

Figure 2. Geographical Distribution of IPARD II M7 Beneficiaries on Rural Tourism



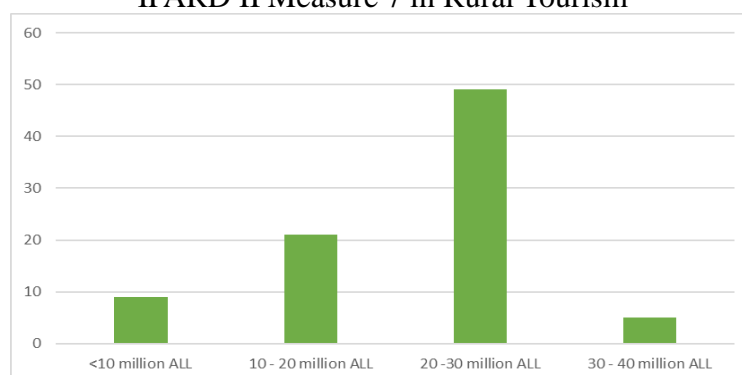
Source: ARDA (Agricultural and Rural Development Agency)

The third figure provide a detailed overview of the distribution of grant amounts awarded to beneficiaries of the IPARD II Measure 7 programme for rural tourism. The data is categorized into four distinct funding ranges, revealing significant insights into the allocation of financial resources and the number of beneficiaries within each range. The majority of the beneficiaries, a total of 49, received grants within the range of 20 to 30 million ALL. This category represents the most substantial portion of the funding distribution, indicating that a significant number of rural tourism projects require this level of financial support to achieve their goals. The concentration of grants in this range suggests a preference for funding mid-scale projects that can potentially deliver considerable impact in the development of rural tourism. Following this, the 10 to 20 million ALL category comprises 21 beneficiaries. This substantial number reflects the importance of moderate funding levels for various rural tourism initiatives. Projects within this range are likely to be those that have considerable potential but require moderate investment to scale and enhance their operations. The <10 million ALL category has the fewest beneficiaries, with only 9 recipients. This indicates that smaller-scale projects are less common or less successful in securing IPARD II grants. It suggests that while there is some support for smaller initiatives, the programme primarily

focuses on more substantial investments. Lastly, the 30 to 40 million ALL category includes 5 beneficiaries. Although this category has a minimal number of recipients, it highlights the availability of high-value grants. However, these larger grants are awarded sparingly, likely due to the stringent criteria and higher scrutiny involved in approving significant funding amounts.

Overall, the distribution of grant amounts demonstrates the IPARD II Programme's emphasis on providing significant financial support across a range of rural tourism projects, with a notable concentration on mid-range funding levels. This balanced allocation of resources ensures that both moderate and large-scale projects can thrive, thereby fostering the sustainable development of rural tourism in Albania.

Figure 3. Distribution of Grant Amounts and Number of Beneficiaries for IPARD II Measure 7 in Rural Tourism



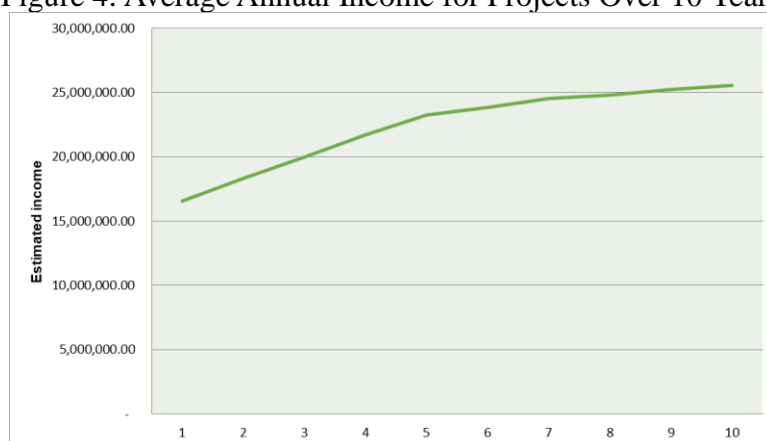
Source: ARDA (Agricultural and Rural Development Agency)

#### 4.1 Economic Impact

The economic impact of Measure 7 of the IPARD II Programme can be assessed through several key financial metrics: average income over the projected 10-year period, net current value, and the internal rate of return.

The data in Figure 4 illustrates the estimated annual income for projects over a 10-year period, revealing a steady increase in revenue generation. The average annual income across all projects is approximately 22,377,520 ALL. This robust increase highlights the significant revenue potential for businesses engaged in rural tourism, which is crucial for sustaining their operations and contributing to regional economic stability.

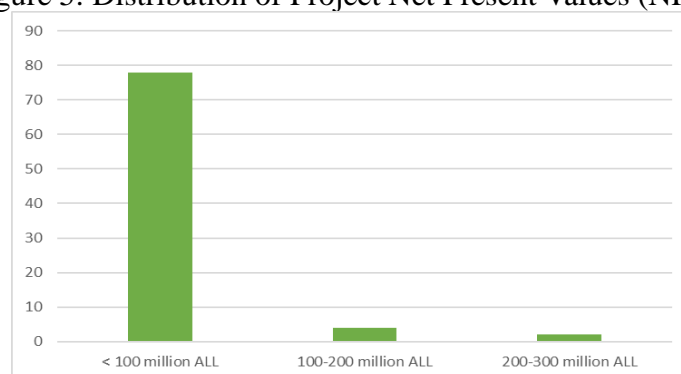
Figure 4: Average Annual Income for Projects Over 10 Years



Source: ARDA (Agricultural and Rural Development Agency)

The figure 5 provide an insightful overview of the distribution of Net Present Values (NPVs) for projects under Measure 7 of the IPARD II Programme. The data is categorized into three distinct ranges of NPV, highlighting the financial outcomes achieved by various projects.

Figure 5: Distribution of Project Net Present Values (NPVs)



Source: ARDA (Agricultural and Rural Development Agency)

The majority of the projects, a total of 78, have an NPV of less than 100 million ALL. This indicates that most rural tourism projects supported by Measure 7 are economically viable within this lower NPV range. These projects, while smaller in scale, still demonstrate substantial profitability and economic sustainability.

A smaller group of projects, totaling 4, have NPVs ranging between 100 million and 200 million ALL. These mid-range projects reflect higher

economic returns and indicate a moderate level of investment and profitability within the rural tourism sector. Finally, only 2 projects fall into the NPV range of 200 million to 300 million ALL. This minimal number of high-NPV projects suggests that achieving very high economic returns is less common but still possible within the scope of Measure 7. These projects likely represent significant investments and considerable economic impact. The distribution of NPVs across these ranges demonstrates that while most projects achieve substantial economic returns within the lower NPV range, there are opportunities for higher-value projects to also thrive. This distribution underscores the financial effectiveness and positive impact of Measure 7 in supporting a diverse array of economically viable rural tourism projects.

The analysis of the Internal Rate of Return (IRR) for the 84 projects under Measure 7 of the IPARD II Programme reveals a wide range of profitability levels across the projects. Several projects exhibit exceptionally high IRRs, with the highest reaching an impressive 90.96%. Other significant high values include 71.05%, 60.38%, and multiple IRRs above 50%, indicating that these projects are extremely profitable and offer substantial returns on investment.

The majority of the projects fall within a moderate to high IRR range, between 20% and 50%. This range showcases strong profitability and robust returns, underscoring the financial viability of most projects supported by Measure 7. These IRR values reflect well-managed investments and favorable market conditions contributing to their success. A few projects have relatively lower IRRs, such as 2.64% and 9.96%. While these projects still generate positive returns, their profitability is modest compared to others with higher IRRs. These variations might be due to differences in project scale, investment efficiency, or market conditions.

On average, the IRR across all 84 projects is approximately 29.99%. This average indicates a healthy return on investment for the projects supported by Measure 7, highlighting the programme's effectiveness in fostering economically viable rural tourism initiatives. The diverse financial outcomes, as evidenced by the distribution of IRR values, demonstrate that while a significant number of projects achieve high profitability, there are also projects with more modest returns.

The IRR analysis suggests that Measure 7 of the IPARD II Programme has successfully supported a variety of projects, many of which exhibit strong financial performance and high returns on investment. This positive economic impact is crucial for the sustainable development of rural tourism



in Albania.

#### 4.2 Social Impact

The social impact of the IPARD II Programme is evident in the employment opportunities it has created, particularly focusing on inclusion of women and youth.

Table 1: Employment Creation by Measure 7 Projects

Description	Total Number
Total New Job Created	379
Total Jobs for Women	165
New farmers under 40 years old	47

Source: ARDA (Agricultural and Rural Development Agency)

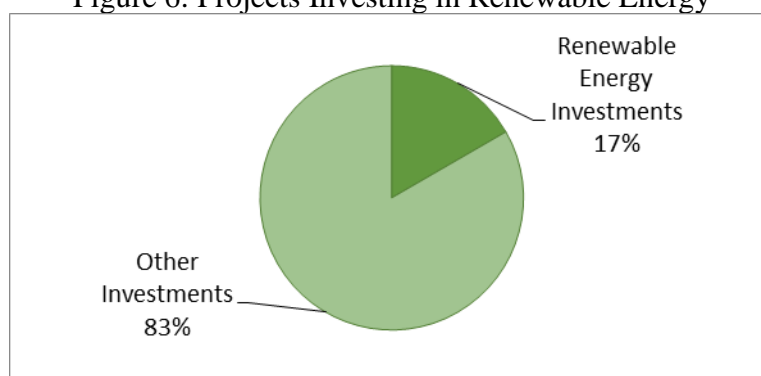
Table 1 highlights the employment impacts of Measure 7 of the IPARD II Programme, specifically targeting rural tourism in Albania. The data indicates a creation of 379 new jobs, demonstrating the programme's significant contribution to job creation in rural areas, which is essential for enhancing local economic stability. Notably, the programme has made strides in promoting gender equality within these new roles, with women filling 165 of these positions. This reflects a conscious effort to enhance women's economic participation in rural economies, where traditional employment opportunities may be limited. Furthermore, the involvement of young farmers/ entrepreneurs, with 47 individuals under 40 years old taking up new farming roles, underscores the programme's appeal to younger demographics and its potential impact on reversing the aging farmer trend. This is crucial for the sustainability of the agricultural sector, as engaging younger individuals ensures the transfer of skills and innovation necessary for future development. These figures not only reflect the success of the IPARD II Programme in creating employment but also in fostering inclusivity and sustainability within Albania's rural communities.

#### 4.3 Environmental Impact

The environmental impact of the IPARD II Programme, specifically through Measure 7, on rural tourism in Albania is significant in promoting sustainable development within these communities. The programme supports projects that integrate eco-friendly practices and the use of renewable energy sources, which are crucial in reducing the carbon footprint associated with tourism and agricultural activities. One of the notable aspects of the environmental impact is the encouragement of projects that utilize sustainable technologies. This includes investments in solar panels, energy-efficient equipment, and eco-friendly waste management systems, which help mitigate the environmental impact of tourism and farming operations. These initiatives align with global

sustainability goals and enhance Albania's rural tourism appeal by showcasing a commitment to preserving natural resources and promoting green tourism. The environmental impact of Measure 7 of the IPARD II Programme is an important element in promoting sustainable rural development in Albania, making it a model for integrating environmental sustainability into rural and agricultural development policies. These efforts are essential for ensuring that the growth of the tourism sector contributes positively to environmental conservation, making rural areas resilient and sustainable in the face of environmental challenges.

Figure 6: Projects Investing in Renewable Energy



Source: ARDA (Agricultural and Rural Development Agency)

In the context of the IPARD II Programme, a notable shift has been observed in the latest call for applications—Call 4, launched in 2022—which specifically emphasizes investments in renewable energy. This development marks a significant stride toward sustainability, as a total of 14 projects have committed to utilizing renewable energy sources. This initiative not only contributes to reducing the carbon footprint of the tourism sector but also aligns with global sustainability goals, enhancing the appeal of Albania's rural tourism by promoting green tourism practices. Interestingly, this focus on renewable energy investments is unique to the most recent call for applications. Previous calls under the IPARD II Programme did not include investments in renewable energy. This evolution in the programme's focus reflects a growing recognition of the importance of sustainable practices in fostering long-term environmental benefits and meeting the increasing global demand for eco-friendly tourism options.

By channeling resources into renewable energy, these projects from Call 4 are setting a precedent for future rounds of funding and applications within the IPARD II Programme, highlighting the shift towards more

environmentally sustainable development practices in Albania's rural areas. This strategic pivot not only enhances the environmental integrity of rural tourism projects but also ensures that Albania's tourism sector remains competitive and sustainable on the global stage.

## Conclusions

The IPARD II Programme's Measure 7 has significantly advanced the development of rural tourism in Albania, yielding substantial economic, social, and environmental benefits. Economically, the programme has increased the income and profitability of rural tourism businesses, with an average annual income of approximately 22,469,577 ALL and strong financial metrics like Net Present Value (NPV) and Internal Rate of Return (IRR), averaging 30.89%. Socially, the programme has created 379 new jobs, significantly enhancing employment opportunities, particularly for women and youth, thereby improving living standards and fostering social cohesion. Environmentally, Measure 7 has promoted sustainable practices, including investments in renewable energy, with 14 projects committing to such initiatives in the latest call for applications. This focus on sustainability aligns with global environmental goals and enhances the appeal of Albania's rural tourism sector.

To build on these successes and address remaining challenges, several recommendations are proposed. Firstly, increasing funding and support for rural tourism projects is essential. This includes providing additional financial resources and technical assistance to help projects achieve their full potential. Emphasizing and expanding support for sustainable practices, such as renewable energy and eco-friendly technologies, will further reduce the environmental footprint of rural tourism. Improving infrastructure in rural areas is crucial for the continued growth of rural tourism. Investments in roads, public transportation, and internet connectivity should be prioritized to make rural destinations more accessible and attractive to tourists. Additionally, emphasizing the digital promotion of rural tourism destinations can help reach a broader audience. Developing comprehensive digital platforms with virtual tours, booking capabilities, and detailed information about rural tourism locations can significantly boost tourist engagement.

Encouraging greater involvement of local communities in tourism development can ensure that the benefits are widely shared. Training programs in hospitality management, tour guiding, and related skills should be offered to local residents to enhance their capacity to participate in and

benefit from rural tourism. Strengthening partnerships between the government, non-governmental organizations, and the private sector can foster an integrated approach to rural tourism development. Collaborative efforts can pool resources, share knowledge, and coordinate actions to maximize the impact of tourism on rural economic development. Furthermore, marketing campaigns that highlight the unique appeal of rural areas—such as their tranquility, natural beauty, and cultural richness—can attract tourists seeking authentic and immersive experiences. These campaigns should aim to differentiate Albania's rural tourism offerings from other destinations. Diversifying tourism products and experiences, such as agritourism, eco-tourism, cultural heritage tours, and adventure tourism, will attract a broader spectrum of tourists and extend the tourism season. Implementing capacity-building programs and educational workshops for rural entrepreneurs and local communities on sustainable tourism practices, marketing strategies, business management, and customer service will improve the overall quality and sustainability of rural tourism offerings. Providing additional financial incentives and grants specifically targeted at innovative and high-potential tourism projects will encourage further investment and development.

Finally, establishing a robust monitoring and evaluation system to regularly assess the impact of funded projects will help identify best practices, areas for improvement, and ensure accountability in the use of funds. By adopting these recommendations, the IPARD II Programme can further strengthen its support for rural tourism development, ensuring sustainable economic growth, social inclusion, and environmental preservation in Albania's rural areas.

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## **DENTAL TOURISM IN ALBANIA – TRENDS, GROWTH, OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES FOR A SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT**

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### ***ABSTRACT***

Dental tourism represents an emerging segment of the tourism industry that has experienced substantial growth over the past few decades. This field is influenced by a variety of factors that pertain to its current and prospective economic, social, and environmental repercussions, while simultaneously addressing the needs of visitors, the industry, the environment, and the host communities. Albania is frequently characterized as a hidden gem for tourism in Southeastern Europe; however, it also demonstrates considerable capacity for providing dental treatments, which may facilitate the development of dental tourism. While Europe boasts a highly competitive landscape in this regard, with notable players such as Hungary, Croatia, Greece, Bulgaria and Poland this article seeks to contribute to the discourse surrounding the positioning of Albania within the dental tourism sector, guided by specific evaluative indicators. When considering factors such as general infrastructure, tourism infrastructure, dental facilities, environmental and natural resources, as well as cultural and artistic offerings, Albania illustrates significant potential for the advancement of dental tourism. Nevertheless, it is imperative to acknowledge that numerous challenges lie ahead that must be addressed to fully realize this potential.

**Keywords:** *Dental tourism, travel and tourism index, sustainability.*

### **1 Sustainability in dental tourism**

The article aims to provide an overview of dental tourism in Albania, comparing it to other countries that have demonstrated long-term sustainability in this field. This comparison is based on specific selection criteria that will be elaborated upon later in the text. However, to understand what makes certain countries more competitive and successful in the long-term in dental tourism, it is essential to consider an analysis of

the sustainability aspects of this trend. The article tends to bring an insight in the general mapping of dental tourism of Albania related to some other countries that have traditionally shown long term sustainability in this field, based on some selection criteria that will be detailed onwards. Beyond that, to understand what makes certain countries more competitive and successful in the long-term within dental tourism, it is essential to consider an analysis of the sustainability aspects of this trend.

### **1.1 Factors influencing environmental sustainability in dental tourism**

In 2015, the carbon emissions were calculated for the publicly funded dental service in England using a hybrid approach of both LCA and environmental input-output analysis. Carbon emissions were classified as: 1. Core emissions: originating from within the health care site 2. Community emissions: emanating from outside the health care site (e.g., staff and patient travel, community prevention) 3. Supply chain emissions: embedded in the products purchased, such as dental supplies, instruments, and equipment. The highest carbon dioxide in dentistry comes from community emissions, followed by the supply chain. Travel is concerning as it contributes both to CO<sub>2</sub> emissions and has a direct impact on population health and quality-adjusted life years (QALYs) via air pollution, noise and accidents (Duane, Steinbach, et al. 2019).

While we claim for sustainability in the overall development, in dental tourism we can detect three main factors that influence it.

External factors for sustainable dentistry hinges on three key areas: formal policy, professional education, and research. Policies should involve dental professionals, require sustainable metrics, incentivize manufacturers, revise IPAC policies, and promote transparency in environmental reporting. Education should integrate sustainability into curricula and encourage leadership, while research should focus on understanding environmental impacts and developing eco-friendly dental practices.

Dental teams, as factors within the sector can significantly contribute to a sustainable health system. Internal process changes include reducing practice energy use, work-related travel, and promoting prevention to lower future care needs. Encouraging staff to use public or active travel and improving energy efficiency in dental practices are key steps. Beyond that, better management of nitrous oxide and waste processes, as well as more research into their environmental impacts, is essential. Community emissions can be addressed by informing patients about the environmental impact of travel and promoting environmentally friendly dental products. Community prevention programs and on-site preventive care can further



reduce travel emissions. For supply chain emissions, moving from a linear to a circular economy by challenging the need for products, preferring sustainable options, and engaging with suppliers is crucial. Detailed product environmental analysis and encouraging manufacturers to produce eco-friendly products are necessary steps.

Lastly, sustainable change in dentistry must be practical, affordable, socially acceptable, and ethical. It implies a shift in behavior among practitioners, staff, and patients through awareness and education about environmental impact and sustainable alternatives. Social acceptance of sustainable practices is growing, and while these choices are perceived as lower cost for society, they may initially be expensive for general practitioners, making them less affordable (Roberts 2018). Ethically, a sustainable dental system should respect justice by using resources fairly, practice beneficence by benefiting patients, and avoid harming others (nonmaleficence). Currently, these ethical standards are not fully met in dentistry.

### **1.1.1 Sustainability and practice reputation**

Sustainability can boost a practice's marketability and reputation. Promoting eco-friendly initiatives not only supports sustainability but also enhances the practice's public image. According to a study, nearly 75% of millennials are willing to pay more for sustainable products and prefer companies with strong environmental commitments (Nielsen, 2015). Another study revealed that 21% of participants would choose a brand based on its sustainability efforts. These insights underline the importance of adopting sustainable practices in dentistry and effectively communicating them to current and prospective patients. There is interest from the dental team in how to become more environmentally sustainable, however, there is a lack of awareness on how best to accomplish this.

## **2 Mapping dental tourism**

Mapping the development of dental tourism and accurately determining the number of tourists seeking dental care is challenging. However, to compare countries and identify their comparative advantages in this sector, a literature review has been conducted. The research indicates that the countries receiving the most tourists for dental treatment include Poland, Croatia, Thailand, Turkey, Mexico, Hungary, and the Dominican Republic. This article focuses on Europe, particularly Southeastern Europe, considering the geographical context. It also examines data on the number of dentists and dental prosthetic technicians per 10,000 inhabitants as a proxy for dental service capacity. The goal is to create an index for dental

tourism competitiveness, considering relevant factors to the industry. This approach acknowledges the limitations of data access, such as the exact number of dental tourists, the qualifications, and reputation of dentists and dental clinics, and types of certifications.

### 2.1 Dental Services Assessment

When considering dental tourism as an alternative to receiving dental care in one's home country, a crucial criterion is the standard of dental service in the host country. Various literature reviews suggest a range of criteria that the dental services in the host country must meet. For this analysis, the Dental Service and Infrastructure Subindex will be formed of the following items:

Dental clinics with certification/accreditation schemes (DS1) (Elliott-Smith, 2010; Fetscherin and Stephano, 2016)

Qualified and competent dental professionals (DS2) (Turner, 2008; Ungureanu and Mocean, 2015)

High quality/standard of dental care (DS3) (Fetscherin and Stephano, 2016; Kovacs and Szocska, 2013; Österle et al., 2009; Turner, 2008)

Reputation of hospitals/facilities and doctors (DS4) (Fetscherin and Stephano, 2016)

As mentioned, finding a common basis for comparing the certification of dentists and clinics, or measuring the reputation of hospitals, is challenging due to the different medical schemes, policies, and regulations in place. However, the total number of certified dentists and dental prosthetics per 10,000 inhabitants is used as a proxy for dental service capacity. Data for this analysis is retrieved from the Health Data Observatory for the year 2019.

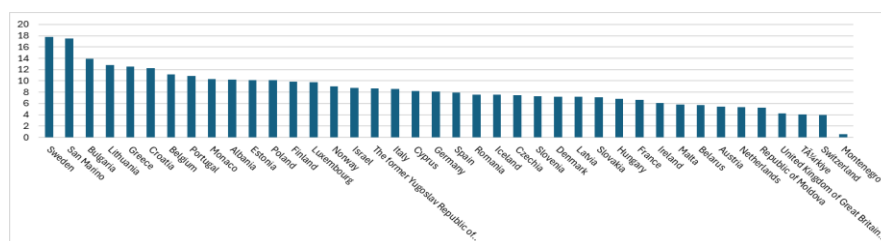


Figure 1

Number of dentists per 10 000 inhabitants

From the graph above, we observe that countries such as Sweden, San Marino, Bulgaria, Lithuania, Greece, Croatia, Belgium, Portugal, Monaco, Albania, Estonia, and Poland have at least 10 certified dentists per 10,000 inhabitants. This indicates a substantial capacity to accommodate more patients, which is beneficial for the dental tourism industry. The World

Health Organization (WHO) recommends a dentist-to-population ratio of 1:7,500. From the perspective of dental tourism, countries with a higher number of dentists per 10,000 inhabitants are more likely to develop a robust dental tourism sector. This is further enhanced by their attractiveness as tourist destinations.

## 2.2 Travel and tourism competitiveness Index

The UN WTO has developed an index regarding Traveling and Tourism Competitiveness that is basically compounded of 5 main qualities of a country which are Enabling Environment, Travel and Tourism Policy and Enabling conditions, Infrastructure and Natural and Cultural Resources. Each one of these qualities is further explained from other items as in the figure below.

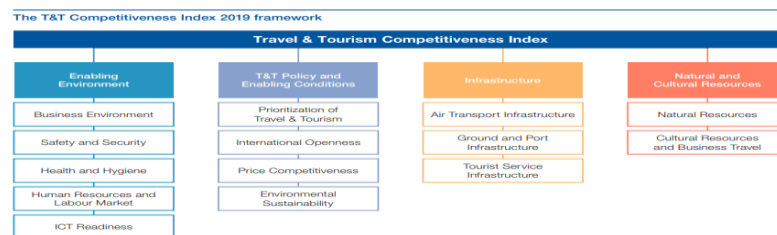


Figure 2  
Travel and Tourism Competitiveness Index

This index represents merely one component of the broader dental tourism competitiveness indicator; however, other crucial factors also contribute to the attractiveness of dental tourism destinations. These factors include the capacity of the dental industry, its reputation, certification standards, and overall quality of care provided.

The examination of the weight assigned by individuals to dental services versus other indicators when making decisions regarding dental tourism is an area ripe for further research. Understanding the relative importance of these factors can provide valuable insights into consumer behavior and preferences in the context of dental tourism.

### 1.1.2 Subindex for Travel and Tourism Competitiveness

Subindexes for Travel and tourism competitiveness Index (2019) are developed from UNWTO. Two-thirds of the dataset for the TTCI is statistical data from international organizations, with the remaining data based on survey data from the World Economic Forum's annual Executive Opinion Survey, which is used to measure concepts that are qualitative in nature or for which internationally comparable statistics are not available for enough countries.

The first one is related to Enabling environment for travel and tourism, concerning issues such as Business environment, Safety and security, Health and hygiene, Human resources and labor market and ICT readiness. Each one of these subindexes varies from one to seven(Best) points.

Country	Business Environment	Safety and security	Health and hygiene	Human resources and labour market	ICT readiness	ENABLING ENVIRONMENT SUBINDEX
Albania	4.02	5.77	5.28	5.08	4.69	4.97
Belgium	4.83	5.65	6.54	5.29	5.83	5.63
Bulgaria	4.43	5.19	6.73	4.59	5.19	5.22
Estonia	5.07	6.24	6.34	5.07	6.11	5.77
Greece	3.93	5.58	6.49	4.7	5.22	5.18
Croatia	3.78	5.87	6.33	4.12	5.17	5.05
Hungary	4.31	5.83	6.64	4.6	5.27	5.33
Lithuania	4.68	5.86	6.91	5.06	5.64	5.63
Poland	4.26	5.62	6.3	4.76	5.51	5.29
Portugal	4.66	6.28	6.04	5.09	5.55	5.52

Figure 3. Enabling environment

From the table we can distinguish that in general Baltic countries such as Estonia and Lithuania have the highest score regarding an enabling environment for travel and tourism regarding safety, hygiene, human resources and ICT readiness, followed by Belgium and Portugal and then the other countries and Albania the lowest score. These results are in line with the development and the functioning of the institutions of the country.

Country	Prioritization of Travel & Tourism	International Openness,	Price competitiveness	Environmental sustainability	T&T policy and conditions subindex
Albania	5.03	2.42	5.26	4.3	4.25
Belgium	4.41	4.15	4.76	4.81	4.53
Bulgaria	4.73	3.89	5.65	4.85	4.78
Estonia	5.43	3.67	5.4	5.18	4.92
Greece	5.63	4.11	4.86	4.54	4.78
Croatia	4.87	4.16	5.05	5.1	4.79
Hungary	5.1	4.17	5.27	4.83	4.84
Lithuania	4.34	4.01	5.72	4.57	4.66
Poland	4.21	4.1	5.68	4.21	4.55
Portugal	5.74	4.23	5.05	4.18	4.8

Figure 4

T&T policy and conditions subindex, 1-7 (best)

As for the Travel and Tourism Policy and Conditions Subindex it is compounded from four indicators like Prioritization of Travel and Tourism, International Openness, Price competitiveness and Environmental sustainability.

The results show Portugal, Greece, Estonia and Albania have given a prioritization of Travel and Tourism in their policies, which will give them the advantage to experience a vast flow of tourist. Meanwhile most of the countries taken in consideration have an average international openness, Albania has the lowest score of 2,42. Regarding price competitiveness, in general terms and not especially related to dental services, most of the countries score above 5, except of Belgium and Greece which seem not to be as much competitive as the other countries in pricing of the goods and services related to tourism. Estonia and Croatia are more environmentally sustainable comparing to the other countries, with Poland and Albania that have to do a lot more in this aspect.

**Infrastructure subindex, 1-7 (best)**

Country	Air transport infrastructure	Ground and port infrastructure	Tourist service infrastructure	Infrastructure subindex
Albania	2.1	3.11	4.01	<b>3.08</b>
Belgium	4.09	5.46	5.2	<b>4.91</b>
Bulgaria	2.71	3.21	5.95	<b>3.96</b>
Estonia	2.47	4.47	5.41	<b>4.12</b>
Greece	4.77	3.85	5.75	<b>4.79</b>
Croatia	3.61	3.86	6.48	<b>4.65</b>
Hungary	3.35	4.15	4.75	<b>4.09</b>
Lithuania	2.48	4.31	4.42	<b>3.74</b>
Poland	3.21	4.26	4.52	<b>4</b>
Portugal	4.72	4.18	6.7	<b>5.2</b>

Figure 5

**T&T policy and conditions subindex, 1-7 (best)**

In the Infrastructure subindex we can distinguish Portugal with the highest score of 5.2, which is mostly derived from the high tourist service infrastructure (6.7 out of 7). Albania is the one that scores the lowest level of 3.08, meaning that has relatively low scores for air transport infrastructure, ground and port infrastructure and tourist service infrastructure. Greece has the highest score in the air infrastructure comparing to the other countries, while Belgium has the highest score in ground and port infrastructure.

Figure 6. Natural and Cultural subindex, 1-7 (best)

	Natural resources	Cultural resources and business travel	Natural and cultural resources subindex
Albania	2.89	1.19	<b>2.04</b>
Belgium	2.54	3.69	<b>3.11</b>
Bulgaria	3.69	2.08	<b>2.89</b>
Estonia	2.4	1.56	<b>1.98</b>
Greece	3.52	3.33	<b>3.42</b>
Croatia	4.44	2.76	<b>3.6</b>
Hungary	2.71	2.33	<b>2.52</b>
Lithuania	2.29	1.45	<b>1.87</b>
Poland	3.2	2.98	<b>3.09</b>
Portugal	4.01	4.09	<b>4.05</b>

From the scores of Natural and Cultural Resources subindex we can see that Croatia and Portugal have a higher competitive advantage in the natural resources, while Portugal has also more cultural resources and business travel according to the TTI framework.

The current indexes encapsulate only a singular dimension of the comprehensive dental tourism competitiveness framework. However, a multitude of additional factors plays a pivotal role in shaping the attractiveness of destinations for dental tourism. Among these factors are the dental industry's capacity, its reputation, the rigor of certification processes, and the adherence to established standards of care. Collectively, these elements are integral to the decision-making processes of prospective dental tourists. In this context, it is essential to investigate the extent to which individuals prioritize dental services in comparison to other significant indicators when deliberating on destinations for dental tourism. This inquiry raises important questions about consumer behavior, particularly regarding how potential patients weigh various attributes—such as cost, quality of care, accessibility, and the perceived expertise of dental practitioners—against one another.

Such an analysis could yield critical insights into the criteria that influence patient choices in the realm of dental tourism. Furthermore, recognizing the interplay of these factors may inform strategies for destinations seeking to enhance their appeal within this competitive market. Given the evolving landscape of dental tourism, empirical research aimed at quantifying these preferences and the decision-making processes involved remains a vital avenue for future investigation. Understanding how consumers navigate the multitude of options available, particularly in light of regional competition,

will be crucial to advancing the discourse surrounding dental tourism and optimizing the services offered in various locales.

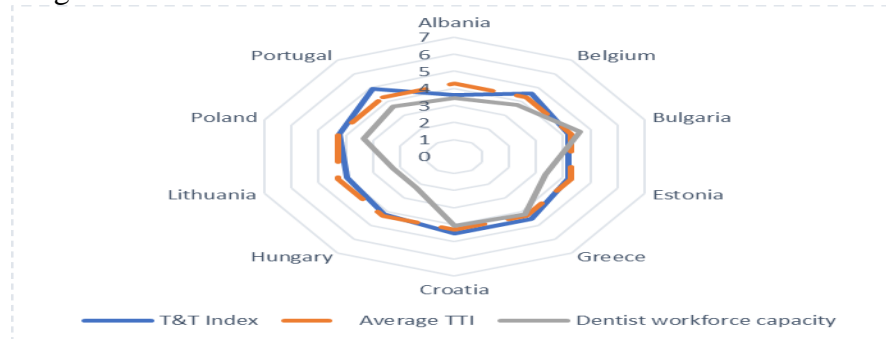


Figure 7. Authors visualization on data

### Conclusions

Concerning the dimension of dental services, Albania exhibits considerable potential for the advancement of dental tourism. The prioritization of the travel and tourism industry serves as a significant driving force for enhancing the country's performance in the relevant tourism sub-index.

Nonetheless, several challenges persist that hinder the full realization of this potential. Notably, Albania faces shortcomings in establishing a secure and conducive business environment, as well as deficiencies in infrastructure that are integral to supporting a robust dental tourism framework. To address these challenges effectively, it is essential to foster improved collaboration among various stakeholders, including government entities, dental agencies, marketing organizations, and academic institutions. Such partnerships can facilitate the development of comprehensive strategies that not only enhance the service offerings in dental tourism but also contribute to the establishment of a more favorable regulatory and operational landscape. Still, Croatia and Greece remain two of the the best competitors in the region regarding the dental tourism sector. By aligning the interests and resources of these diverse actors, Albania can create a more resilient and competitive dental tourism sector, ultimately improving its attractiveness to prospective patients from both domestic and international markets.

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## **LOGISTICS AND CIRCULAR ECONOMY AS LIMITING ELEMENTS OF THE TOURISM ECONOMY OF THE MEDITERRANEAN NON-EU COUNTRIES OF WESTERN BALKANS**

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### ***ABSTRACT***

Numerous doubts and open questions are hidden in the title of this paper. Anyone who has even once been to the Mediterranean region of the Western Balkans (Montenegro, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Albania) is clear that the natural beauty is something that is indisputable as a touristic value and immeasurable potential. How objective is that potential in agreement with what is heard in marketing messages: eco-states, untouched nature, natural beauty, rest, enjoyment, pearls of the Adriatic, etc. There are numerous definitions of logistics and circular economy and what they all cover, and we do not intend to give them here, just as we do not intend to give our definitions either. Here we just want to emphasize a clear difference between what is often meant by the circular economy, which many do not perceive as a full economy but as a field of economics. In this sense, let's bring things down to a much lower threshold of discussion, that is, stay in the domain of the mathematics of simple calculations and see where the biggest limits are for the development of this important economic sector. So, in a logistical sense, let's ask the question of how to enable a

guest of Montenegro to pass the 224-kilometer coastline in his vehicle without having to travel 6 hours on that section in the height of the tourist season. Or how can we get to Montenegro or Albania with a challenging drive through BiH in general. How can approximately 450 cruise ships or larger vessels enter Kotor annually without it leading to a traffic collapse. Or why, on the way from the EU through Croatia and Slovenia, people from these three countries spend hundreds and thousands of collective days at the border crossings of the EU countries (Croatia, Slovenia, Greece). How can the waste produced by tourists fill up the city of Kotor and its hinterland. From the systems theory we teach our students, it is clear that the throughput of the bottleneck is equal to the throughput of the entire system, or the productivity of the weakest machine in the chain defines the productivity of the entire system. Let's translate that into logistics and travel conditions on the route Herceg Novi-Tivat-Budva-Bar-Ulcinj (or respectively Skadar-Drač-Valona-Saranda in Albania or Mostar-Neum in BiH) and let's first recognize the "bottlenecks" in the system and only then we are working on improving the flow between the "bottlenecks". Maybe the modalities are in combinations of potential different types of traffic or definitely not in the improvement of transport between "non-critical locations". Now let's take a look at the so-called return logistics as part of the circular economy because it is closely correlated with the "tourist perception" that someone gets when staying in Montenegro. With its approximately 600,000 inhabitants, Montenegro "produces" approximately 600 tons of waste per day. With tourists whose peak visits are dominant in July and August, this is an additional 200-300 tons of waste per day. Similarly in Albania. How to deal with everything that this wave of tourists brings in two months, as well as in other months of the year, this paper tries to investigate and explain.

## **1 Introduction**

In one analytical presentation that this paper tries to follow, the goal was to achieve, from the abundance of statistical data generated by each country and each area of tourism, that these data, with their minimum, confirm the thesis in which areas must be invested the most in the coming decades. Montenegro is proclaimed a country of tourism and ecology, which means that more or less everything should be subordinated to tourists and, of course, ensure a pleasant life for the hosts (good standard, high quality of life, etc.). In recent times, such an epithet has increasingly been attributed to Albania as well (for example, 3.7 million tourists in 2014, 7.5 million in 2022, or even 614,000 in April 2023). Also, Bosnia and Herzegovina, with

its numerous offer of tourist content, is making it from the former dominantly industrial republic of ex-Yugoslavia to be viewed as a serious tourist power in the eyes of the world. However, these three countries with approx. 6 million inhabitants and annual income from tourism (approx. 3 billion euros for 2023, e.g. Montenegro will record 2,613,306 tourists in 2023, of which 96.3% are foreigners with 16,389,279 overnight stays and an income of of 1.36 billion euro) are still very far from e.g. Croatia with approx. 4 million inhabitants and is a member of the EU (19.5 million tourists, approx. 12.9 billion euros for 2023 or according to some data as much as 14.6 billion euros). Or Slovenia, which registers 5.8 million tourist arrivals and 15.3 million overnight stays). Of course, in all economic and other analyses, data on where tourists come from is very important. E.g. data for Albania indicate that the largest number of tourists (approx. 75%) come from the region of Southeast Europe (neighboring countries), which consequently shows the way of arrival as well as the level of consumption, etc. This work does not intend to only detect problems, but to offer some logical solutions, and how "logical" they are (technically, economically, technologically, socially,...) will be evaluated by time and competent experts. Where to start from?

<i>Number of overnight stays</i>	
<b>Bosnia and Herzegovina</b>	<b>3.690.514</b>
<b>Montenegro</b>	<b>16.389.279</b>
<b>Albania</b>	<b>6.346.324</b>
<b>Croatia</b>	<b>90.040.000</b>

Table 1 Number of overnight stays in the countries of the region<sup>1</sup>

## 2 Detection of key problems

### 2.1. Border crossings

Let's recognize at the beginning those "bottlenecks" in terms of logistics/sector (LS) as well as circular economy (CE). Let's start from

<sup>1</sup> Official statistics (BiH, CG, CRO, ALB)

[https://bhas.gov.ba/data/Publikacije/VremenskeSerije/TUR\\_01.xls](https://bhas.gov.ba/data/Publikacije/VremenskeSerije/TUR_01.xls), <https://dzs.gov.hr/>, <https://www.monstat.org/cg/>, <https://www.instat.gov.al/en/home.aspx>

Montenegro and see what the border crossings are like at the entrance to Montenegro, Albania and Bosnia and Herzegovina. Border crossings? To the greatest extent, at the entrance to Montenegro, poorly organized, cramped, the flow of vehicles and the software control of passenger documents are at a catastrophically bad level, so the summer crowds are huge and weekend tourism or holidays a mission impossible. How to explain that at the crossings to Croatia, Serbia, Albania or Bosnia and Herzegovina, there are usually hours of waiting on the Montenegrin side during seasonal or weekend rush hours. Or that e.g. the border crossing towards Bosnia and Herzegovina on the Tara River still takes place today in improvised containers instead of the facility that was built by Montenegro as a donation from the EU more than 10 years ago. Today, this building is almost completely devastated due to lack of use. Due to this way of working, Montenegro loses millions of euros from potential tourism with its neighbors (BH, CRO, IT, ALB, SRB), because whoever experiences what it means to enter Montenegro during the peak season, tries to avoid them for the rest of his life. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, the EU invested significant funds for the arrangement of border crossings with Croatia and Serbia, even much more than it invested, for example, in higher education. But the crowds in all seasonal peaks are unreal, which clearly shows that the intention of the EU was not even to speed up the flow there, but to strengthen the border towards the EU as much as possible and make it more difficult to cross. As a country in the extreme south of the Western Balkans, Albania also has numerous problems of congested border crossings, despite numerous innovations made during the last ten years. A large diaspora makes it even more difficult, especially in the summer months. Announcements of new procedures by which travelers should provide fingerprints and photo-pupils will definitely lead to a situation where citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina and Montenegro will be much closer, both financially and time-wise, to Istanbul or Antalya than Dubrovnik or Budva.

## ***2.2. Air travel and airports***

The fastest way to get to the desired destination is certainly by plane to the appropriate airport. In this sense, the most frequented airport is between Durrës and Tirana, which has a solid infrastructure and which, on an annual basis, has traffic just behind the leader of the region: Belgrade Airport. This airport also has numerous low-cost lines, which gives tourists new chances to arrive. In Montenegro, the only coastal airport is the one in Tivat, which looks like a slightly better scouting pavilion. This airport has opened the options of new low-cost flights, but it is basically quite small. Bosnia and

Herzegovina does not have an airport on the coast, and the closest one in Mostar has so many passengers that it would justify the reason for the existence of the airport building. Little is thought about the network of potential small coastal and hinterland airports in these countries, except for the ideas about the airport in Trebinje (BiH), which are as old as all tourism strategies in this region.

<i>Number of passengers by plane BiH<sup>2</sup></i>		<i>The number of passengers by plane to the countries of the region<sup>3</sup></i>	
AIRPORT	TOTAL 2023	AIRPORT	TOTAL 2023
SARAJEVO	1.362.007	BiH	2.424.716
MOSTAR	20.544	CROATIA	10.469.950
TUZLA	581.445	MONTENEGRO	2.493.209
BANJA LUKA	460.720	ALBANIA	7.280.216
TOTAL	2.424.716	TOTAL	22.668.091

Table 2

Number of plane passengers in regional and in local BiH airports

Comparing this with the Croatian Adriatic, which has international airports in Dubrovnik, Split, Brač, Zadar, Rijeka and Pula and is working on the development of small airports, it is clear why the number of air arrivals is drastically in favor of the EU neighbors.

<i>Number of passengers by plane in Croatian airports<sup>4</sup></i>	
Brač	13.000
Dubrovnik	2.139.000
Mali Lošinj	2.000
Osijek	15.000
Pula	383.000
Rijeka	162.000
Split	2.886.000
Zadar	1.083.000
Zagreb	3.102.000

Table 3. Number of plane passengers in Croatian airports

<sup>2</sup> Official airport statistics of BiH <http://www.bhdca.gov.ba/index.php/bs/doc/statistika>

<sup>3</sup> Official statistics of regional countries <https://bhas.gov.ba>, <https://dzs.gov.hr/>, <https://www.monstat.org/cg/>, <https://www.instat.gov.al/en/home.aspx>

<sup>4</sup> Official airport statistics CRO <https://dzs.gov.hr/>

### ***2.3. Road connection of the coast and tourist destinations***

A significant limiting factor that weakens the tourist experience of the beauty of Montenegro, BiH and Albania is the poor road infrastructure. In this concept of bad, inland transport in Montenegro along the sea coast leads the way. The end-to-end journey from H.Novi to Ulcinj (approx. 200 km) can take hours or an eternity. Critical places are almost all urban centers along the coast (H.Novi, Budva, Kotor, Ulcinj) and passing through them, as well as the ferry to shorten the journey through the Bay of Kotor. In Albania, significant investments have been made in the construction of highways, as well as in Bosnia and Herzegovina, but still the main tourist spots are not connected in the best way. Bypasses around large cities are poorly constructed or non-existent, so that all the benefits of expressways are "zeroed" due to these omissions. For the sake of comparison, Croatia, which in these analyzes was taken as a comparative sample for all three countries together (BIH, CG and ALB – 3 Mediterranean countries -3M) today has more than 1200 km of highways, Albania less than 200 km, Montenegro about 120 km and finally BiH about 250 km. In addition to almost twice as many km of highways as 3M combined, the geographical position of Croatia, which is leaning on Central Europe as the strongest emitting tourist area (Germany, Austria, Switzerland, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, etc.) is also an important fact.

<b>Highways length of countries in the Region</b>	<b>kilometers</b>
Croatia	<b>1341</b>
Serbia	<b>938</b>
Bosnia and Herzegovina	<b>233</b>
Albania	<b>192</b>
Montenegro	<b>41</b>

Table 4.

Highway length in countries of the WB region

### ***2.4. Sea connectivity***

A relatively small number of tourists come by sea to each of the 3M countries because modern ports for the arrival of larger ships or ferries exist in only one location in Albania (Durrës) and one in Montenegro (Bar), while Croatia has a large number of port capacities ready to receive a large number of passengers (Dubrovnik, Split, Zadar, Šibenik, Rijeka, Pula, etc.). Croatia also has a large number of maritime lines directed mainly to Italy, while the number of such lines from Albania or Montenegro is significantly

smaller. What must be recognized as a significant step forward for Montenegro is the construction of modern luxury marinas in the last 20 years (Porto Montenegro-Tivat, Bar, Budva, Herceg Novi, Bijela, Luštica Bay, Porto Novi, etc.) In this segment in BiH and Albania there are almost no events, so the question remains whether these countries are permanently distant from this segment of the tourist offer, which is growing significantly today more than ever. Of course, we should not forget cruising tourism, in which Kotor (CG) and Dubrovnik (Croatia) are the leaders, but that is a separate topic for wider elaboration.

Number of passengers in maritime traffic	
<b>CROATIA</b>	14.935.000
<b>ALBANIA</b>	1.604.774
<b>MONTENEGRO</b>	573.039
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>17.112.813</b>

Table 5

Number of maritime passengers in three regional countries<sup>5</sup>

### 2.5. Ecology, cleanliness and circular economy

What is happening with ecology as a basis for circular economy in all this. Hosts in every country make a real effort to create the impression of a clean and well-maintained environment. Of course, standing in queues, congested cities and roads on the coast are enough of a sign that exhaust gases are taking their toll. Unorganized collection of waste, as in the entire SEE region, makes serious processing impossible, and when it is known that not all landfills are up to the "task level", then the situation is very critical in this segment as well. We will ask only one question here in Montenegro: what about the old car tires, which according to some estimates, there are several million discarded in the sinkholes from Cetinje to Kolašin. Or how is it possible that the landfill in Nikšić, at the end of very porous land, is located less than 200 m from the water course and only 100 m above it. Why is Mostar, as the biggest tourist pearl of Bosnia and Herzegovina, often the dirtiest city in Bosnia and Herzegovina? Or how can we fix some extremely ugly areas for tourists and hosts so that they are not usually an

<sup>5</sup> Official statistics of regional countries <https://dzs.gov.hr/> , <https://www.monstat.org/cg/> , <https://www.instat.gov.al/en/home.aspx>

image that remains in our memories (for example, the bad entrance to the tourist part of Skadar Lake in Shkodra from the direction of Ulcinj or the entrance to Tirana). One example of the consequences of negative infrastructure is the quality of the sea on the beaches, so for example according to data from the European Environment Agency, Croatia has 95% of bathing locations (beaches) rated excellent, while Albania, for example, has less than 70%. Only Greece and Cyprus are ahead of Croatia in this evaluation. According to the ecological performance index, Croatia achieves 70.2 out of 100 points and Albania 54 out of 100 in terms of sanitary devices and safe drinking water.

## 2.6. Seasonality of tourism

As it was emphasized at the beginning of the paper, only some of the key parameters that determine the tourism of the observed 3M countries will be analyzed. We will conclude our analysis with the phenomenon of seasonality. Therefore, one of the pressing problems of the 3M countries, but also of Croatia, is the high seasonality of tourism, which results in a low contribution of tourism to other parts of the economy (i.e. a low GDP multiplier). Thus, in the three summer months, Croatia achieves 63% of overnight stays, and a similar ratio has 3M countries (50-70%). This clearly indicates how many limiting elements there are that prevent tourism from being a significant factor in the general development and raising of standards in each of the 3M countries, but also in Croatia.

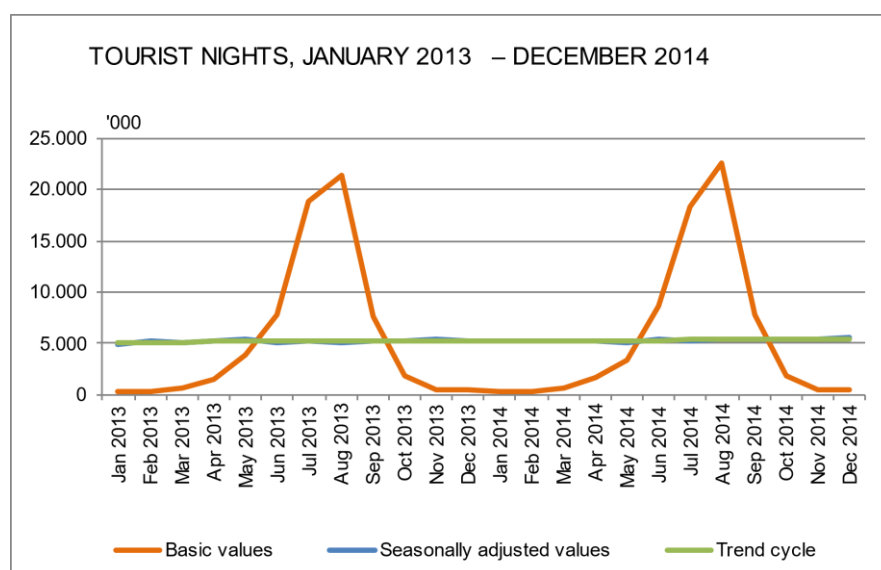


Figure 1. Seasonality of tourism in Croatia 2014



### **3 Significance of the logistics sector (LS) and the circular economy (CE) for tourism**

Along with numerous other economic sectors, and in the first place the food production sector, every serious tourist country strives to bring its logistics and circular economy sectors to the highest level of development in order to enable tourists to fully experience what that country has to offer. In this sense, one does not need to be very smart to know that tourist superpowers such as Spain, Italy or Turkey have brought this almost to perfection. Even small countries that base their economic life largely on tourism take this into account (e.g. Portugal, Slovenia or Cyprus). So how do you put things in place in LS and CP?

It was already emphasized in the previous part that during the whole year the transport along the so-called Adriatic highway becomes a "nightmare" for everyone who needs to pass through it. It is no longer a phenomenon of the two peak months of the tourist season (July-August), but becomes a "modus vivendi" during every weekend, every holiday, which is at least ½ day a year. The transport connection that Montenegro has, located between the countries of the south with a large diaspora and a significant export economy (Albania, North Macedonia, Greece, Turkey) directed towards the West and the EU, and without "daily tourist migrations", conditions and requires a significantly better and more organized road infrastructure .

In terms of logistics, each mode of transport has a specific significance for Montenegro. A small country with all types of transport can hardly carry the burden of organization and management of such a complex system, and in that sense foreign influence in this sector is a necessity. This is already evident with the port of Bar as an example of foreign ownership or management of most marinas. In addition to transportation, logistics also has its significant potential in internal logistics (logistics centers, warehouses, etc.) and in this sense, progress is already being felt, while the importance of outbound logistics in the wider context is still insignificant (the link in the trade sector for the countries of SEE). The link of the transit connection to Europe is also insignificant, because in this context, shipping traffic and the ports of Croatia, Greece and Albania have completely assumed primacy. Air traffic in the mentioned neighbors is also significantly more developed.

With the limited potential of the real economic sector, it is clear that return logistics or the circular economy is not at a significant level. Without capacities that would close the chain of potential application of waste fuels (RDF or SRF), everything remains only in stories. The number of tourist arrivals and overnight stays in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Albania,

Montenegro and Croatia and the production of waste that comes with them clearly indicates that these countries urgently need to work on ways to achieve optimal circular economy models (construction of sanitary regional landfills, ways of collecting and sorting waste, waste processing, etc.)

On the basis of statistical data and insight into the situation on the ground, and in the domains that cover the logistics sector and the circular economy sector, for 3M countries, it can be stated:

- Catastrophically bad state of border crossings and IT infrastructure;
- Bad condition of roads leading to border crossings;
- Weak condition and potential of traffic infrastructure along the sea coast;
- Weak condition and potential of the airport for air traffic;
- Mostly unregulated landfills;
- Excessive construction along the coast leading to further collapse in the long term;
- Efforts to make the primary tourist product "swimming and ten days at the beach" instead of developing an annual range of tourist content (seasonality of tourism).

#### **4 Conclusion**

Mathematically, it is easy to prove that no expressways on the sea section H. Novi-Tivat-Budva-Bar-Ulcinj will bring progress and greater flow, because the bottlenecks remain the cities through which the roads pass. The theory teaches that when balancing capacity and productivity, bottlenecks must first be solved and only then investments in the bottleneck processes should be made. If this is not clear to anyone, here is a practical illustration: The traffic jams at the entrance from Podgorica from the direction of Nikšić were solved with two decent expressways at the entrance to Podgorica (one towards Cetinje and the other towards Aluminijski kombinat), which gave the Danilovgrad-Podgorica expressway its meaning and technical justification. In this sense, the same analyzes must be done for coastal cities. Therefore, it is clear that no expressways between individual cities will bring solutions to the problem, because the problem and "bottlenecks" remain the entrances to the cities and the passage through them (Budva, Tivat, Kotor or Durrës, Valona and Tirana in Albania). Setting up bypasses in the zones above the cities will improve the situation for the next 10-20 years until they too become new construction zones along these roads. In this sense, only tunnel bypasses can be a solution because traffic

permanently remains outside of potential new construction zones and environmental problems with exhaust gases and noise are less pronounced. This is best confirmed by the existing tunnel at the entrance to Kotor, which should or had to have its continuation under the walls of the old town, completely leaving transit traffic outside of Kotor. The same solution is applicable for Budva as the most problematic city for transport in Montenegro.

Ferry in the Bay of Kotor? Good financial business, but from a technical and ecological point of view, a very sloppy solution that requires new research. From the aspect of UNESCO protection, the bridge across the Gulf will probably never get the green light, ferries are a capacitive and ecological bottleneck, and what is left? An underground tunnel at the narrowest crossing point, which is technically the most cost-effective long-term solution.

Air traffic at two international locations can be set up much better, but that also means a much better system of organization. It is certain that there is economic space for better use and cooperation with the airports in Tirana and Dubrovnik, but there are problems with border crossings and bad road traffic along the coast. In this sense, the potential construction of small airports in Trebinje and Ulcinj would make sense because it would significantly raise the threshold for using marinas and the services of low-cost companies, as well as strengthening the airports in Mostar and Podgorica for stronger and more explosive growth in the number of lines that will work to reduce seasonality.

New and better organized border crossings. It is clear that the current system of entry and exit from Montenegro at the existing border crossings is extremely bad. From the still present container houses to computers and scanners that usually process documents in 1-3 minutes per car. Improvements of joint crossings with Albania (e.g. crossing Vladimir) or BiH (crossing Vračenovići near Bileća) provide a certain improvement, but also several days of monitoring indicate the slowness of the software when processing documents on the CG side, which limits the entire line.

Maritime traffic between 3M countries should be raised to a significantly higher level, as it only happens sporadically today. In this sense, the potentials are huge, especially for the summer months when road traffic along the sea coast suffers a collapse.

## 5 Literature

- [1] Official statistics of BIH <https://bhas.gov.ba>,
- [2] Official statistics of Croatia <https://dzs.gov.hr/>,
- [3] Official statistics of Montenegro <https://www.monstat.org/cg/>,
- [4] Official statistics of Albania <https://www.instat.gov.al/en/home.aspx>,
- [5] Official statistics of Serbia <https://www.stat.gov.rs/sr-Latn>.

## ASSESSMENT OF WATER QUALITY AND IMPACT ON THE SUSTAINABLE TOURISM DEVELOPMENT IN SHKODRA LAKE

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### ***ABSTRACT***

Safety standards maintenance of water quality in lake basins directly determines the fulfillment of population needs, environmental health and sustainable tourism development. The present study is focused on the assessment of Shkodra Lake surface water quality by means of some physicochemical and biological parameters. Sampling was carried out during August, November 2023, March-April 2024 from six Lake stations. Simultaneous evaluation of water temperature, pH, dissolved oxygen and biomonitoring by *Allium cepa* L. assay was done. Mean root length and potential visible deformities of shape and color, mitotic index, frequencies of micronuclei and mitotic cells with chromosomal aberrations and types, were observed and recorded in onion roots treated with assessed water samples. The data revealed significative differences between the parameter values of Lake to the negative control and from Shiroka, Vraça, Stërbeq and Zogaj samples as compared to middle Lake. Positive correlation of physicochemical parameters and cytogenetic endpoint values was detected mostly at the periodic assessments of August 2023. The diminution of DO concentration, significant increase of temperatures, induced mitodepressive activity and screening of frequent chromosomal aberrations as: stickiness, breaks and fragment, c- Mitosis and micronuclei on onion roots indicated poisonous effects and highlighted serious risk of water pollution closed to the most frequented locations (Shiroka, Zogaj and Shegani Eye) and massively loaded tourist seasons in Shkodra Lake.

**Keywords:** *Shkodra Lake, environmental health, Allium cepa L. assay, water physicochemical parameters, sustainable tourism development*

## **Introduction**

Albania is distinguished for its favorable geographic position, Mediterranean climate conditions, rich biodiversity and cultural heritage that allow the multi-faceted development of the tourism industry, a decisive factor for increasing the level of employment and economic incomes. The commitment efforts and attainments of the last decade on the viability of tourism services satisfying the increasing demands and safeguarding the environment has improved the positive image of the country at regional and international level, which after the global pandemic of 2020 turned into a growing tourist attraction. The abundance of natural aquatic resources creates the priority to develop the tourism potentials closed to freshwaters or along the coastline. It directly depends to the careful use of water capacities, the procurement of clean water and successfully facing all the mutual challenges between the development of tourism and the pursuit of valid and applicable practices aiming to achieve the sustainable development goals (SDGs) [1-4]. Conserved natural environment and protected from anthropogenic damage (especially where water resources are dominant) is an asset that sets up competitive advantages in the market of tourist destinations, conditioned by constant awareness regarding water visual qualities and keeping as low as possible the pollution level. Such objectives are crucial to be fulfilled during the planning and management of tourist activities in hydrographically rich areas [5]. Worldwide the tourism pressure over any kind of water body is galopant, entailing as mandatory to control and monitor qualitatively and quantitatively the pollution degree.

The transboundary water basin of Shkodra Lake locates at North-West of Albania and South Montenegro. The lake is a shallow crypto depression with a mean depth of 8 m, which evolved to its present stand during the Holocene period based on the continuous changes of the hydrological network and sea level. The data of paleontological and archeological studies confirm that the area around the Lake started to be populated and simultaneously affected by the activities of people established there for hunting and living during the Bronze Age [6, 7]. The Southern shore of the Lake, surrounded by the mountain ridges of Lovcen, Sutorman, Rumija and Tarabosh, is rocky, steep and rugged, while the northern and eastern shores bordering the Zeta Valley and Shkodra Lowland are marshy plain, descending gradually towards the bottom of the Lake [8]. Such lakes constitute perfect habitats to study the ecosystem dynamics because the entire taking place processes of physical, chemical and biological nature

differ largely from those of terrestrial and aerial habitats. The micropaleontological, sedimentological, palynological and geochemical studies provide reliable data that the ecological situation in the Lake since the last Earth glacial period hitherto now has been continuously conditioned, not only by climate changes, but by the exertion of waters and surrounding soils, as well [9-11]. The main Shkodra Lake tributary is Morača River, but the water regime is also supplemented and maintained by several branined streams, precipitations and underground springs. The Lake and the flowing out Buna River, constitute one of the most ecologically important areas of South-Eastern Europe, because a significant number of uni- and multicellular organisms grow, feed, shelter and reproduce there. Some of them are considered endemic and endangered [12-17]. The vulnerability to pollution is unavoidable and the resilience of the Lake is weakening, mainly due to the tourist activities located in the vicinity of Lake perimeter, the surrounding wetlands used as agricultural land and the dense algae blooming from summer- to late autumn time.

Combined multiparametric monitoring and assessments are necessary to preserve the quality of water from the deposition of toxic substances, the degree of their solubility and concentration from direct impact of physicochemical factors and the consequential effects on the equilibrium of ecosystems functioning. These upshots can be synergistic, additive and often antagonistic [18] therefore, physicochemical analysis are insufficient to reflect the possible interactions of complex matrices that induce natural changes of dynamic lake environments, toxic effects and critical damages to the biota health and food chains where humans are involved as consumers. Rooting bulbs, seeds and seedlings of common onion (*Allium cepa* L.) are widely used as bioassays in ecotoxicological assessments of water resources. Their efficiency is related to the fact that the biological material can be easily supplied; the test is short- term because the root system grows rather quickly and provides certified and standardized data that evidence the harmful chemical effects even in trace concentrations due to the reduced number of large and clearly observable chromosomes; the ability to preserve the structure of the genetic material and the results comparability to other bioassays, mammals in particular [19-31].

The purpose of the current paper is to evaluate the quality of surface waters alongside of mostly frequented tourist locations in the Albanian part of Shkodra Lake through the application of some physicochemical and biological parameters.

## Material and methods

### *Water sampling and physicochemical analysis*

Surface water samples from the Albanian part of Shkodra Lake were periodically obtained using a special Van Dorn sampling bottle during: August 2023, November 2023 and March-April 2024 from six stations (Figure 1), respectively: Shegani Eye (S1), Stërbeq (S2), Vraka (S3), Shiroka (S4), Zogaj (S5) and Middle Lake (S6,) in accordance with [34].



Figure 1

Map of surface water sampling stations in Shkodra Lake

Filtered drinking water, which was previously tested for all selected physicochemical and biological parameters, was used as negative control (NC) sample. For the collection of water samples were used 51 polyethylene bottles that were previously: washed and disinfected with a 5% hydrochloric acid solution, rinsed with plenty of distilled water, lined with aluminum paper to prevent the damage of water quality from solar radiation and labeled according to stations and monitoring periods. After being filled with Lake water samples the bottles were immediately



transferred to the scientific laboratory of plant physiology Faculty of Natural Sciences of "Luigj Gurakuqi" University and temporarily refrigerated at 3-4°C. The following water physicochemical parameters: temperature, pH value and concentration of dissolved oxygen (DO) were monitored *in situ* using a Hydrolab DS5 multiparametric monitoring system.

#### ***Allium cepa* L. assay**

The application of the *A. cepa* assay was done following the methods of Fiskesjö [21, 33] with few modifications second Dizdari et al. [34]. Healthy and uniform size ( $\Phi = 2.5\text{-}3\text{ cm}$ ) bulbs of common onion native ecotype Drishti untreated with pesticides and growth hormones were: purchased from standard Albanian met markets of Shkodra and Malësia e Madhe localities, stored for one year under dry and dark regime and used afterwards to perform the experimental procedures. The outer dried scales of bulbs were previously removed, taking care to save intact the ring of root primordia hereupon permitting the further growth of new roots. Then the test protocols to monitor the effect of Lake water samples on onion root growth and their potency to induce morpho- and cytogenotoxicity were performed in room temperature (at  $20\pm 2^\circ\text{C}$ ) and protected from direct sun light. All experiments were carried out in a completely randomized design with ten prelabelled test tubes filled with tested water samples. On top of each test tube one onion bulb was put with the root primordia downward in the liquid followed by simultaneous 96-hours treatments of each bulb series. To examine the potential cytotoxic and genotoxic effects of tested water samples on root meristematic cells the following microscopic endpoints were observed under an optic microscope Leitz-Dioplan using a  $500\times$  oil-immersion lens and assessed after 48 hours: Mitotic Index (MI), Frequencies of interphase micronucleated cells (FMN), aberrant mitotic cells (FAC) and chromosomal aberration types (CA). Root tips of 10 mm taken from 5 bulbs, randomly chosen from each of Lake and control samples were placed on slides and the terminal root tips (1-2 mm) were cut off and used for further preparation of microscopy slides. Afterwards it was followed the standard procedure for orcein staining of squashed material [35]. The total number of mitotic dividing cells (NDC) was determined in 1000 examined cells in the field of view per each slide, then MI was scored as percent ratio of NDC. 1500 interphase and mitotic cells (300 cells/slide) have been observed also for the characterization, classification, and quantification of chromosome aberrations (CA) and calculation of FAC and FMN. The potential inducement of phytotoxicity was screened after 96 hours exposure

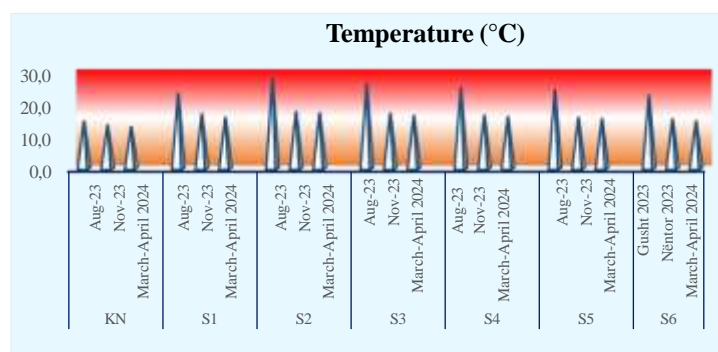
of the biological material by evidencing the observed morphological deformations and calculating the Mean Root Length (MRL) of all bulbs grown in each water series. The temporal and spatial variation of overall toxic tendency through the assessed Lake water samples was supervised, as well. All experiments were set up in a completely randomized design and the results were expressed as the mean of three replicates per sample, in total 630 biologically assessed bulbs [10 test tubes/sample x 7 (6 sampling stations + NC sample series) x 3 periodic samplings x 3 replicates]  $\pm$  standard deviation (SD). Two Analysis of Variance tests were applied to control the significant values of evaluated biological endpoints. Differences (level 5%) against corresponding NC-s were assumed statistically significant at  $P < 0.05$  and  $P < 0.001$  (One-Way ANOVA test) and between spatial and periodic Lake water samples at  $p < 0.05$  (Student New Keuls test).

### **Results and discussions**

The data of the physicochemical parameters of spatiotemporal Shkodra Lake water samples and the morphological and cytogenetic analysis assessed on onion roots (*A. cepa* L.) treated with the same samples are summarized in graphs of Figures 2-6.

As shown in Figure 2, the maximum water temperature was recorded at Stërbeq location (S2) during August 2023 sampling and the lowest in April 2024 at Middle Lake (S6). The largest thermal variation (of 5.2°C) between samples examined into the same season was detected in summer. The data correlate in general with those represented by Dizdari et al. [34, 36], but differ by 1-3 °C in the summer season values of 2011-2013 conducted by [37, 38], clearly testifying the increase of the global warming effects during the last decade in assessed region. The tendency of unceasing raise of air/water temperatures is an environmental abiotic factor that defines the occurrence of chemical reactions rate, reduces the availability of dissolved oxygen to aquatic organisms, increases the solubility of potentially poisonous substances and their water concentration, negatively affects the intensity of photosynthesis and cellular respiration of aquatic unicellular and multicellular living beings. It inevitably harms their development and reproduction, hampers the organism's life quality (including people who use lake waters) and makes them more sensitive to cope with water pollutants and parasites, being often fatal for fish populations, in particular [39].

Figure 2  
Periodic and spatial temperatures of Shkodra Lake  
surface water samples



pH is a key factor with determinant importance on species composition and distribution of Lake and shores biota. The water bodies of Shkodra Lake are typically alkaline and usually show pH values below 8. This fact reflects the specific typology and geology of its basin [40].

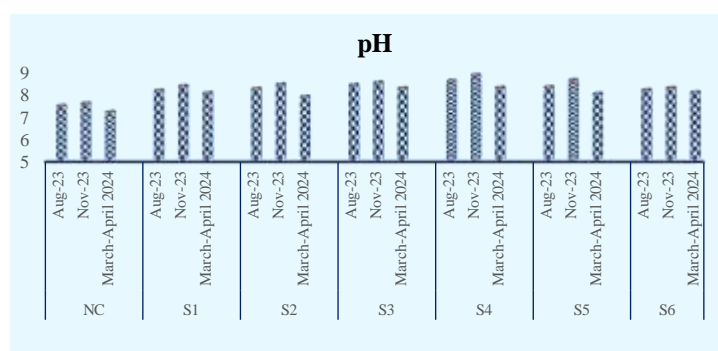


Figure 3  
Periodic and spatial pH values of Shkodra Lake surface water  
samples

The pH values obtained during spring 2024 assessments through spatial stations resulted the lowest (Figure 3), revealing based on this chemical parameter the seasonal good quality of waters [41, 42]. pH variations affect the solubility and availability of essential nutrients such as phosphorus and nitrogen. The significant changes ( $P < 0.05$ , compared to respective NC value and  $p < 0.05$  compared to S6) detected in the whole 2023 periodic samples at Shiroka, Zogaj and Vraça, might be induced by the high

summer-autumnal temperatures and extent water eutrophication due to massive biodegradation of organic matter into the entire water profiles. The potential utilization of such waters for tourism purposes (and not only) becomes seriously impaired, due to enhanced toxicity of metal, ammonium and nitrite ions [43]. The phenomena are negatively promoted by an additive combination of the sediment's resuspension (due to the shallowness of the Lake and its silty basin) and the dispersion up to the surface of heavy metals, such are: Aluminum, Lead, Nickel, Cadmium, etc., and the simultaneous significant increase of temperatures and pH values [44-47] into the same water samples during the second half of 2023.

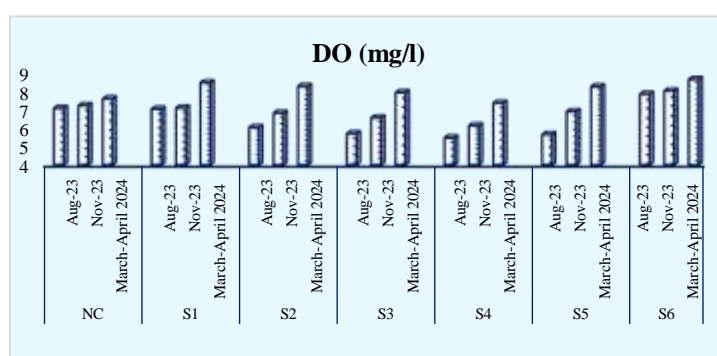


Figure 4

#### Periodic and spatial DO concentrations of Shkodra Lake surface water samples

DO concentration in the surface waters of Shkodra Lake decreased during August 2023 at Stërbeq, Vraça, Shiroka and Zogaj stations compared to the negative control and the Middle Lake (S6) samples. The correct hypothesis is that the increased respiration of Lake aquatic organisms (using much more oxygen at this period of the year) and the low solubility of oxygen gas at high temperatures might impose the findings. In such cases accompanying incidences of massive "bloating" of toxic algae and increased availability of water biotoxins incur. Recent studies [48-50] certify that lessening DO level is also attributed to the low Oxygen solubility in alkaline waters, which is consistent with the current results regarding the increase in higher pH alkaline values of periodic water samples monitored during summer-autumn of 2023. Likewise, the data clearly demonstrate the presence of organic pollutants having anthropogenic origin (detergents,

pesticides, personal care products, etc.) that negatively affect the management of chemical stresses by the Lake organisms (mainly fish and birds) and the users of these waters for hygiene and as a source of drinking water or recreation (swimming, diving, fishing, etc.), which prevent the effective control and appropriate management of water pollution sources and worsening escalation.

Environmental monitoring projects and integrated ecotoxicological studies in developing countries are using with priority plants as bioassays due to their rapid and successful reproduction, low cost, the applicability of *in vivo*, *in situ* and *in vitro* methods, the fact they do not require voluminous samples or difficult preliminary procedures of extraction and/or isolation to be carried out in laboratory conditions, the ethical advantages as compared with animal biotests, etc. The categorization of water quality in complex ecosystems such as Shkodra Lake is a complicated goal to be achieved, because solid and liquid wastes containing toxic chemicals by known and unknown pollution sources are loaded by intentional or unintentional human activities (including tourism), impeding to predict, prevent and manage their effects with the lowest noxious pressure. Longtime confrontation with organic and inorganic substances poured into the Lake from previously untreated sewage, toxicant-charged of traffic emissions deposited by precipitations, sloping mountains and effluents of nearby industries, etc., can irreparably harm the ecological health of the aquatic and surrounding environments by causing significant negative consequences, such as: pollution bioaccumulation on the organisms and biomagnification effects reaching the highest trophic levels. If oscillating values of physicochemical characteristics, as: temperatures, pH, dissolved oxygen and inconsistent cycles of water mineral nutrients append to the abovementioned factors, the overall situation becomes much more complicated for the normal development and survival of plants growing into or in areas close to these water basins [30, 51, 52].

The root is the first plant organ facing with contaminated soil or water environment and reflects the type and level of pollutants present into them. Root tips and the meristematic tissue positioned there are very sensitive to toxicity and even genotoxicity caused by contaminated solutions or water bodies. The bulbous roots of onion, which is not only a common food used and consumed in tourist culinary services, but also a broadly cultivated plant in the agricultural land alongside the eastern shore of Shkodra Lake, were grown normally in the three periodic drinking water samples with: linear elongation of 1-1.5 cm/day (3.91-4.56 cm), MI value of 13.45-14.62%; FAC < 3% of NDC and negligible occurrence of micronuclei in

interphase meristematic cells, according to the standards related to the chosen parameter values used in the present biotest to evaluate the water quality [19-21, 29]. These preliminary results allowed their further use as negative control samples.

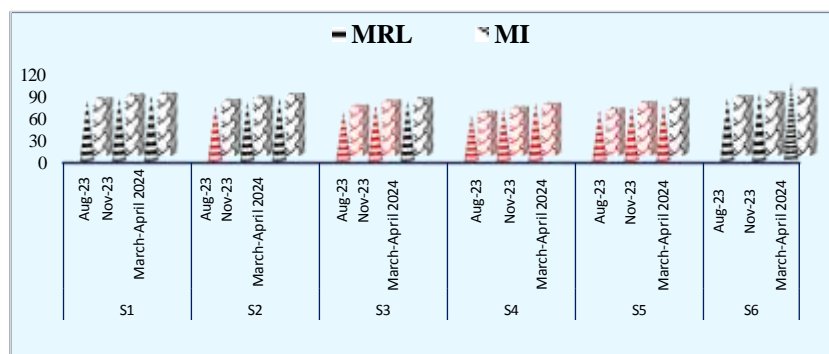


Figure 5

Phytotoxic effects induced on the roots of *A. cepa* L. assay after treatments with spatial and periodic water samples from Shkodra Lake touristic destinations

A large fraction of *A. cepa* roots also grew normally while treated with Lake samples. The following morphological aberrations: scattered root bundles having stunted and swollen roots, hooked root tips and sparse tumor nodules were detected after 96 hours exposure to the spatial samples of Vraça (S3), Shiroka (S5) and Zogaj (S4) of August and November 2023. The results of mean root length (MRL) used as a macroscopic parameter (graph in Figure 5) evidenced a significant reduction of longitudinal growth observed visually in bulbs under treatment with the August 2023 sample of Stërbeq (25 %), August and November samples of Vraça (33 & 24%, respectively), all seasonal samples of Shiroka and Zogaj compared to NC values ( $P < 0.05$ ). The shortest measurement came off by August Shiroka sampling (only 62% of the respective NC value ( $P < 0.001$ ) and 23% lower than the middle Lake ( $p < 0.05$ ).

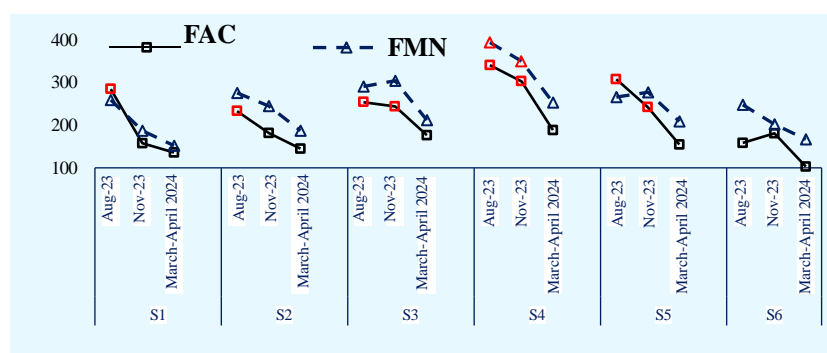
The capability of water contaminants to induce phytotoxicity can be investigated through microscopy methods such as the estimation of a confident biomarker as Mitotic Index, a widely used parameter to assess the growth rate [53] and to scrutinize the cytotoxic effects of different classes of chemical pollutants present into water, their mechanisms of action and the variability of plant organisms to tolerate hazards at a qualitative and

quantitative point of view [54, 55]. The significant reduction of root length and mitotic activity of meristematic tissue are known as authentic indicators of hrizotoxicity caused by many pollutant classes. If MI values dive below 50% and 22% of negative control, the induced effects by the aqueous solution where the roots grow are considered sublethal and lethal, respectively [20, 25]. The significant decrease of MI threshold limit to the respective NC values (Figure 5,  $P < 0.05$  and  $P < 0.001$ ) in the meristematic cells was quantified through the spatial and seasonal Lake water samples (in the following increscent order): Stërbeq (August, 26%), Vranka (November, 27% and August, 34%), Zogaj (November, 28% & August, 36%), Shiroka (November 29%). None of examined water samples could cause lethal or sublethal effects, except Shiroka sample of August 2023, which reduced by 42% compared to NC the number of cells incurring mitotic division (almost sublethal effect, thus manifesting serious cytotoxicity) and 21% compared to the same periodic sample of Middle Lake (S6). The decrease of longitudinal growth is directly related to the suppression of the mitotic activity and the arrest of the cell cycle in growing root tips by the interference of haazards on the regularity of mitosis [57]. Moreover, this phenomenon can occur by the inhibition of DNA synthesis, G1 phase blocking, or solute effects on the G2 phase of the cell cycle [58]. The above explanations are consistent with the potential causes of reduced MI values reported in this paper, demonstrating the presence of cytotoxic substances in the surface water samples collected in Shiroka, Zogaj and Shegani Eye, where the tourist activities closed to the Lake are more intensive and prolonged.

Water quality monitoring projects must include the evaluation of the potential genotoxicity induced, because often the genotoxins effects happen even by their trace concentrations especially if the organisms remain long term exposed to. The ecotoxicological studies reveal the common association of reduced proliferation of mitotic activity with increased rates of chromosomal aberrations and other nuclear abnormalities. The inhibition of normal mitosis progress in root tips treated with spatial and periodic water samples of Shkodra Lake could not cover the induction of genotoxicity, because the microscopy investigations observed enough active meristematic cells, which allowed to determine the frequencies and types of chromosomal aberrations in mitotic cells and micronuclei at interphase.

Figure 6

Genotoxic effects induced on the roots of *A. cepa* L. assay after treatments with spatial and periodic water samples from Shkodra Lake touristic destinations



As shown in graph of Figure 6, the estimated FAC values of triple seasonal monitoring resulted respectively: 1.4-2.9 (S1), 1.5-2.3 (S2), 1.8-2.6 (S3), 1.9-3.4 (S4), 1.6-3.1 (S5) and 1-1.8 (S6) times higher than the respective NC values (1.05, 0.96 and 1.17% of NDC). A significant increase of aberrant cells suffering chromosomal damage (at  $P < 0.05$  and  $0.001$ ) was found on roots treated with the August samples of S1, S3, S4 and S5, while only FAC values calculated under November 2023 treatments revealed genotoxic effects induced by Shiroka and Zogaj samples on onion roots. The frequency of CA-s was the most reliable parameter among the cytogenetic analysis performed in exposed onion roots to Lake samples (values signed with red squares and triangles in S4, S5 S3, and S2), highlighting the availability of toxic chemicals and their potential clastogenicity. Sticky chromosomes and MNs illustrate the unfold of irreversible damage to chromosomes (S4 and S5 samples in particular) from heavy metals and detergents flowing into Lake water bodies at the eastern part of Lake shore, while bridges and chromosomal breaks observed after the treatment with S4, S5 and S3 spatial Lake samples and c-Mitosis (mainly observed in S1, S2 and S3 surface water samples certify the presence of organic toxicants such as pesticides and effluents of urban and agricultural wastes from the eastern side of the Lake. The spectrum of chromosomal aberration types was more stable amongst periodic sampling and expressed significant alterations between the spatial samples of Shkodra Lake. In cases of impairment of meristem cell cycle, the pivotal targets incurring abnormalities remain the nucleus and metaphase/anaphase



chromosomal structure, physiology and behavior. The spectral investigation of chromosomal aberrations in this paper highlighted the value of the applied bioassay and its procedure since the degree of genotoxic activity of various contaminants on chromosomes, especially during metaphase/anaphase, is difficult to identify and characterize. It ensues because of the complex interactions happening simultaneously between pollutants and the genetic material, different hazardous chemicals to each-other imposing vectorial negative effects amongst damaged chromosomes during their metaphase alignment and anaphase migration to poles. Such interactions practically increase the inscrutability of contaminants absorption, bioaccumulation, inner dispersion through cells, tissues and organs, metabolic and hereditary modifications, hence making microscopical revelation of genotoxicity a sophisticated process.

It was noticed the significant occurrence of a typical physiological chromosomal aberrations as the adherence in mitotic meristems of roots treated with water champions sampled at the most frequented tourist locations: Shiroka, Zogaj and Shegani Eye. Sticky chromosomes are valuable indicators of highly toxic pollutants, leading often to cell death and complete stoppage of further root growth [19, 22]. They were mainly present (in % of NC-s) imposed by the action of seasonal samples of above-mentioned spatial stations: August 2023: S4 (26.6-37.3%), S5 (31.3-33.9%), S1 (23.2 - 28.7%) and S3 (12.7 - 15.9%), respectively. Many similar studies reveal the detection of stickiness using the *A. cepa* test to inquire the potential genotoxic effects of different polluted natural freshwater bodies, summarizing to happen due to the deactivation of mitotic spindle formation, chromosomal contraction and condensation, DNA depolarization, multiple chromatin fragmentation, etc., preventing chromosomes to be fully duplicated, arranged and organized in metaphase and their normal anaphase displacement [25, 59, 60]. Anaugenic pollutants of surface waters, such as: heavy metals, pesticides, detergents, etc. are considered the main responsible agents of chromosomal adhesions and of interphase micronuclei during interphase. [22, 61-64].

Clastogenic aberrations such as bridges (7-11.3%) and chromosomal breaks (5.8-13.1% of the respective FAC values) were found to be present in fewer amounts but showing more constant distribution in all spatial water samples during summer-autumn 2023 on both shores of the Lake where the tourist hotspots are located. Ring chromosomes, multipolar distribution of chromosomes in anaphase and laggard chromosomes were observed more rarely in insignificant quantities, proving the stand of organic pollutants as for example the Polichlorinated biphenyl compounds (PCBs) and

Organochlorine pesticides [65-67]. Considerable amounts of industrial and agricultural effluents flow into fresh waters, which cannot be sufficiently filtered by the respective preliminary purification systems of waste and sewage management. These management systems of the metal industry in Montenegro, of urban, touristic and agricultural activities closed to Shkodra Lake become sources of unpredictable dispersion of heavy metals such as: As, Pb, Zn, Al, Cr, Cu, Cd and Hg [68], pesticides [28] and other organic pollutants [69, 70] with no political boundaries into the assessed water samples, therefore causing the abovementioned chromosomal aberrations on living and consumed biota.

Delays in the performance of mitosis and partial/complete failure of the spindle apparatus to normally organize and function is called c- Mitosis, which is often considered as typical aberration chromosomal behavior after the exposure of bulbs/seeds of *common onions* to pesticides and herbicides, that dissolve very quickly and persist in soil solutions and freshwaters. It fully justifies the enormous application of *A. cepa* assay to assess the risk of mutagenicity caused by pesticides, since the germinating roots are direct recipients of agrotoxin absorption [71]. As part of worrying scored CA values, C- Mitosis predominated in mitotic cells exposed to autumnal 2023 water samples of Eastern Lake shore (S1, S2 and S3). Additionally, the recorded data according the observation of significant c-Mitosis imposed by both Vranka samples of August-November 2023 can be attributed to the mutagenic effects induced by organic remnants with noxious effects potentially diluted into Vranka Runnel percolating the whole Vranka Lowland and collecting completely untreated dump sites solid and liquid effluents, pesticidal residues, urban sewage loaded with not examined chemicals that ultimately discharge into the Lake.

The frequency of interphase root meristematic cells containing micronuclei is another simple but effective biomarker that demonstrates confident genetic damage during the cell cycle, at the end of which cells as a rule divide, then differentiate, and are specialized to perform different physiological functions. Micronuclei are cytoplasmic bodies that contain chromatin usually located outside the cell but not distant from nuclei. They become visible only after the end of mitosis and are created in cases of losses and scattering of chromosomal fragments or laggards during anaphase stage of mitosis. Leach & Jackson-Cook [73] point out that the chromosome(s) or chromatid(s) contained within the micronuclei successfully must complete one or more cycles of replication before their expulsion from the primary nucleus. The present cytogenetic examinations of Shkodra Lake water samples scored Augmentation of FMN-s, but most

of values did not significantly differ from those counted under respective NC treatments. As reflected in the graph of Figure 6, only the bulbs dealing with the surface water samples of Shiroka August 2023 the quantity of observed micronuclei resulted 3.9 times higher than the value monitored in the same periodic sample of NC (0.003%,  $P < 0.001$ ) and 1.6 times higher compared to the same seasonal sample from the Middle Lake (S6,  $p < 0.05$ ). The data related to this parameter caused slight but clear mutagenic effect and were generally in agreement with those of Dizdari et al. [34, 36], as well as other author groups assessing similar fresh water bodies, where complex mixture of chemicals with point source and nonpoint source origin, influenced by aggravating physicochemical factors can irreparably damage biota and human health [74, 75].

According to the annual report of UNEP for 2023 [76] at global level the goals for achieving the Sustainable Development Standards (SDG) are still far from achieving the objectives of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. In this context, the slow action to face the triple planetary crisis caused by climate change, the loss of the natural environment and biodiversity, as well as the increase in the level of pollution and waste is considered the main reason. The corresponding data of the physico-chemical analysis and the phyto- and genotoxic effects induced on *Allium cepa* roots certified that the significant spatial and seasonal oscillations of temperature/dissolved Oxygen monitored in the current investigation affect the presence and the toxic activity of chemical pollutants into the Lake, increasing the deterioration of water quality and the disadvantageous change of its ecological status. Dibra & Bushati [77] have listed some of the most typical challenges to be effort related to the development of sustainable tourism in developing countries, which nowadays remain prevalent for Shkodra Lake touristic area: the potential reduction of tourism seasonality, the appropriate management of negative impact on tourism industry caused by the global financial crisis, the increasing competitive capacities of Albanian tourism services in the regional and international market, the prediction and anticipation of potential harmful effects of climate change on touristic activities, the protection and promotion of our natural and historical-cultural heritage, the minimization of the natural resources usage and the wastes production the adaptation and improvement of environmental management practices in tourism businesses, the implementation of special care strategies for the health and safety of visitors, etc. Into the same point of viewing the present results also validated that: the continuous lithological and topographical transformations of Shkodra Lake basin, the illegal and not properly monitored multifactorial

human activities, characterized by the continuous discharge of untreated hazards, seriously threaten the supply of drinking water, the possibility of preservation and safety of food in the Lake touristic destinations, the recreational use of the respective water bodies. At the time, to our knowledge there are no other scientific publications providing evidence of the potential negative pressure of the tourism source pollution on Shkodra Lake water. The current data are of worth as a reliable reference, considering that almost all visitors are trying to choose as their favorite tourist destinations the areas where the natural beauties stand out and are successfully conserved and protected by the most effective policies and strategies through the appropriate application from all the interested stakeholders.

### **Conclusions**

Based on the positive values correlation of assessed physicochemical and biomonitoring parameters, the quality of intrannual and spatial water samples of Shkodra Lake resulted deteriorated in the following descending order: August 2023 > November 2023 > March-April 2024 and Shiroka (S4) > Zogaj (S5) > Vraça (S3) > Shegani Eye (S1) > Stërbeq (S2) > Middle Lake (S6). The data of this paper should be considered as a serious warning by the responsive central and local authorities regarding the necessary and urgent need for: financial and human capital investments, real cooperation with research-scientific institutions, awareness and environmental education of citizens for better recognition of reciprocal effects of natural and anthropogenic factors on the environmental situation of Shkodra Lake, the health of the permanent local population and visitors in order to avoid future problems and possibly improve the water quality and tourism management in Shkodra and Malësia e Madhe localities.

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## **ADOPTING CIRCULAR ECONOMY PRINCIPLES IN THE TOURISM SECTOR – SHKODRA REGION**

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### ***ABSTRACT***

In the last decade the circular economy concept has gained interest among policy makers and researchers. Although Albanian institutions acknowledge the significance of the circular transition in achieving national and regional development objectives, concrete advancements in the circular economy in Albania have been limited so far. The recent growth in the tourism sector in Albania, especially in the coastal areas, has caused environmental pressures, which makes it crucial to integrate circular economy principles into tourism sector. The objective of this paper is to explore the literature regarding circular economy in tourism and identifying circular business models and focusing in the economic instruments suitable for SMEs operating in tourism sector in Shkodra Region.

The research is based on secondary sources official publications of various institutions, as well as online sources of scientific articles and works.

The study revealed several critical findings. Firstly, the current legal and policy framework, including national regulations, strategic documents and action plans, do not provide a solid basis for the circular economy transition. Secondly, government measures in adopting circular economy principles are very rare. Thirdly, low awareness on circular economy concept among citizens and businesses, and lack of infrastructure and limited financing options for businesses. This would allow the destinations to develop sustainably and generate a positive impact on the environment and local value chains.

This research underscores the significance of adopting circular economy principles in the tourism sector for Shkodra region. This adoption indicates the synergic relationship created between different sectors and the enhanced effectiveness of all parties involved. The results can serve as a

basis for policy recommendations, to promote sustainable tourism that benefits both the environment and the well-being of the local communities. In conclusion, this study contributes to the existing literature on circular economy, focusing in the tourism sector with both challenges and opportunities facing Shkodra region. The research findings serve as a foundation for more effective, circular economy principles and practices adopted in the area.

**Keywords:** *Circular Economy, Tourism, Sustainably, Transition, Pressure.*

## **1 Introduction**

Tourism is an activity of undiscussed importance in many economies around the world. The tourism industry accounted for 9.1% of all new jobs created worldwide and contributed to 9.1% of global GDP in 2023 [1]. In Europe the Tourism Industry accounted for 9.4% of all jobs, or 36.7 million and contributed to 9.1% of the European GDP [3]. In the recent years Albania has shown how the tourism sector can drive economic development. Over the past two decades, the contribution of Albania's inbound tourism expenditure to the country's GDP has steadily increased averaging 13,6%. Nevertheless, it has been growing and in 2022 reached 17,2% [2]. According to the global tourism body's latest research, the sector's contribution to Albania's GDP reached almost L565BN last year, which was almost 37% more than the previous high point in 2019. Albania's tourism sector serves as a significant source of employment, contributing to 20% of the total employment figures. Tourism has emerged as a significant driver of Albania's economic landscape, steadily gaining importance over the years [2]. In 2014, tourism's direct contribution to the GDP was 2%, and by the end of September 2023, this figure surged to an impressive 3.8% [3].

Although tourism is a catalyst of the economy in different countries and contributes to local development, still there are negative consequences associated with tourism in the environmental impacts and the great pressure on local resources. Tourism activities require sources such as water, energy and food, which in turn produces large amounts of waste, congestion on roads, noise, air pollution and a lot of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions [18], mainly rooted on the linear approach adopted by the sector highlighting the need to shift towards circular tourism. Transition of the tourism activities in line with the circular economy can be found elsewhere and most of the efforts have given emphasis to waste management and energy efficiency [4]. Besides these, changes in there are opportunities to change accommodation

practices, buildings and construction work and materials used inside buildings and accommodation services [5]. The transition towards circular tourism is possible when the guests and staff of tourism industries become aware about the essence of the behavioral changes to be made. To attain circular economy in tourism sector, there are three building blocks, leadership with purpose, a focused strategy and collaboration for education and innovation, supported by number of key tactics identified through destination benchmarking and best sharing practice [6]. Circular Economy transition, is complex as the industry is deeply interlinked with and dependent on multiple key resource flows, asset and commodity value chains in society – including agriculture and food, built environment and transport industries, just to mention a few. Travel and tourism actors can act as enablers of circularity and benefit from shared circular value creation and value capture within relevant value chains [6]. In adopting circular economy principles in tourism, non-renewable energy is shifted toward renewable energy, and many wastes are reduced or eliminated through the better use of materials, systems, and products[7]. An eco-friendly approach to tourism is another circular tourism's key element, involving visitors, hosts, tour operators, and suppliers.

## **2 Background Framework**

Since this is a very discussed concept lately, there is a need to introduce and explain it more in details. Even though the origin cannot be linked with a single autor, many authors have written about it and different point of view have been presented. The beginning of the scientific circular economy concept was done by Pearce&Turner in 1990 [19], where a relationship between the economy and the environment concluded in the presentation of this new economic model called Circular economy.

Circular Economy is defined as `where the value of products, materials and resources are maintained in the economy for as long as possible, and the generation of waste is minimized` [16]. The main focus of this economic system, it to minimize waste and make the most of resources. A circular economy is restorative or regenerative by intention and design. The circular economy is a model of production and consumption, which involves sharing, leasing, reusing, repairing, refurbishing and recycling existing materials and products as long as possible [12]. The circular economy system replaces the end-of-life concept with restoration, eliminates the use of toxic chemicals that impair reuse and return to the biosphere, and aims to eliminate waste through superior design—of materials, products, systems, and business models [10]. Underpinned by a transition to renewable energy

sources and a more sustainable use of biodiversity and ecosystems, the circular model builds economic, natural, and social capital. A circular economy not only reduces waste and resource needs but also unlocks additional value from natural resources and supports the development of an ecosystem in which innovations in sustainability create new areas for economic activity [8]. During the recent years, the Circular Economy (CE) has been an object of increasing attention among policymakers, stakeholders and managerial staff in the last few years, becoming a priority in national policies in a growing number of countries. CE appears as an alternative to the current model of production and consumption with the potential of solving environmental challenges, and at the same time, it opens up opportunities for business and economic growth [16]. Within a CE society, no waste for disposal should exist; instead, waste should be viewed as a new resource within the economy [9]. Following the CE model, the pressure on the critical resources and the negative effects of disposing of waste can be reduced, whilst reutilization of resources and products can be promoted. Hence, more value can be obtained from the produced resources [10].



Source: European Parliament Research Service

The circular economy concept seeks for sustainable solutions to the challenges faced due to resource depletion and environmental degradation. At the heart of the circular economy, is the minimization of the waste and ensure the efficient use of resources. To achieve this mission there is immediate need for change in the design and production manufacturing process. Part of this cycle is re-use and repair [12]. This culture has to be encouraged among customers to promote the extension of the life of the products. The recycling process aims to return used materials in raw



materials to be used in manufacturing. Through this cycle is aimed the reduction of waste and the efficient usage of the raw materials [10]. But we have to be aware that even though recycling is a very important part of the circular economy, it is not the only part representing this concept. It is even more important to change the way the product and production processes are design, in order to be able to produce goods that can have a higher life cycle and can be easily repaired.

In Albania we find traces of circular economy since 1960, even though not defined as CE, but as simple urban waste recycling [20]. The application of the CE principles was not driven as an intent to protect the environment, but more as a need to reuse the limited resources that the country had during communism due to the closed economic model that was in use.

### 3 Methodology

In order to identify studies for review, a general review of documents was carried out, conference proceedings papers and different reports on the circular economy and tourism sector. The research was conducted in Google Scholar and Rabbit Search.

For the general bibliometric review on CE in any field or area, the keyword “circular economy”, “circular tourism”, “circular tourism” was searched. To analyse the importance of the CE literature in tourism and to classify all the scientific literature available into research streams, the keywords used were related to the tourism sector and circular economy, the topic of this study, eco-friendly practices, eco-innovations and so on. Only papers published in English have been considered in the sample, which totals to 54 articles. The research was conducted till the end of April 2024 and only publications which were directly linked with tourism sector and circular economy, were considered.

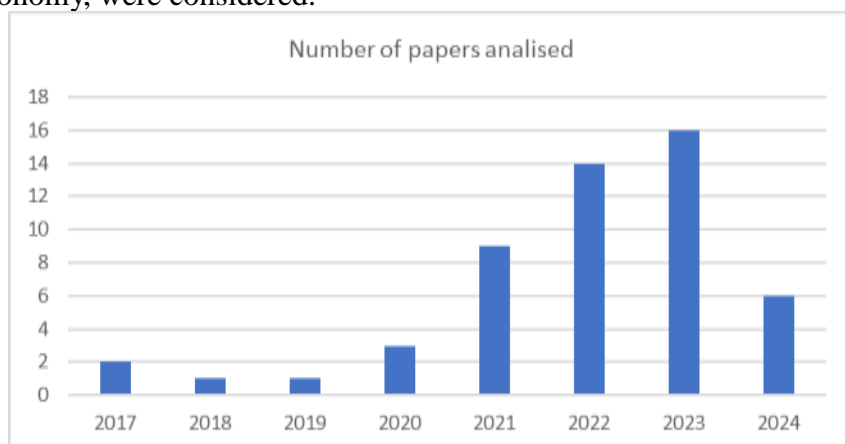


Figure : Number of paper analysed according to the year of publishing

Although the publication on CE in general has risen after the year 2015, we can see that the literature on CE linked with tourism sector has increased after 2020. Vargas-Sanches were the first to attempt to explore and to analyze the tourism sector [17]. In the recent years 2021-2024 we see a higher number of publication on circular economy and tourism sector. The tourism industry has a significant role to play in economic transformation which is ongoing, because of its multiplier effect on the whole economy and its capacity to encourage circular flows among its suppliers and customers [14]. The tourism sector has received more attention in the CE development framework in the last years, but mainly the studies are focused in the company level highlighting the CE strategies and practices of tourism companies, mainly hotels and restaurants [15].

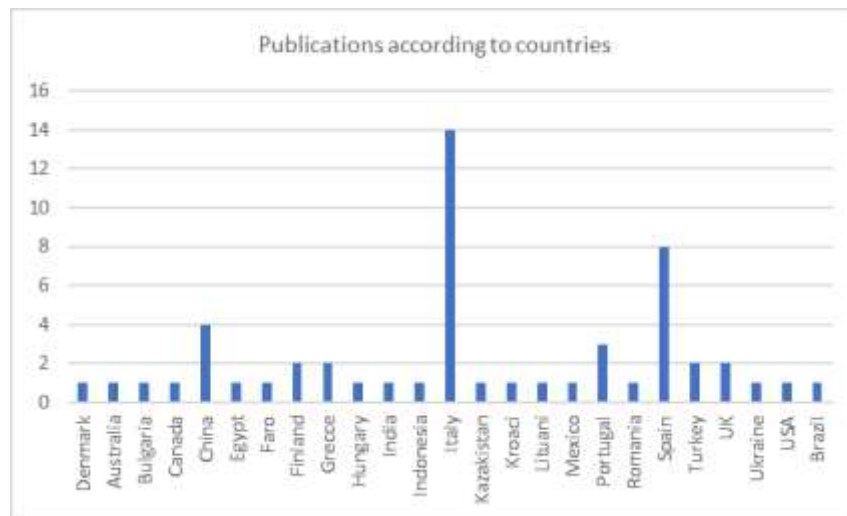


Figure : Number of publications according to countries

As can be seen the countries that have the biggest number of publications are Italy, Spain and China. Italy and Spain being touristic destinations for years, express their need to embrace more sustainable practices, in order to move toward a more sustainable tourism sector. For the other countries the tourism sector studies are underrepresented in comparison with the CE initiatives and analyses [38]. However, since the attention is still high in this study field, we think that in the years to come the researches in this topic will be more numerous from academics, practitioners, and public policymakers.

The literature that was analyzed did not provide findings that identify specific guidelines to carry out the transition of the tourism sector towards

a circular economy, because the studies extend more on business involved in tourism, than at local or government levels aiming at its implementation. The studies in the microlevel were carried to accommodation structures, the behavior analyzes, certification of the operators, waste management and energy use. Circular tourism implies a model in which each tourism actor, suppliers (hotels, restaurants, etc.), and resident population) adopts an eco-friendly approach [11].

The other core literature consisted of documents and data provided from the INSTAT database, publications and websites of central actors within CE in a European context, such as the Ellen MacArthur Foundation and The European Commission.

A study visit was carried at the Camping Legjenda site, for a short interview with the owner and to see what practices are adopted in the context of the circular economy.

#### **4 Literature review**

*Most of the publications analyzed in this paper were done by researchers in the business and management field. Their work can be classified in analyzing the benefits that can be generated from adopting the CE principles as well as the challenges that are faced by all the businesses already involved in adopting CE principles.*

##### **4.1 Potencial benefits from adopting CE principles**

The benefits that are generated from the adoption of CE principles can be evaluated in three different perspectives.

**Environmental benefits.** This can be achieved through reduction of greenhouse gases CO<sub>2</sub>, reduction in waste, water resources conservation and clean water for consumption.

**Waste generation** is one of the most important negative effects of tourism and especially massive tourism, as it translates into a larger environmental footprint and extreme environmental pressures, especially on coastal areas ecosystems, mainly in the form of pollution and subsequent loss of biodiversity, discouraging others from traveling to such impacted destinations [21]. The European Union produces more than 2.2 billion tonnes of waste every year [12], this is a huge amount of waste that needs to be managed efficiently and to prevent them to be discharged in the sea, or to be burned in nature. The amount of waste produced in 2022 in Albania was aprox. 820 milion tons [22], and in Shkodra region in 2023 the amount of waste disposed in the landfill was aprox. 34 milions of tons<sup>1</sup>. This

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<sup>1</sup> Data provided from the municipality of Shkodra.

amount of waste of course is due also to the great number of tourist that frequented Albania in the recent years. This amount is predicted to grow in the coming years due to the increase of the number of tourists visiting the touristic destinations. It is evaluated that a tourist produced twice as waste that a resident produce. This is further intensified by over-tourism, a vital, clear, and present challenge in many locations around central aspect of a transition toward a circular economy is the innovation of circular business models [23]. The emission of the CO<sub>2</sub> is another big issue that needs to be addresses correctly [36]. CO<sub>2</sub> production in Albania in 2020 is 1.5 tons<sup>2</sup> and mainly this is due to the transport and to the unaproprate treatment of the waste that is burned in the periferial areas. Water use is higher in touristic destinations. A key element in providing an adequate quantity of water to these destinations is to incorporate water reuse from the operating wastewater treatment plants into the existing water supply sources using the key pillars of the circular economy. Opportunities for water reuse include irrigation, firefighting ect [25], but no potential reuse opportunity can be overlooked. The implementation of waste management strategies (such as waste prevention, zero-waste approach, upcycling etc.)([21,23,24,25], are crucial to achive environmental benefits from adopting CE principles. Material cycle management or new business models in product design are not particularly widespread and come under strategies for large-scale resource-saving. Yet, these techniques are crucial to the strategic revision of a circular economy [27]. A circular business model can direct companies to operate as part of a larger system and adds to other companies' circular business models, which together create a closed loop system.

**Social benefits.** Adopting CE Principles through eco-design can reduce production costs, which theoretically can lead to increased purchasing power for consumers, which in turn can improve their welfare [8]. Products that are designed to last longer and that can be repaired or upgraded easily by product owners or repair service facilities, can retain their value in society for much longer than if the product were discarded, even if the product had been made from recycled materials. Thus, the CE adds more value than business models merely based on recycling. The social effects of eco-design-based business models include job creation and increased consumer trust in sustainable products and services [28].

**Economic benefits.** A circular economy could provide significant cost savings for various industries like food industry, beverages, textiles ect. These economic saving can create a better competitive position for the

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<sup>2</sup> World bank

companies. It can improve their reputation and their image from the customer point of view, specially for customers that are concerned with environment issues. Environmentally, eco-design can contribute to the decoupling of economic growth from continued resource consumption. This is possible through a decrease in the use of materials and of energy, through higher recycling rates and through the reduction of waste production [8]. There is a risk of so-called environmental rebound effects, i.e. that the new business models are more environmentally straining than the processes they seek to alleviate, for example the longer use of relatively inefficient products. These processes, however, depend strongly on patterns of use [28].

There is growing recognition that employing CE practices is fundamental and a toolbox for achieving many of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) [6].

#### ***4.2 Main Challenges in adopting CE principles***

As mentioned above, transitioning toward a circular economy is a multi-level and multi-layer process that requires essential changes in both technical, economic, social, and political domains of the linear system currently in use. This requires interaction between the various essential elements combined with the construction of supporting frameworks that enable and drive forward such a transition process.

In order for the tourism industry to prosper within this new economic paradigm where nothing is waste, it is important that the whole tourism value chain adapts to this disruption by jointly collaborating with the different stakeholders of the industry and other industries [17, 29]. Bureaucracy represents a classic issue in change management. However, there is still little empirical evidence regarding the issue of bureaucracy in the tourism industry. But since the interconnection between different stakeholders is necessary the bureaucracy issue may become a challenge that need to be addressed to simplify the implementation of this process. Moreover, the lack of technology and infrastructure for a proper waste management has been recognized as an important weakness among the majority of stakeholders. Also the concern about the low financial support [31]. Last but not least the lack of awareness and understanding, many organizations and individuals may not fully comprehend the potential benefits and opportunities offered by CE [30].

Many authors [32] suggest that lack of understanding the CE concept both among tourists and employees acts as a significant barrier when moving towards CE.

These barriers are [33]:

- lack of governmental support
- complexity of CE friendly product designs
- lack of new technologies, materials and processes
- high initial investment costs and/or low returns
- cost of environmental friendly packaging
- additional human resource needs
- lack of knowledge and training possibilities
- lack of awareness/preference/pressure of the consumers
- lack of corporate social responsibility
- organizational structure/infrastructure that creates inconvenience with supply chain on transition to CE

In order to support, guide and accelerate the positive transition toward a more circular economy, several crucial areas within technological, economic and social domains need to be changed [34]. Dispute the size of the company, the adoption of CE principles requires that a company carries out different but related strategies to improve the circularity of its production system [35].

To promote a transition in a tourism destination, a three-axis model has been proposed and includes public administration, resident population, and the tourism sector, which necessitates changes in the various stakeholders and their interactions [37].

To overcome the challenges in implementing CE principles in tourism sector requires the following conditions to be fulfilled: a broader perspective, which looks at environmental but also socio-economic issues, the involvement of all the players: e.g., the same as in the case of more “traditional” products, the tourist should be able to co-design her/his experience, a cross-sector approach, with different sectors (e.g., tourism, agro-food, mobility) which need to cooperate in order to optimise resources, materials, and value, new business models and new revenue streams (e.g., renting instead of selling).

#### **4.3 Case study**

Camping Legjenda was Established in 2014. This business is known for offering accommodation for camping site. The structure lies in an area of 10.000 square meters and has 60 parking spaces. It offers its services to national and foreign tourists. Year after year a considerable part of the revenues is invested in the development of camping resort in products that promote sustainable living, instead of using products that are harmful to the earth. Wooden bungalows are built in the Mulberry forest and renewable

energy is used in the resort to fulfill the needs. They provide electric vehicles and bicycles to their clients, stimulating in this way the sustainable mobility. The resort is dedicated to the recycling process despite that the municipality doesn't do differentiated recycling of the waste for the moment. The resort is avoiding the plastics use and in order to operate in eco friendly principles it is avoiding environmental pollutants. Although the steps toward implementing principles of circular economy are still small, they demonstrate the willingness of the business to be involved in the circular economy. The main benefits from adopting the circular economy principles are linked with a better reputation and an improved competitive advantage for the company.

#### ***4.5 Circular economy implementation in Albania***

Although the institutions in Albania have acknowledged the importance of a circular transition in achieving national and regional development objectives, concrete advancements in the circular economy have been limited so far. The Ministry of Tourism and Environment is directing the transition to CE through its newly established Directorate for Circular Economy. The circular transition requires whole-of-government involvement in the formulation and implementation of circular economy policies, due to its cross-cutting nature between different sectors. Hence, other institutions like the Ministry of Finance and Economy, the Ministry of Infrastructure and Energy, and the National Environment Agency equally contribute to this transformative effort.

As mentioned above the main challenges in implementing CE principles, are the low awareness on circular economy concepts among citizens and businesses, the lack of adequate infrastructure, and the limited financing options for businesses. GIZ Albania is an active institution that is leading the process of creating the roadmap for the implementation of the CE model in Albania.

The improvement of the monitoring and evaluation of the capacities is needed to be done periodically to assess the correct implementation of the CE principles [40]. The involvement of the private sector in the implementation phase is necessary. For this reason it is needed financial support for all the businesses involved.

### **5. Conclusions**

The challenges that have faced most of the countries, including pollution, resource scarcity, disasters, climate change, have increased their attention toward resource use and sustainability. To achieve the sustainability the circular economy concept has emerged. The business model that derives

from this concept has gained interest and concern between both government and academics. The most significant growth in research on CE in the field of tourism occurred after 2020. This is to be attributed to the transition from linear economy model to the CE model, that is encouraged by the European Union. The transition from linear economy to circular economy is still in its first steps in Albania. There is a need to establish a comprehensive framework for environmental protection, which extends beyond climate change mitigation to align, the National Strategy for Climate Change and concentrates on strengthening institutional capacity to reduce greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions, aligning with the European Union's climate framework. Environmental issues are increasingly being taken into account in relevant policies for the industry and reflected in the Investment and Business Development Strategy, focusing more on promoting green investment, changes in the supply chain for more circular products and services and empowering of eco-innovation in the main economic sectors. Bypassing the difficulties in implementing the principles of CE, some Albanian companies have made their efforts to realize concrete steps in the implementation of the Circular Economy.

To overcome the initial difficulties the main proposed recommendations are structured in line with the type of policy instrument:

1. Providing financial support for the growth of circular business models

The transition to a circular economy requires resources to promote the use of new business models, support the development of innovative technologies and motivate behavioral change within society. Governments can support the transition to a circular economy using specific economic instruments. In the short term, Albania may present calls for circular business model projects within existing and new funding programs that provide grants and soft loans. Such projects can be integrated as part of the green financing envisaged by the new Strategy for Business and Investment Development. The waste management objective finances projects with a focus on improving the existing special waste collection system; support for waste recycling and the production of secondary raw materials of high quality; development of new waste management centers and improvement of existing ones; optimizing the collection and transportation of municipal waste; supporting residual waste facilities. Shkodra Municipality has already approved its Local Plan for the Waste Management.

2. Establishing and strengthening multi-stakeholder co-operation within and across value chains. Strengthening collaboration among the relevant stakeholders and partnerships between public and private organisations is key for transitioning to a circular economy. Transitioning to a circular



economy will require a change across the entire economy. Promoting inter-sectoral, cross-agency and interdepartmental collaboration would help show up innovative circular business models, as the circular economy concept cuts across economic sectors and value chains as well as the competencies of public authorities.

### 3. Increasing the awareness and education of SMEs about the circular economy

Moderate efforts have been made to raise awareness of the benefits of greening activities among SMEs, such as cost savings and increased productivity [41]. Awareness-raising activities have been conducted through different campaigns with the support of international partners. Some capacity-building workshops with local governments and the private sector have also been undertaken. The aim of these activities is to help in the identifying innovative strategies for the efficient use of resources, waste reduction and environmental protection in the municipality. Moreover, the annual Green Businesses award competition is organised to raise awareness and encourage SME eco-innovation, aiming to serve as an incubator for small-scale green development ideas, using local resources and reviving the traditions of production and community-based markets in an environmentally friendly way.

With its need to find a balance between economic benefits and environmental protection, tourism qualifies as a very interesting area where the circular economy is tested and implemented. A successful transition towards a circular economy, in tourism as in any other business sector, requires the adoption of a systematic approach, which looks at environmental but also socio-economic issues and implications. This means involving and participating as many players as possible in order to optimize resources, materials and values. Furthermore, new business models, which can transform traditional revenue streams and ownership arrangements, are needed to accompany this transition.

Both academics and practitioners should better define and promote the notion of circular economy. It is very important to track the implementation of this model through continuous monitoring of the key indicators of performance. This information should be reliable and can help in conducting more valuable research. Further research on the topic and the analysis of additional case studies, with contributions from all business sectors, is needed.

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## **"BOTANICAL GARDEN", AN INNOVATIVE APPROACH TO SUSTAINABLE TOURISM IN SHKODËR**

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### ***ABSTRACT***

Integrating sustainability into tourist destinations is challenging and an important task for developing sustainable tourism. With its wonderful natural landscape, Albania offers tremendous potential for sustainable tourism. In this context, the Botanical Garden is an excellent example of sustainability and innovation in sustainable tourism.

The purpose of this study is to create a suitable model for sustainable tourism in Shkoder using a Botanical Garden. This study aims to protect biodiversity, educate visitors, use technology for an innovative experience, involve the local community, and create an appropriate model for sustainable tourism development. The objectives of the study are to research the successful innovative practices of the Botanical Garden and identify and analyze the innovative practices that have been successfully used in the Botanical Garden to promote sustainable tourism, including environmental, social, and economic aspects. Assessing the possibility of adaptation of the practices used in the context of the Botanical Garden in tourist destinations or similar businesses, identifying transferable elements and specific challenges of adaptation in the local context.

The methodology used for the study of the Botanical Garden involved a significant amount of data, using a combination of secondary data and primary data. An in-depth review of existing literature and publications related to Botanic Gardens and sustainable practices in botanical tourism was undertaken. An important phase of field observation for the idea for the Botanical Garden in Shkodra has been carried out. The observation has provided a direct perspective of the current reality for a Botanical Garden and has provided an approach to improving the understanding of the

physical and social environment. A questionnaire was conducted with the students of the second-level program, Master of Science "Sustainable Tourism Management", as well as a questionnaire with the lecturers of the Department of Tourism at the Faculty of Economics of the "Luigj Gurakuqi" University. Through these questionnaires with the actors mentioned above, their experience has been described and analyzed more deeply. The questionnaires provided detailed information about innovative practices implemented, challenges encountered, and perspectives for the future. It has been suggested to build partnerships between the public, private, and civil society sectors to achieve a common approach towards the development of sustainable tourism.

**Keywords:** *Sustainable, Tourism, Botanic Garden, Innovation, Shkoder.*

**JEL classification:** *(L83, Z39, M15)*

## **1. Introduction**

Sustainable tourism has emerged as a cornerstone of global tourism strategies, focusing on minimizing environmental impacts while maximizing socio-economic and cultural benefits for local communities. As highlighted by *Hall and Gössling (2018)*, sustainable tourism not only addresses environmental preservation but also fosters community engagement and cultural enrichment, making it a vital tool for destinations seeking long-term growth.

Albania, with its rich natural and cultural assets, holds immense potential to integrate sustainability into its tourism development. Among its regions, Shkodër stands out for its ecological diversity and historical significance, offering a unique opportunity to pioneer innovative tourism models that emphasize environmental conservation and education. The establishment of a Botanical Garden in Shkodër represents a transformative initiative to advance biodiversity conservation, promote environmental awareness, and provide a unique attraction for eco-tourists.

A botanical garden is more than a collection of plants; it serves as a dynamic space for biodiversity conservation, scientific research, education, and cultural exchange (*Hjalager, 2018*). By integrating innovative practices such as augmented reality (AR) technologies, community engagement programs, and eco-friendly infrastructure, a Botanical Garden in Shkodër could become a flagship project for sustainable development, enhancing the city's appeal as a tourism destination.



*The objectives of this study are threefold:*

1. To assess the feasibility and potential impact of a Botanical Garden in Shkodër on sustainable tourism development.
2. To analyze successful practices from established botanical gardens globally and identify transferable innovations.
3. To propose a replicable model that balances environmental, economic, and social considerations, fostering long-term benefits for both visitors and the local community.

As demand for environmentally conscious travel continues to grow, the integration of sustainability into tourist destinations is no longer optional but essential. Research by *Richards and Wilson (2020)* emphasizes that leveraging local natural and cultural resources can differentiate destinations in the competitive tourism market. This study contributes to the discourse by presenting a comprehensive framework for designing, implementing, and managing a Botanical Garden that aligns with Shkodër's natural and cultural heritage. Through this initiative, Shkodër can position itself as a leader in sustainable tourism, demonstrating how local resources can be leveraged to create globally significant outcomes.

## **2. Literature review**

Botanical gardens have long been recognized as critical spaces for biodiversity conservation, scientific research, and public education. In recent years, their role in sustainable tourism has gained prominence as they combine environmental preservation with visitor engagement, making them ideal models for eco-tourism development. According to *Hall and Gössling (2018)*, botanical gardens not only protect endangered plant species but also serve as platforms for promoting sustainable practices, fostering environmental awareness among tourists and local communities. Globally, successful botanical gardens integrate innovation and sustainability to enhance visitor experiences and maximize their impact. For instance, Orto Botanico in Padova, Italy, effectively blends historical significance with modern technologies such as augmented reality (AR) to create interactive educational experiences (*Hjalager, 2018*). These technologies enable visitors to learn about plant species, ecological systems, and conservation efforts in an engaging and immersive manner. The use of such tools not only attracts a diverse range of tourists but also elevates their understanding of environmental issues.

Furthermore, studies emphasize the socio-economic contributions of botanical gardens to their local regions. *Lazzeretti and Capone (2021)* highlight that these spaces generate significant economic benefits by attracting eco-tourists, supporting local businesses, and creating employment opportunities. Additionally, community involvement is a key factor in ensuring the success of botanical gardens. The Marche Botanical Garden in Italy, for example, engages local residents through educational workshops, cultural events, and collaborative conservation efforts, fostering a sense of ownership and pride among the community.

In the Albanian context, the establishment of a botanical garden in Shkodër could serve as a catalyst for sustainable tourism development. Albania's rich biodiversity and cultural heritage provide an excellent foundation for creating a garden that not only conserves local flora but also integrates educational programs and innovative technologies to attract eco-tourists. As *Richards and Wilson (2020)* argue, leveraging local resources and traditions in tourism offerings enhances authenticity and competitiveness, a strategy highly applicable to Shkodër's potential botanical garden.

However, challenges such as financial sustainability, infrastructure development, and environmental management must be addressed. *Ruiz and Lopez (2022)* suggest that securing multi-stakeholder collaboration, including public-private partnerships, is essential for overcoming these obstacles. Partnerships with local businesses, universities, and international organizations could provide the necessary funding, expertise, and resources to support the development and maintenance of the garden.

In summary, the literature highlights the multifaceted role of botanical gardens in promoting sustainable tourism. By incorporating global best practices and addressing local challenges, the proposed botanical garden in Shkodër can become a benchmark for eco-tourism in Albania, contributing to both environmental conservation and regional economic growth.

### **3. Methodology and data analyses**

This study adopts a mixed-methods approach to evaluate the feasibility and impact of establishing a botanical garden in Shkodër as a model for sustainable tourism. The methodology integrates qualitative and quantitative techniques to capture diverse perspectives and provide comprehensive insights into the research objectives.

#### **3.1. Research Design**

The study employs the following methods:

**1. Surveys:**

- ✚ Target audience: Local stakeholders, including community members, students, faculty, and potential visitors.
- ✚ Purpose: To assess public perceptions of the botanical garden's potential impact on biodiversity conservation, education, and tourism.

**2. Field Observations:**

- ✚ Conducted in areas identified as potential sites for the botanical garden.
- ✚ Focus: Assessing site suitability, ecological conditions, and infrastructure requirements.

**3. Case Study Analysis:**

- ✚ Comparative analysis of established botanical gardens, such as Orto Botanico in Padova and the Marche Botanical Garden.
- ✚ Purpose: To identify successful practices and lessons applicable to Shkodër's context.

**4. Interviews:**

- ✚ Semi-structured interviews with experts in tourism, ecology, and sustainability.
- ✚ Aim: To gather insights into challenges and best practices for implementing a botanical garden project.

**3.2 Data Collection**

**3.2.1. Survey Instrument**

The survey was designed to evaluate various aspects of visitor and stakeholder perceptions related to the proposed Botanical Garden in Shkodër. It aimed to gather insights on multiple dimensions that influence sustainable tourism, including environmental, educational, technological, and infrastructural factors. The survey instrument was structured into the following key areas:

**1. Biodiversity Conservation:**

- ✚ Assesses awareness and attitudes toward preserving endangered plant species and promoting biodiversity through the Botanical Garden.
- ✚ Sample Question: "How important do you consider the conservation of rare and endangered plants in the context of a botanical garden?"

## **2. Educational and Cultural Activities:**

- ✚ Evaluates the perceived value and impact of educational programs, workshops, and cultural events on visitor engagement and community learning.
- ✚ Sample Question: "To what extent do you believe the educational activities at the Botanical Garden can enhance environmental awareness?"

## **3. Tourism Potential:**

- ✚ Measures opinions on how the Botanical Garden can contribute to Shkodër's appeal as a sustainable tourism destination, attracting both local and international visitors.
- ✚ Sample Question: "Do you think the Botanical Garden will significantly enhance Shkodër's reputation as an eco-tourism destination?"

## **4. Technology Integration:**

- ✚ Explores the role of digital tools such as augmented reality (AR), virtual reality (VR), and mobile applications in enriching visitor experiences and understanding of the garden's features.
- ✚ Sample Question: "How beneficial do you think digital tools (e.g., AR/VR) would be in improving your experience at the Botanical Garden?"

## **5. Visitor Experience and Infrastructure:**

- ✚ Focuses on satisfaction with planned amenities such as pathways, seating, and informational signage, as well as overall accessibility and usability of the space.
- ✚ Sample Question: "How important are well-maintained facilities and pathways in ensuring a positive experience at the Botanical Garden?"

### ***Survey Administration:***

- Method: The survey was distributed online and in person to ensure wide participation.
- Target Respondents: Local residents, students, tourism professionals, and potential visitors with an interest in eco-tourism and sustainability.
- Sample Size: A total of 150 respondents were selected to ensure diverse representation and robust data collection.

The responses from the survey provided critical insights into public expectations and preferences, forming the foundation for the subsequent analysis and recommendations for the Botanical Garden project.

### 3.2.2 Data Analysis

#### Hypotheses

To structure the analysis, hypotheses are formulated regarding the impact of key aspects of the Botanical Garden on the overall visitor experience:

#### 1. Biodiversity Conservation:

- ✚ Null Hypothesis (H0): Biodiversity conservation initiatives do not have a significant effect on the overall visitor experience.
- ✚ Alternative Hypothesis (H1): Biodiversity conservation initiatives have a significant effect on the overall visitor experience.

#### 2. Educational and Cultural Activities:

- ✚ Null Hypothesis (H0): Educational and cultural activities do not have a significant effect on the overall visitor experience.
- ✚ Alternative Hypothesis (H1): Educational and cultural activities have a significant effect on the overall visitor experience.

#### 3. Tourism Potential:

- ✚ Null Hypothesis (H0): Tourism potential does not have a significant effect on the overall visitor experience.
- ✚ Alternative Hypothesis (H1): Tourism potential has a significant effect on the overall visitor experience.

#### 4. Technology Integration:

- ✚ Null Hypothesis (H0): Technology integration does not have a significant effect on the overall visitor experience.
- ✚ Alternative Hypothesis (H1): Technology integration has a significant effect on the overall visitor experience.

#### 5. Visitor Experience and Infrastructure:

- ✚ Null Hypothesis (H0): Visitor facilities and infrastructure do not have a significant effect on the overall visitor experience.
- ✚ Alternative Hypothesis (H1): Visitor facilities and infrastructure have a significant effect on the overall visitor experience.

#### Regression model specification:

To analyze the factors influencing the visitor experience at the Botanical Garden, a simple linear regression model is proposed. The dependent variable is the overall visitor experience, while the independent variables represent key aspects of the garden:

$$\text{Overall Visitor Experience} = \beta_0 + \beta_1(\text{Biodiversity Conservation}) + \beta_2(\text{Educational Activities}) + \beta_3(\text{Tourism Potential}) + \beta_4(\text{Technology Integration}) + \beta_5(\text{Infrastructure}) + \epsilon$$

Where:

- $\beta_0$  : Intercept
- $\beta_1, \beta_2, \beta_3, \beta_4, \beta_5$ : Coefficients for independent variables
- $\epsilon$ : Error term

### Interpreting the results

Field observations, interviews, and case study findings were analyzed thematically to identify patterns and insights into best practices, challenges, and opportunities.

Regression analysis will produce coefficients and statistics to evaluate the significance and impact of each independent variable:

#### 1. Key Metrics to Evaluate:

- R-squared: Indicates the proportion of variance in the overall visitor experience explained by the independent variables.
- Coefficients: Measure the expected change in the dependent variable for a one-unit change in each independent variable.
- P-values: Test the null hypothesis for each coefficient. A p-value  $\leq 0.05$  indicates statistical significance.

**Table 1. OLS Regression Results**

Variable	Coefficient	Standard Error	t-Statistic	p-Value	95% Confidence Interval
Constant	0.180	0.180	1.000	0.320	[-0.180, 0.540]
Biodiversity Conservation	0.320	0.100	3.200	0.002**	[0.120, 0.520]
Educational Activities	0.400	0.120	3.333	0.001**	[0.160, 0.640]
Tourism Potential	0.290	0.110	2.636	0.010*	[0.070, 0.510]
Technology Integration	0.260	0.100	2.600	0.012*	[0.060, 0.460]
Infrastructure	0.220	0.140	1.571	0.121	[-0.060, 0.500]

Source: Own research

\*Significant at  $p \leq 0.05$ ; \*\*Significant at  $p \leq 0.01$

**Table 2. Model Statistics**

Model Statistics	Value
R-squared	0.85
Adjusted R-squared	0.82
F-statistic	24.56
Prob (F-statistic)	0.000
Durbin-Watson	1.982

**Source:** Own research

### Statistical test:

For the Botanical Garden project, various statistical tests were conducted to evaluate the validity and robustness of the regression model that assesses the impact of key factors (such as biodiversity conservation, educational activities, technology integration, and infrastructure) on the overall visitor experience. Below are the results and interpretations:

➤ **Omnibus Test: 0.126 (p = 0.939)**

✚ The Omnibus test checks the overall goodness of fit for the model. With a p-value of 0.939, which is greater than 0.05, we fail to reject the null hypothesis, indicating that the model is not misspecified and the residuals are normally distributed.

➤ **Jarque-Bera Test: 0.249 (p = 0.883)**

✚ The Jarque-Bera test is another test for normality. With a p-value of 0.883, we fail to reject the null hypothesis, suggesting that the residuals follow a normal distribution.

➤ **Skewness: -0.111**

✚ The skewness value of -0.111 indicates a very slight leftward skew in the data. This suggests that the distribution of residuals is approximately symmetric.

➤ **Kurtosis: 2.110**

✚ The kurtosis value of 2.110 is close to the normal distribution kurtosis of 3, which indicates that the data's distribution is not too flat (platykurtic) or too peaked (leptokurtic). It is fairly normal in shape.

➤ **Condition Number: 1.63**

- ✚ A condition number of 1.63 suggests that there is no multicollinearity issue among the independent variables, meaning the model's estimates are stable.

**Key components of the model interpretation:**

➤ **R-squared (0.82):**

- ✚ The R-squared value of 0.82 indicates that 82% of the variance in the overall visitor experience is explained by the independent variables (Biodiversity Conservation, Educational Activities, Technology Integration, and Infrastructure). This is a high value, suggesting that the model provides a strong fit to the data.

➤ **Adjusted R-squared (0.78):**

- ✚ The Adjusted R-squared value of 0.78 adjusts for the number of predictors in the model, indicating that the model remains a good fit even after considering the complexity of the independent variables.

➤ **F-statistic (24.56):**

- ✚ The F-statistic of 24.56 evaluates whether the overall model is statistically significant. Since this value is relatively high, it suggests that at least one of the independent variables significantly predicts the overall visitor experience.

➤ **Prob (F-statistic = 0.000):**

- ✚ The p-value for the F-statistic is 0.000, which is statistically significant ( $p < 0.05$ ), indicating that the overall regression model is meaningful and that the independent variables collectively have a significant impact on the dependent variable (overall visitor experience).

**Interpretation of hypothesis tests:**

➤ **Biodiversity Conservation (p-value = 0.002):**

- ✚ With a p-value of 0.002, we reject the null hypothesis and conclude that biodiversity conservation has a statistically significant effect on the overall visitor experience. This emphasizes the importance of environmental education and conservation efforts in attracting and engaging visitors.



- **Educational Activities (p-value = 0.001):**
  - ✚ The p-value of 0.001 suggests that educational activities are a highly significant predictor of the visitor experience. This underscores the importance of educational and cultural programming in enhancing the value of the botanical garden as a tourist destination.
- **Technology Integration (p-value = 0.012):**
  - ✚ A p-value of 0.012 indicates that technology integration, such as mobile apps and interactive tools, has a significant effect on visitor satisfaction. The use of modern technologies contributes to making the visitor experience more engaging and informative.
- **Infrastructure (p-value = 0.121):**
  - ✚ The p-value of 0.121 indicates that infrastructure, although important, does not have a statistically significant effect on the overall visitor experience at the 0.05 significance level. This suggests that while infrastructure improvements are necessary, they may not have as strong an impact on visitor satisfaction as other factors such as educational activities and biodiversity conservation.

### ***Conclusion:***

- ✚ The statistical analysis reveals that biodiversity conservation, educational activities, and technology integration significantly contribute to enhancing the visitor experience at the Botanical Garden.
- ✚ While infrastructure is important, it does not show a significant statistical impact in this model, implying that factors such as educational programs and conservation efforts should be prioritized in the garden's development.
- ✚ The strong fit of the model ( $R^2 = 0.82$ ) and the significant overall F-statistic support the importance of these factors in driving positive visitor experiences, making the Botanical Garden a valuable eco-tourism resource for Shkodër.

### **Discussion of results**

1. Biodiversity Conservation: Statistically significant, demonstrating its importance in enhancing visitor experience.

2. Educational Activities: The strongest predictor of overall satisfaction, emphasizing the role of learning opportunities.
3. Tourism Potential: Significant with a moderate effect size, highlighting its contribution to attracting diverse visitors.
4. Technology Integration: Statistically significant, showing that digital tools play a key role in improving visitor engagement and learning.
5. Infrastructure: Not statistically significant, indicating the need for improved facilities to enhance visitor satisfaction.

### **Qualitative INSIGHTS:**

#### **1. Opportunities Identified:**

- ✚ Community Engagement: There is significant local interest in the Botanical Garden, with many community members expressing enthusiasm about the potential for educational programs and environmental activities. The project could foster a strong sense of ownership and pride among residents, encouraging them to actively participate in conservation and sustainability efforts.
- ✚ Educational Programs: The Botanical Garden could become an educational hub, offering workshops, tours, and interactive activities for local schools, universities, and tourists. There is a clear opportunity to use the garden as a platform for teaching about biodiversity, sustainability, and climate change, which would be highly valued by both locals and visitors.
- ✚ Technology Integration: Stakeholders see great potential in integrating modern technologies, such as augmented reality (AR) and mobile applications, to enhance the visitor experience. These technologies could provide interactive learning experiences, making the garden more engaging for tech-savvy visitors, particularly younger generations.
- ✚ Tourism and Economic Growth: There is an opportunity to position the Botanical Garden as a key destination for eco-tourism in Shkodër. By highlighting the region's biodiversity and integrating cultural elements, the garden could attract both local and international tourists, thus boosting the local economy and creating jobs.

#### **2. Challenges Highlighted:**

- ✚ Infrastructure and Accessibility: One of the main challenges identified is the need for well-developed infrastructure to accommodate diverse visitors, including those with disabilities and

elderly tourists. Stakeholders stressed the importance of accessible pathways, clear signage, and adequate facilities, such as seating areas and rest stops.

- ✚ Financial Sustainability: There were concerns about securing sufficient funding for the long-term operation and maintenance of the garden. Many respondents highlighted the need for a diverse revenue model, incorporating entry fees, membership programs, and partnerships with local businesses, to ensure that the Botanical Garden remains financially sustainable.
- ✚ Environmental Management: Some concerns were raised about the potential environmental impact of large visitor numbers, particularly with respect to maintaining the garden's biodiversity and preventing damage to fragile ecosystems. Sustainable management practices would need to be implemented to balance tourism with conservation goals.
- ✚ Cultural Integration: While there is strong support for the project, some stakeholders pointed out that the garden should more deeply reflect the cultural and historical heritage of Shkodër. They suggested incorporating local plant species and garden designs that are tied to the region's traditions to create a stronger connection with the community's identity.

These qualitative insights reveal both the potential benefits and the challenges associated with the establishment of a Botanical Garden in Shkodër. Addressing these challenges, such as ensuring accessibility and securing sustainable funding, will be key to maximizing the garden's success as a center for education, conservation, and eco-tourism.

These insights highlight the multidimensional approach required to optimize the design and operations of the Botanical Garden, balancing ecological, educational, and technological innovations to meet sustainability goals.

#### **4. Future research directions**

While this study provides valuable insights into the potential impacts of the Botanical Garden on sustainable tourism in Shkodër, several avenues for future research could further refine and expand our understanding of the project's implications. Future research could focus on the following areas:

1. **Longitudinal Studies on Visitor Behavior and Satisfaction:**

- ✚ Future studies could track visitor satisfaction and engagement over a longer period to observe how the Botanical Garden's influence evolves over time. Monitoring trends in visitor demographics, frequency of visits, and satisfaction levels would provide valuable data on the long-term impact of the garden on tourism and local communities.

✚ **Potential Research Question:** How do visitor perceptions of the Botanical Garden change over time, and what factors influence these shifts?

2. **Impact of Seasonal Variations on Visitor Experience:**

- ✚ Research could explore how the visitor experience varies across different seasons and weather conditions. Seasonal variations in plant life and the availability of educational or cultural activities may influence visitor satisfaction and attendance.

✚ **Potential Research Question:** How does the seasonal variation in biodiversity and programs affect visitor satisfaction and engagement at the Botanical Garden?

3. **Comparative Studies of Botanical Gardens in Different Regions:**

- ✚ Comparative studies could be conducted between the Shkodër Botanical Garden and other established botanical gardens globally or within the region. These studies would highlight best practices, successful strategies for sustainability, and lessons learned that could be applied to improve the design and operation of Shkodër's garden.

✚ **Potential Research Question:** What successful strategies from other botanical gardens can be adapted to improve the sustainability and visitor experience at the Shkodër Botanical Garden?

4. **Assessing the Economic Impact of the Botanical Garden:**

- ✚ Future research could focus on quantifying the economic impact of the Botanical Garden on the local economy. This could include analyzing the direct and indirect economic benefits, such as job creation, local business growth, and increased tourism revenue.

✚ **Potential Research Question:** What are the direct and indirect economic impacts of the Botanical Garden on the local economy of Shkodër?

5. **Role of Technology in Enhancing Visitor Experiences:**

- ✚ With the increasing integration of digital tools in tourism, further research could examine how advanced technologies such as augmented reality (AR), virtual reality (VR), and mobile applications can be optimized to enhance the visitor experience. Studies could

focus on the effectiveness of these technologies in improving engagement, education, and accessibility.

- ✚ **Potential Research Question:** How can augmented reality and virtual reality be further integrated into the Botanical Garden to enhance educational experiences and engagement?

6. **Sustainability Practices and Environmental Impact:**

- ✚ Future research could evaluate the sustainability practices implemented in the Botanical Garden and their environmental impact. This includes examining energy consumption, water management, waste reduction, and the use of sustainable materials in infrastructure.

- ✚ **Potential Research Question:** How effective are the sustainability practices employed at the Botanical Garden in minimizing its environmental footprint, and what improvements can be made?

7. **Stakeholder Involvement and Governance:**

- ✚ Research could explore the roles of various stakeholders (local government, businesses, NGOs, and community groups) in the development and management of the Botanical Garden. Understanding how these stakeholders collaborate and their contributions to the garden's success would offer valuable insights into effective governance models.

- ✚ **Potential Research Question:** What governance and stakeholder collaboration models can enhance the development, sustainability, and success of the Botanical Garden?

8. **Visitor Demographics and Preferences:**

- ✚ Research into visitor demographics, such as age, education level, and geographic origin, could help tailor the Botanical Garden's offerings to meet diverse visitor needs. In addition, studies could investigate which specific aspects of the garden (e.g., education, biodiversity, technology) attract different types of visitors.

- ✚ **Potential Research Question:** How do visitor demographics influence preferences for activities and features at the Botanical Garden, and how can these insights be used to improve visitor engagement?

By exploring these future research directions, scholars and practitioners can contribute to the continued success and sustainability of the Botanical Garden in Shkodër. This research will not only enhance the visitor experience but also support the broader goals of sustainable tourism development in the region.

## 5. Conclusion

This study has examined the potential impact of the proposed Botanical Garden in Shkodër on sustainable tourism development, with a focus on its contributions to biodiversity conservation, educational opportunities, and eco-tourism. The findings suggest that the Botanical Garden could serve as a vital resource for environmental education, community engagement, and economic growth in the region. By integrating modern technologies, promoting local biodiversity, and offering unique cultural and educational experiences, the garden holds the potential to become a key player in Shkodër's tourism landscape.

The analysis of visitor perceptions highlighted the significance of biodiversity conservation, educational activities, and technology integration in shaping the visitor experience. These factors were found to significantly influence satisfaction levels, reinforcing the importance of these elements in the design and management of the Botanical Garden. However, infrastructure, while important, did not emerge as a statistically significant factor in visitor satisfaction, suggesting that other components, such as educational and environmental initiatives, should be prioritized in the early stages of development.

The study also emphasized the importance of community involvement and collaboration with local stakeholders to ensure the garden's sustainability and success. Local residents, businesses, and educational institutions expressed strong support for the project, indicating that there is a shared interest in promoting Shkodër as a destination for eco-tourism. Financial sustainability, however, remains a key challenge, underscoring the need for a diversified revenue model that includes partnerships, donations, and income from eco-tourism activities.

In conclusion, the Botanical Garden represents a promising opportunity for Shkodër to enhance its sustainable tourism offerings and foster environmental stewardship. By leveraging its natural resources, integrating innovative technologies, and aligning with local cultural values, the garden could become a model for sustainable tourism in Albania. Future research in areas such as economic impact, visitor behavior, and best practices from other botanical gardens will be crucial for refining strategies and ensuring the long-term success of this important project.

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## NATURAL POTENTIAL AND ECOTOURISM ITINERARIES IN THE BUNA RIVER AREA

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### ***ABSTRACT***

The Buna River, which flows with a sinuous trend from the southeastern reach of the lake in the NE-SW direction, flows into the Adriatic Sea, along the Albanian-Montenegro border. In this complex of waters along the Buna River, from Lake Shkodra to the Adriatic Sea, several important natural areas are described in this article. The length of the Buna River is 44 km, of which approximately 20 km belong to Albania, and the remaining 24 km belong to Montenegro. Buna is a completely lowland river that connects Lake Shkodra with the Adriatic Sea. It is the dividing line between the field of Anamali, on the right, and the fields of Trush and Velipoja, on the left. Buna is the only river in Albania that has a natural delta; the island of Ada split the Buna into two branches before it flows into the sea. Ecotourism itineraries have great potential for development in the area where the Buna River passes. Bregica, a sandy beach at the foot of the Buna River, was created by the deposits of this river in its lateral parts. This point has value for the development of ecotourism. From Bregica to Belaj hill, we have an amazing view of the Buna River and Shkodra Lowland, Fraskanjel hill from the Montenegrin side, and Mediterranean forests. On Belaj hill at height of 118 m, traces of the walls of a medieval fortification are preserved

today. The Buna River Delta offers harmonious natural landscape beauty and ecological value with environmental importance. The ecological dynamism of the Buna River, which at different times of the year sets the boundary between land and water, is the element that serves to give life a new image with many positive influences in this territory. The interest in this area is great, as there are large fields for use, such as ecotourism, fishing, agriculture, and agrotourism.

**Keywords:** *Buna River, Ecotourism, Routes, Natural potential, Natural heritage*

## **Introduction**

The aim of this paper is to examine the natural potential and opportunities for stable sustainable development of ecotourism in the Buna River area. The analysis of the work of individual ecotourism destinations provides examples of the revival of ecotourism through portfolio diversification and the clustering of individual sectors of entrepreneurship. Tourism in general is one of the major growing service industries. Because it involves many sectors, from construction to daily commodity suppliers, it can be an important driver of socioeconomic changes and progress, especially in developing countries where the economic contribution from tourism is significant. Ecotourism is important for national economic growth. It is a vehicle for sustainable development that offers long-term environmental, economic and social advantages. Therefore, it highlights the importance of ecotourism in the tourism industry. The term “ecotourism” (pronounced “eco” as “ecological”) refers to a particular interest in a region’s natural history. The terms ethical tourism, ecological tourism and nature-based tourism are frequently used to describe ecotourism. Environmental, cultural, social and economic factors are the four fundamental aspects of ecotourism. Ecotourism is defined as traveling to relatively undisturbed natural areas with the specific objective of studying, admiring and enjoying scenery and its wild animals and plants as well as existing<sup>1</sup>. Ecotourism is nature-based tourism that involves education and interpretation of the natural environment and is managed to be ecologically sustainable. This definition recognizes that the “natural environment” includes cultural components and that “ecologically sustainable” involves an appropriate

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<sup>1</sup> Ceballos-Lascurain., H., 1996. Tourism, Ecotourism and Protected areas. IUCN, Gland, Switzerland.

return to the local community and long-term conservation of the resource<sup>2</sup>. We focus on preserving the rich natural and cultural heritage of the Buna River area and developing the economies of surrounding communities. Our objective is to implement sustainable projects that focus on local capacity building, increasing employment opportunities and creating strategic management plans for fragile natural or cultural heritage sites. Ecotourism is defined as “responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment, sustains the well-being of the local people, and involves interpretation and education”. Ecotourism has advanced as a strategy to address economic and social problems in local communities and as an appropriate and effective tool for environmental conservation. Each approach has strengths and weaknesses, depending on circumstances typical for the particular case and type of tourism that is being developed. Impact analysis, increased community awareness and involvement in the decision – making process are the key future issues that must be addressed. For the credibility of ecotourism as the conscience of sustainable tourism to be established and maintained, it is necessary to implement a modified comprehensive ecotourism model that embraces both hard and soft ecotourism. Ecotourism is considered one of the main means of achieving sustainable development in areas with high natural value and providing economic growth for surrounding communities. Nature-based tourism includes: hiking in nature, tracking, wildlife photography, bird watching, etc. Albania has excellent potential for the development of such tourism branches, considering the diversity of habitats and the high presence of wildlife. Bird watching is touristic activity that is widely practiced by many people around the world. The sustainable development of ecotourism in Albania has great prospects and opportunities for the intensification of entrepreneurship based on natural resources in rural areas. Food producers in Albania have potential for large areas of fertile soils and pastures, high-quality varieties of crops, and good breeds of sheep, pigs, cows, goats and mangules. There is practically no general marketing or promotion of the tourist offering branding of Albanian food products for placement in world markets. To attract investment, it is necessary to develop Albanian tourism brands and promote ecotourism in rural areas at international fairs. The concept of sustainable development of ecotourism is slowly being accepted in Albania as well. Ecotourism becomes a chance to protect biodiversity,

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<sup>2</sup> QuickStart Guide to a Tourism Business., 2006. Ecotourism vs Nature Based Tourism, Tourism Western Australia.  
[http://www.tourism.wa.gov.au/Publications%20Library/Growing%20Your%20Business/Ecotourism%20vs%20Nature%20Based%20Tourism%20v3%20260706%20\(final\).pdf](http://www.tourism.wa.gov.au/Publications%20Library/Growing%20Your%20Business/Ecotourism%20vs%20Nature%20Based%20Tourism%20v3%20260706%20(final).pdf).

but also an opportunity for young people, who through their work, can contribute to economic development of Albania. The development of ecotourism contributes to the protection of nature and the rational use of natural resources, the reduction of unemployment and poverty, the conservation of water, air and land; the increase in competitiveness and markets, and the development of entrepreneurship.

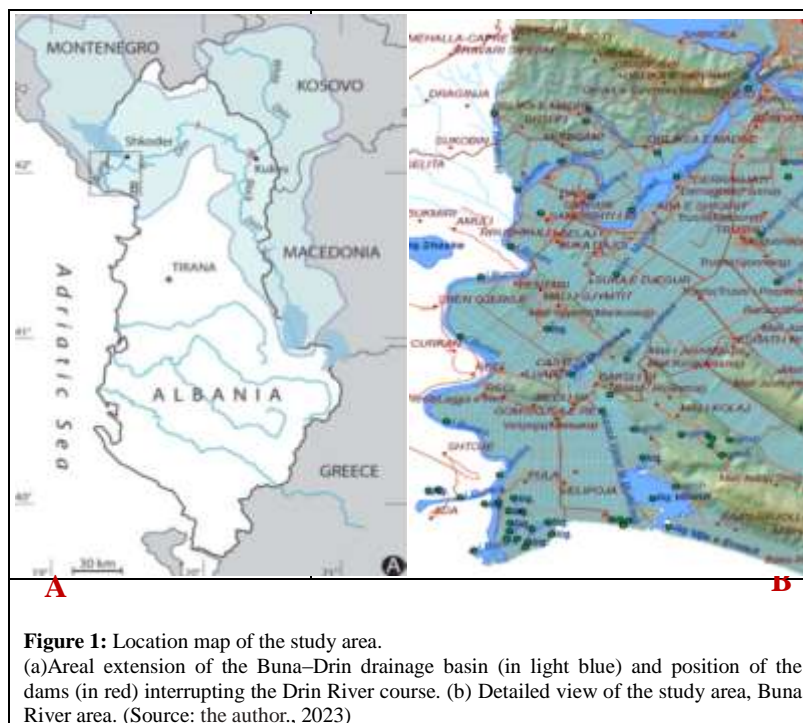
### **1 Study area**

The study area is part of the Shkoder municipality (northern Albania), which is one of the most important hydrographic hubs of the whole country. The Buna River -which is 44 km long with a depth that varies from 2 m to 4 m- is the only outflow from Lake Shkodër. Discharges from Lake Shkodër combine with flows from the Drin River about 1.5 km from the lake to produce a mean annual discharge of over  $20 \text{ km}^3 \text{ yr}^{-1}$ . The study area rests on a wide alluvial plain, 12 km southwest of Shkoder, along the left bank of the Buna River, the only emissary of Shkoder Lake. This lake is supplied by a  $5,200 \text{ km}^2$  drainage basin (20% in Albania, 80% in Montenegro<sup>3</sup>). The Buna River, which flows with a sinuous trend from the southeastern reach of the lake in the NE-SW direction, flows into the Adriatic Sea in correspondence with the Administration Unit of Velipoje. Approximately 2 km southwest of Shkoder, the Buna River receives water from the Drin River, which flows from mountainous regions in the eastern part of the country. This river encompasses a drainage basin of approximately  $14,200 \text{ km}^2$  including Albania, Macedonia and Kosovo. Consequently, the drainage basin of the Buna-Drin River system extends for approximately  $20,000 \text{ km}^2$ , almost half of the total hydrographic surface of Albania.

The Buna River alluvial plain is generally wide, but locally interrupted NW-SE. The river has a meandering trend, and it is characterized by single channel for most of its course. The alluvial plain is poorly drained, and during the wet season (November-January), it is typically waterlogged. Terrains are widely used for agricultural aims, and houses are concentrated in small villages dispersed along riverbeds or not far from them. Land – use changes adjacent to the river channel have reduced the area of the floodplain, altering ecosystem structures and the hydrology of the river.

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<sup>3</sup> Pano, N., Avdyli, B., 1984. [Hydrology of Albania]. Tirana: Academy of Science, Institute of Hydrometeorology; p. 941-46.



Before the intensive drainage and melioration of the area, almost 50 percent of the whole Buna River and Delta region was regularly flooded.

## 2 The natural potential of the Buna/Velipojë wetland

The Buna Delta/Velipojë wetland area covers a triangle of land between the Buna River, the sea and the western extremity of the Velipojë Administration Unit. This area supports a diverse mosaic of wetland habitats, including Pentar marsh and a sizeable portion of alluvial forest. Previously designated as a Managed Natural Area, this area now comprises the core conservation area of the BRPL and is fenced mainly to protect against high tourism pressures. The Buna floodplain covers a major part of the area and has now mostly been converted to agricultural land.

The undeveloped remaining land in the Buna watershed is covered by rich natural landscapes. Both parts of the river border contain forests and seminatural areas, including Maquis shrubland, beaches, sand dunes, and dry grasslands. Rare and endangered species dominate the water bodies and wetlands of the Lake Shkoder wetlands, where the outflow of the Buna River and its deltaic area empty into the Adriatic Sea. These wetlands

include 900–1,000 plant species and provide habitats for 25,000 wintering birds, and at the delta, more than 76% of migratory birds can be found. The wider region of the Buna Delta supports high reptile biodiversity and provides a migration route for freshwater fish, linking Shkoder Lake and the Adriatic Sea. Ada Island formed in the delta of the river. The island is characterized by a natural mosaic of habitats formed by the dynamic growing delta of the Buna River and is therefore protected under special laws for preservation of the entire Montenegrin coast. Areas of Albania such as Velipoja are also protected as a natural reserve. Wetland ecosystems can be found throughout the watershed area and are mainly important for water retention and flood control, while floodplain forests help humidify the region during summer Mediterranean droughts<sup>4</sup>.

Tourism has been identified as one of the main economic drivers for Velipoja Administration Unit based on its high potentials to offer a high variety of activities. The area has an enormous natural potential that makes it very attractive for tourism and it is not a casualty that it is very preferred by citizens and tourists as well. Velipoja is also a touristic center with a wide range of accommodation, both to visit the natural values of the region but also as a relaxing place especially during summer. The Velipoja complex consists of the Buna Delta, the Velipoja Managed Reserve, Viluni Lagoon, and the Baks Rrjolli coastal zone. The freshwater marshes of Domni and Mërtemza extend along the road to Velipoja. The river Buna is an important natural resource of the Velipoja Administration Unit and the surrounding area. The sediments carried by the Buna have an important role for the morphology of the seashore and of the coastline, which is subject to strong coastal erosion in the Velipoja area. According to previous descriptions, the Buna Delta is an impressive wilderness area<sup>5</sup>. However, like other Mediterranean wetland areas, it has been strongly transformed during recent decades. Between 1947 and 1980 approximately 36 km<sup>2</sup> of agricultural lands was reclaimed or removed from swamps and marshes, whereas only 2 km<sup>2</sup> of agricultural land existed before then.

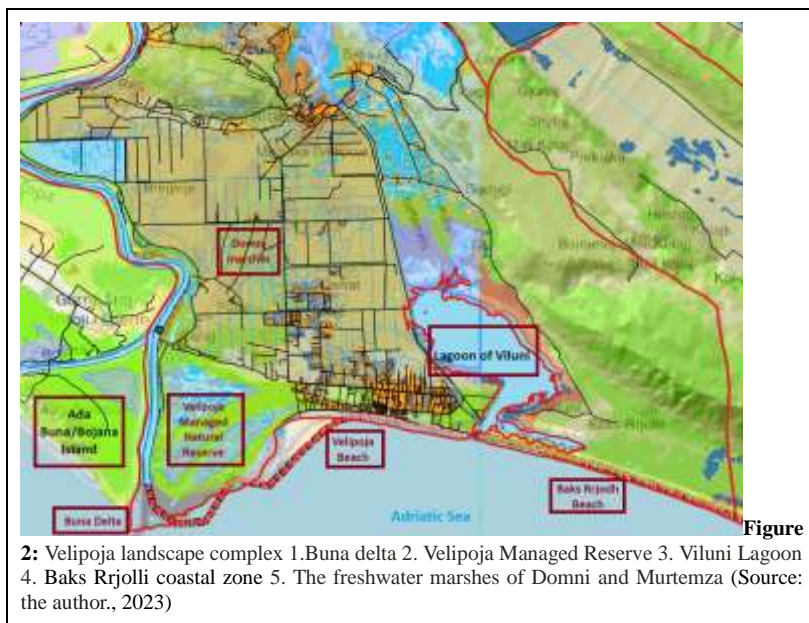
The Albanian part of the Buna basin is an important plant area (IPA) (Plant Life International, 2021). The “Protected Landscape of the Buna River – Velipoja” is designated an EMERALD candidate site (Directorate of Democratic Participation EU, 2021). Despite its high natural value, the area

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<sup>4</sup> Schneider-Jacoby M., et al. (2006b) 12. The Bojana – Buna delta between Albania, and Serbia and Montenegro. In A. Terry, K. Ullrich & U. Riecken (Eds.), *The Green Belt of Europe: From Vision to reality*. IUCN.

<sup>5</sup> Reiser, O., & von Fuhrer., L., 1896., *Materialien zu einer Ornithologie der Balkanica*. IV. Montenegro. Bos. - Herc. Landesmuseum in Sarajevo, Carl Gerold's Sohn, Wien.

is significantly threatened by unsustainable, unplanned, and illegal activities, as well as a lack of integrated management and shared values for



joint planning. This area is also very important hydrographically and is well-known for its high ecological sensitivity. The so-called “hydrologic junction” Shkodra Lake - River Buna - River Drin determines the hydrological regime of Shkodra Lake, the River Buna itself, and their tributaries, and has an important impact on the morphology and water regime of the Buna Delta in the southeastern Adriatic<sup>6</sup>. The Buna Delta offers important food sources for fish, spawning grounds, nurseries, and migration paths on which fish stocks depend (either within the wetland or other habitats connected to them). This area is also very important hydrographically and is well-known for its high ecological sensitivity. The so-called “hydrologic junction” Shkodra Lake - River Buna - River Drin determines the hydrological regime of Shkodra Lake, River Buna itself, and their tributaries, and has an important impact on the morphology and water regime of the Buna Delta in the southeastern Adriatic<sup>7</sup>.

<sup>6</sup> Krymbi, E., Kopliku, N., Rustja, D., 2014, The organization of coastal space of Velipoja-The challenge to the urban development. Studime Albanologjike, ISSN: 2304-3828.

<sup>7</sup> Beqiraj, S., Frascchetti, S., Gačić, M., Joksimovic, A., Mackelworth, P., Mascle, J., Notarbartolo di Sciarra, G., Odorico, R., 2010, Scientific rationale for the proposed CIESM South Adriatic Sea Marine Peace Park, MARINE PEACE PARKS IN THE MEDITERRANEAN - Siracusa, 18 - 20 November 2010.



**Figure 3:** River Buna delta (Source: the author., 2023)

The Velipoja wetland complex, with a surface of 8.2 km, has the shape of a triangle in the Buna delta east of the Buna River. Approximately 6.4 km<sup>2</sup> are fenced and protected as Managed Natural Reserves. Velipoja beach and dunes form the coastal profile of Velipoja, where large sandy beaches approximately 10 km in length and up to 200 m in width extend along the coast<sup>8</sup>. The adjacent prodelta areas on both sides of the river cover 8 km<sup>2</sup> with reaching 25 m. Velipoja Managed Natural Reserve was created in 1958. In this area, vegetation and birds are in their very best natural state. This reserve has four forest belts in its interior as well as four marshes, which are connected by land to each other. Through this reserve, via roads between dense forests, the mouth of the Buna River is reached. This point has a rare beauty, as there are three islands, a large one called Ada and the other two that are smaller. The reserve, for its part, in the southern part of its territory, is bordered by the Adriatic Sea Coast, from the western part, it is bordered by the Buna River, and in the northern and eastern parts, it is bordered by land. The marshes are strongly influenced by the dynamic processes of the Buna water regime with seasonal changes in water flow as well as by tides and waves of up to 3.5 m caused by strong winds. Several drainage channels link the marshland with the Buna, allowing control of the hydrological regime through special ports. Four roads starting from the main entrance help visitors visit different marshes and forest habitats.

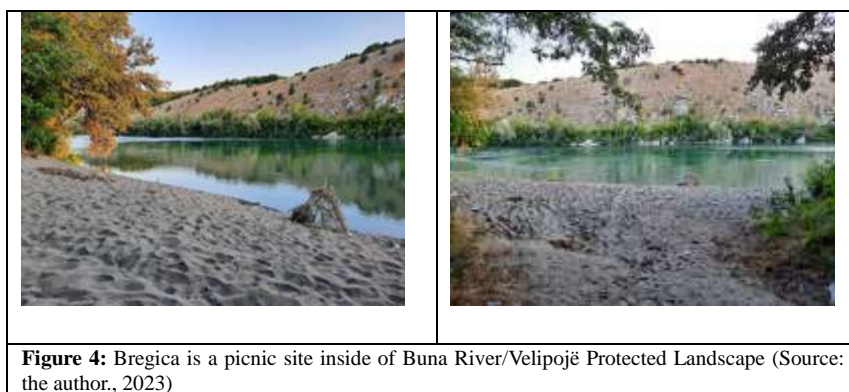
### 3 Ecotourism itineraries in the Buna River

The complexity of the landscape components of the Buna watershed, as well as its transboundary nature, make it an interesting case for study and analysis. The natural linkages between lakes and rivers, brackish waters and groundwater, inland and coastal zones in the area, the ongoing development

<sup>8</sup> Krymbi, E., Natural resources and landscape conservation in Velipoja Administration Unit, Collective Volumes, 21st Century Landscape Sustainability, Development and Transformations: Geographical Perceptions, ISBN 979-12-80064-61-5, Year: 2024; Pages: 321; Vol. 7, No. 1, May 2024.



of socioeconomic activities, and the lack of a legal framework for sustainable management represent the main aspects of the watershed that need to be analyzed. Sustainable development is a crucial not only for nature, but also for tourism, because intact nature, biodiversity survival and cultural heritage are the most important potentials for tourist destinations. **The Dajçi Administration Unit** is located in the southwestern part of the city of Shkodra, at a road distance of 22 km from the center. It is approximately 36.52 km<sup>2</sup> and almost all of this area is agricultural land with good production values. Dajçi is located along the left side of the Buna River, 10 km below its bridge, and has considerable natural, water and environmental resources. In addition to the tradition of using agricultural crops, such as fruit trees, a new tradition namely, cultivating ornamental plants, has recently been developed. Elements of natural and cultural heritage, such as: **Bregica** (tourist spot lying along the river Buna); the monasteries of Shen Shergj (St.Sergius) and Shen Baku, also known by people as the Church of Shna Prende; and the fortification of Belaj village. **Bregica is part of the Buna River.** It is one of the five destinations for biking around a river. It is a perfect place we can use as an adventure park, a potential area for the development of this activity, as it is rich in hardwood and sandy shore by the Buna River. Sailing activities can develop in the area via ecological means such as canoeing and stand-up paddling. Birdwatching can also be promoted, as the area is very rich in water birds. Other activities to be developed might also include yoga, retreat, camping, cycling, and sports. Adventure through wooden installations that will be placed through trees without damaging the area in question. These activities are environmentally friendly as they do not cause pollution, noise, or carbon dioxide emissions. *Canoeing, cycling along the Buna River, fishing, bird watching, and visiting cultural heritage sites, are the various activities that can take place in this area.*



**Figure 4:** Bregica is a picnic site inside of Buna River/Velipojë Protected Landscape (Source: the author., 2023)

The Buna River basin is rich in springs which dry out during the year. Their riverbeds can be completely dry, or permanent puddles can remain in them, with or without vegetation. Occasional Mediterranean rivers are a special phenomenon, that is important for the development and reproduction of numerous animals, primarily insects, reptiles and amphibians<sup>9</sup>. The cultural heritage of the Buna River region is rich, dating from the Paleolithic period and developed throughout the Neolithic, Eneolithic, Bronze, Iron, Antiquity, Middle Ages, and New and Contemporary periods. This historical course has created great cultural wealth.

Another attraction of the Buna area is **The Church of Shirq** or Shirq Monastery, which is a church and Benedictine monastery, now containing only its ruins (old wall and a cult object), in the village of Shirq, which is currently part of the Administration Unit of Dajç in the Buna River area in northern Albania. The church was built by Queen Helena of Anjou in 1290 and was dedicated to the saints Sergius and Bacchus. The church of Sts. Sergius and Bacchus on the river Bojana (Albanian: Buna), also known as the Shirgj Church (Alb.: Kisha e Shirqit/Shirgjit), is probably the most important sacred monument built at the southernmost end of the former province of Praevalitana, from an architectural point of view. It belongs to the regional architectural school together with the cathedrals in Tivar/Bar and Ulqin, as well as the smaller churches in Danj and Svač<sup>1</sup>. The church was a part of the former Benedictine monastery, whose existence is known from the literature. However, except for a part of the church, no other buildings of the former abbey have been preserved. Unfortunately, owing to the changes in the topography of the wider area around the church, caused by the erosion of the terrain, it is not possible to find any remains, because the entire area, except for the SW part of the church, has been eroded by the Buna River. The existence of at least one earlier church at the location of the present church is confirmed by The Chronicle of the Priest of Duklja, a mediaeval historical source indicating that the church was used as the royal mausoleum for several members of the Vojislavljević dynasty of Duklja, who were buried there, such as Mikhail I (ca. 1050–1081), Constantine Bodin (1081–1101), Dobroslav, and their descendants Vladimir and Gradinja. The location of Sts. Sergius and Bacchus in the mediaeval period were also known as Sveti Srđ (St. Sergius, abbreviated), because somewhere in the vicinity of the Benedictine monastery there existed a

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<sup>9</sup> Milanović, Đ., Čaković, D., Hadžiablahović, S., Vuksanović, S., Mačić, V., Stešević, D., Stanišić-Vučajić M., Biberdžić V., & Lakušić, D. (2021). Manual for Identification of Habitat Types in Montenegro of Importance for the European Union with the Main Indicator Species. Environment Protection Agency of Montenegro and University Banja Luka, Faculty of Forestry.

mediaeval village and a marketplace, an important trading place where contingents of salt were transferred<sup>10</sup>.

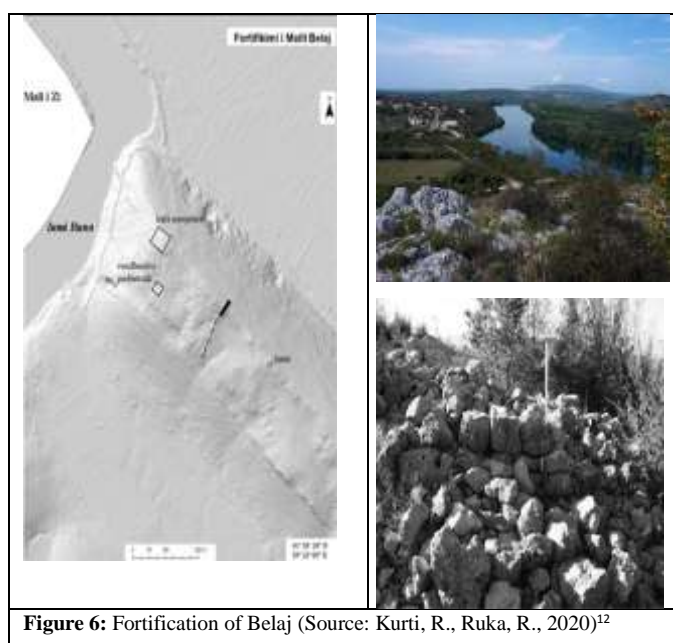


Figure 5: The Church of Shirq (Source: the author., 2023)

Buna, which was navigable for both, large ships and galleasses to the port of Shirqji, was not only crossed by distant merchants from Dubrovnik and Venice, but also served for regional traffic, especially for the transport of goods from Ulqin and Tivar. The International Day of Archaeological Parks was celebrated on April 18th at this archaeological site. **Fortification of Belaj:** Belaj village is situated in Shkodra Lowland, on the left side of the Buna River flow. It is located in the northern mountainous backbone of Gjymt, where this relief structure is interrupted by the River Buna, thus forming the gorge of Belaj. Two sides of the river's gorge have two ends, which are recognized by the names Belaj Mountain (left Buna) and Fraskanjeli (right Buna, in the territory of Montenegro). Above the two terraces, at the highest point of the hill (118 m), traces of medieval fortification were revealed. The fortification has a rectangular-shaped layout with a length of 40 m and width of 30 m. Its walls are relatively well preserved in the northwest and northeast sides. They are made of small and medium limestone and relate to abundant lime mortar. At many sites of this

<sup>10</sup> Hoxha, G., A return to the history of the church of Sts. Sergius and Bacchus on the Buna riverbank (Shirqi, Shkodra - north - western Albania), u/in: New Archaeological Discoveries in the Albanian Regions, Vol. II, Tirana, 2017, 695–721.

fortification, the two sides of the wall have thicknesses ranging from 1.40 m to 1.70 m<sup>11</sup>. Among the fortification elements, there are also two preserved towers with open jaws. In the northern part of the fortification, there is a tower with a circular shape, whereas its eastern edge is set with a rectangular tower. According to the terrain configuration, we assume that the possible entrance of fortification has been located on the southern side where the hill slope is light. The physical condition of the fortification and a historical background analysis of the Lowland of Shkodra lead us to believe that it is probably a fortified site that originated from the period of Balsha possession during the second half of the XIV century. This conclusion is based even on the local legends regarding the method of building fortifications in Bela and Fraska, which were registered by Hecquard in the middle of the XIX century but are also maintained to this day. A systematic archaeological excavation will probably provide more complete information about the date of its construction.



**Figure 6:** Fortification of Belaj (Source: Kurti, R., Ruka, R., 2020)<sup>12</sup>

<sup>11</sup> Hoxha, G., Fortifikimi mesjetar në fshatin Belaj (Shkodër) / The Medieval Fortification of Belaj's Village (Shkodra). In: Iliria, vol. 36, 2012. pp. 283-295.

<sup>12</sup> Kurti, R., Ruka, R., 2020: Raport mbi vëzhgimin arkeologjik në zonën kodrinore të Shqipërisë veriperëndimore (Lezhë-Shkodër, viti 2018)/Report on the archaeological survey of the hilly region of northwest Albania (Lezhë-Shkodër, 2018), Candavia 8, f. 25-66.

**The Buna delta** shelters a high proportion of coastal biodiversity in southwestern Balkans. The role of this area is particularly important for certain vertebrates such as birds, fish, mammals, reptiles and amphibians. One of the most important ecological features of the area is migration, especially for the globally threatened species fish and bird species. This area is a part of one of the three migration routes of European birds in the north – south direction. It plays a very important role in maintaining bird diversity at the regional level, and shelters species of global conservation concern and species of European conservation concern. In this area, you can also visit the Velipoja Wetland, which is located at the estuary of the River Buna, which includes 4 shallow swamps and the marsh of Domen; Viluni Lagoon; Velipoja Reserve, which lies in the delta of the River Buna, approximately 8 km away from Velipoja, where you can observe migratory birds, enjoy nature walks, bike rides, picnics etc. With a green and relaxing space, it offers direct contact with nature. Under the shade of tall trees and surrounded by a variety of vegetation, you will have the opportunity to observe nature and its beauty. **The Administration Unit of Ana e Malit** is located 6 km away from the city center of Shkodra, with an area of approximately 44 km<sup>2</sup>. It borders the south-southeast by the Buna River. The magnificent landscape, the Buna River and the villages with their microclimates, create good opportunities for the development of ecotourism in the area. The diversity of natural resources, hilly and aquatic ecosystems, groves and cultivated lands, is considerable and provides safe premises for the development of agriculture, and agrotourism in this area. The table of products from Ana e Malit does not lack fresh meat, cabbage and pies, cheese, chills, yogurt sauce, salads, pickles, vegetables such as tomatoes, peppers, cucumbers and olives. The organic agricultural and livestock products of the area and their cultivation provide opportunities for the development of agritourism and agribusiness. In addition to households in the area, there are also eco-farms that not only guarantee the safe processing of livestock products, but also attract the area.

## Conclusions

The River Buna plays an important role at the regional scale within the hydrographic network of Lake Shkodra-River Buna - Velipoja Coast. In terms of hydrology, the Buna plays a very important role in the regime of Lake Shkodra, the River Drin, their tributaries in the drainage basin and the Buna delta in Albania and Montenegro. In terms of biodiversity, the Buna and its surrounding wetland area is an important natural reserve and has

high potential for nesting and sheltering many animal groups. It would be much more efficient to maintain family farms and develop high-quality eco-products on the basis of the unique agro biodiversity typical of the region of the River Buna area. In addition, it is necessary to secure marketing to support tourism. This sector is the largest economic sector, so further growth in the future is expected. More will be said about issues that condition other sectors, such as agriculture, fishing, transport, and culture. The potential for developing ecotourism all year round in the Buna area is enormous, and for beginning, some elements important to establishing it are identified:

- health tourism – would require mapping health-related resources in the River Buna area (medicinal plants, recipes, – e.g., cooking pomegranate peel, etc., creation of “health trails”, etc.)
- immersion in old customs (demonstration of tradition to tourists through direct experiences, such as cooking traditional food with housewives, etc.)
- ecological facilities – Locally identified as an important element of ecotourism is the sustainable use of resources and consumption, with one of their main ideas being the use of restaurant waste to create compost on farms or feed to animals.
- promotion – by information boards, websites, marketing via social media, etc.

There is a need to implement development plans and manage natural resources in the Buna area in a way that ensures ecological and environmental integrity. Environmental education and interpretation are the keys to creating an enjoyable and meaningful ecotourism experience and are key points in differentiating between ecotourism and other tourism products. Successful interpretive components of ecotourism products foster appreciation and support for conservation efforts, local communities and culture.

**Acknowledgement:** The authors would like to thank the local authorities for the provided support in data collection about the real needs of the local community in relation to ecotourism.

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## THE USE OF ADVANCED METHODS IN THE CREATION OF TOURIST MAPS IN THE MUNICIPALITY OF LEZHA

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### **ABSTRACT**

Albania is the country of natural assets, of numerous cultural and historical values that constitute an important tourism potential. Lezha is a wonderful tourist complex which is becoming more popular every day, both for coastal tourism, cultural tourism, culinary and quality hotel service. In Lezha, it is observed that there is a low use of GIS cartographic methods in tourism, and this is therefore related to the lack of experts in technology, a phenomenon that has led to the ignorance of many of its tourist areas. The object of the study is the preparation of maps of the tourist resources of Lezha, this after several months of work in the field, with advanced methods including the most important areas to visit in Lezha. In order to achieve the goal and objectives, the study focuses on several issues: the role of the importance of cartography in tourism, the application of GIS in tourism in the case of Lezhë municipality (demonstration cases in some tourist attractions in the study area, where the interpretation of geographic data was made with the potentials that are important to visit where natural and cultural paths and itineraries are defined). The result of the developed study will serve as a product for tourist agencies, hotel counters, tourist service offices, etc.

**Keywords:** *Geographic Information Systems, Maps, Lezha, Management, Tourist Attractions.*

## Introduction

Geographic Information Systems (GIS) play a significant role in the tourism industry by providing tools for mapping, analyzing, and visualizing geographic data. The Geographic Information System applied to tourism management is the preferred platform of tourism information. On the basis of introducing the concepts of Geographic Information System (GIS) and Travel Geographic Information System (TGIS), this paper illustrates the role that the geographic information system plays in tourism management. Tourism has a strong geographical attributes. And GIS itself is information system offering services to geographic research and decision-making, which can play a role in tourism management<sup>1</sup>.

Here are some ways GIS is utilized in tourism:

1. *Destination Planning and Management:* GIS helps tourism planners analyze spatial data to identify trends, visitor patterns, and suitable locations for new attractions or accommodations.
2. *Marketing and Promotion:* Utilizing GIS can help in targeting specific demographics by analyzing travel patterns and preferences, allowing for more effective marketing strategies.
3. *Trail and Route Optimization:* For outdoor tourism, GIS can be used to design and optimize trails or routes for hiking, biking, or driving, taking into account factors like terrain and accessibility<sup>2</sup>.
4. *Visitor Experience Enhancement:* GIS applications can provide tourists with interactive maps and mobile applications that help them navigate destinations, find attractions, and learn about the area.

Overall, GIS enhances the efficiency and effectiveness of various aspects of the tourism industry, leading to better planning, marketing, and management.

The main value of GIS is in geographical analysis where vector and raster data models are used to perform six main analysis functions: proximity analysis, network analysis, overlay analysis, temporal change analysis, statistical analysis, and three-dimensional visualization<sup>3</sup>. The use and application of GIS technologies in the tourism sector can be divided into

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<sup>1</sup> Wei, W., 2011. Research on the Application of Geographic Information System in Tourism Management, 2011 International Conference on Environmental Science and Engineering (ICESE 2011).

<sup>2</sup> Hasaj, A., Krymbi, E., 2015. Industria turistike dhe impakti në ekonominë shqiptare, Buletini Shkencor i Universitetit të Shkodrës “Luigj Gurakuqi”, Seria e Shkencave Ekonomike.

<sup>3</sup> Fotheringham, S., Rogerson, P., 2005. Spatial Analysis and GIS.

three major application areas: tourism development and research, tourism planning, and tourism marketing<sup>4</sup>. GIS offers valuable and manifold opportunities for the development of modern tourism. In tourism development and research, GIS has been used to study ecosystems' biodiversity, their value as a tourism product, and the challenges they face from human development<sup>5</sup>.

However, as for all Albania, the tourism industry in the Municipality of Lezha has difficulties about the promotion. Therefore, one solution for this situation is the application of GIS in this area and providing it online for tourists and all interested visitors. The reasons for that are explained in this paper. So, the main aim of this paper is the application for the first time of GIS in the Municipality of Lezha, an important tourism destination in Albania. The object of the paper is the reflection of the mapping of the tourist resources of Municipality of Lezha, after several months of work in the field, with advanced methods, including the most beautiful natural and cultural areas. To achieve these goals and objectives, this paper focuses on several issues: the role of the importance of GIS in tourism, and the application of GIS in tourism in the case of Lezha Municipality (demonstration cases in some tourist destinations in the study area, where the interpretation of geographic data included touristic potentials, touristic infrastructure, and defined natural and cultural paths and itineraries). The purpose of the developed work that is reflected during the work is to serve as a product for tourist agencies, and tourist service offices. The purpose of the study is to create the Mapping of Tourist Resources of Municipality of Lezha with advanced methods, including the most beautiful natural, cultural and culinary areas, to be part of the tourist offerings and packages of local, national and international guides.

### **Methodology of work:**

- Cartographic methods (GIS) were used not only to synthesize the phenomena of the area but also to analyze the geographical phenomena in the field and to determine what they reflected.

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<sup>4</sup> Sureshkumar, M., Uttej, B., Mahadevan, K., 2017. Applications of GIS for Tourism. *Int J Latest Eng Manag Res* 2(4):12–16.

<sup>5</sup> Rahman, MA., 2010. Application of GIS in ecotourism development: A case study in Sundarbans, Bangladesh. *Search*, June, pp 1–89.

- The method of field observation, photographing the phenomena and the corresponding analysis.
- The most used method for this study was through secondary data. Secondary data were collected from the literature, from the offices of institutions in Lezha, from several studies and through various websites.
- Using the experience of foreign researchers (especially French, Italian, etc.) in the direction of tourism development.
- Field analysis through interviews and surveys.
- The contemporary methods of the Adobe Illustrator program were used not only to synthesize the phenomena of the area but also to illustrate the itineraries in a comprehensible way.

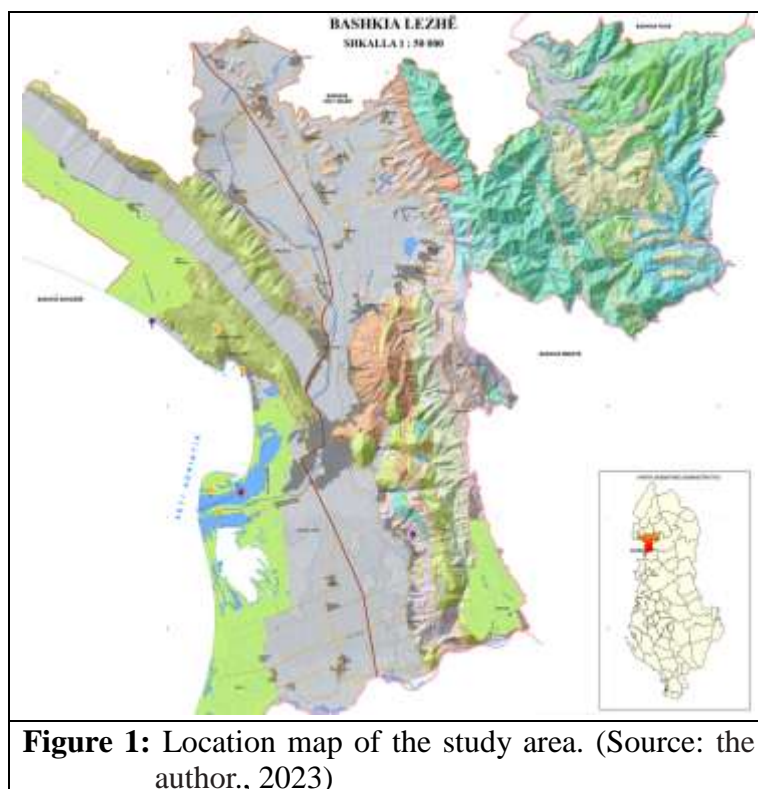
Thus, it examines location attributes and relationships of features through a range of spatial modeling procedures leading to diverse application areas using the six functionalities highlighted above.

## **1 Study area**

The Municipality of Lezha is located in the western plain of the Republic of Albania, in an area of 508.9 km<sup>2</sup>, bordered on the north by the Municipalities of Vau i Dejës and Puka, on the west by the Adriatic Sea and the Municipality of Shkodra, on the east by the Municipality of Mirdita and on the south by the Municipality of Kurbin. The municipality consists of 10 administrative units: Lezha, Shëngjin, Zejmen, Shënkoll, Balldren, Kallmet, Blinisht, Dajç, Ungrej and Kolsh. The territory contains two main urban areas (the city of Lezha and Shëngjin) and 65 villages. The natural landscapes are diverse and, in some areas, the terrain is below sea level. Its highest point is “Maja e Velës” with an altitude of 1170 m, while the average height of most of the territory is 5 meters above sea level. The Municipality of Lezha is recognized for its long coastline, which starts from the protected nature reserves of the Mati Coast and Kune-Vain-Tale to the rocky beaches in the north of the settlement of Shëngjin. The coast of Shëngjin, during the last 25 years has undergone a highdensity development<sup>6</sup>.

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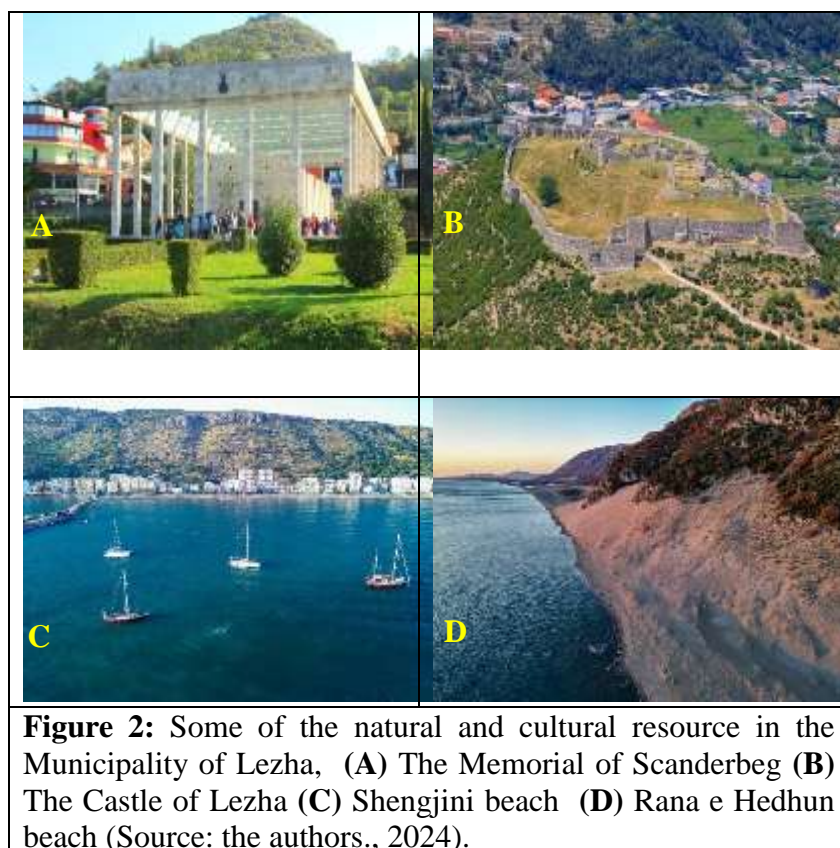
<sup>6</sup> Bashkia Lezhë, UTS-01. 2016. Plani i Përgjithshëm Vendor i Bashkisë Lezhë.



**Figure 1:** Location map of the study area. (Source: the author., 2023)

The territory of the municipality has a very rich hydrography. The north-western part is traversed by a stream-line of the Drin River and Gjadri River, while in the south, the municipality is bordered by Mati River and its delta. The Municipality of Lezha has a number of protected areas of national and international importance. The Kune-Vain-Tale Nature Reserve is a tremendous potential for the area. Another protected natural area is that of Bërzana, which is also classified as a Natural Reserve. The tourism sector has a positive growth trend in the municipality of Lezha. In national economic terms, the contribution of tourism has been increasing since 2013. In quantitative terms, the tourism industry contributed about ALL 32.2 billion in total value added in 2017, increasing by about 15.2 % in annual terms. In addition to contributing to the benefit of the economy, the tourism sector can potentially contribute substantially to employment and improve welfare in local economies<sup>7</sup>.

<sup>7</sup> Strategic Plan for the Sustainable Development of the Community of Lezha, 2013 – 2030.



The Municipality of Lezha inherits an incomparably rich natural environment characterized by: diversity of terrain features and microclimate conditions; edaphic factors that have created various forest formations; considerable plain areas; vast wetland areas accompanied by lithographs and sandy beaches; geological formations abundant in minerals and groundwater; as well as a rich hydrographic network<sup>8</sup>. Kune-Vain Lagoon is situated near Lezha and nestled between Shengjin and several villages of the island of Lezha. The Protected Area is 2,300 ha and it was formed by accumulated sediment from the Drin and Mati rivers. Two channels connect the lagoon with the sea. It has become one of the most visited lagoons in the country because of the culture, gastronomic tradition and the Adriatic coast. It was the most favorite among the Italian occupiers

<sup>8</sup> Le Tissier, M., Bruci, E., Kay, R., Adhami, E., Gjini, J., Brew, D., Leka, M., 2013. Identification and Implementation of Adaptation Response Measures in the Drini – Mati River Deltas. Tirane: UNDP.

(who actually erected the very first hotel here) toward the end of the 1930s. Kune Lagoon offers wonderful bird watching opportunities and delicious riverside restaurants make it ideal for nature and food enthusiasts. It has around 200 types of birds (some of them very rare), that is why the nature park is considered an important bird area. Kune-Vain is the first protected area in the history of nature conservation in Albania since it was declared a hunting reserve as early as the 1960s. It is the first protected area in Albania, promulgated since 1940. More than 360 species of animals have crossed the Kune-Vain region and about 190 species that inhabit the region are included in Albania's Red List of Threatened Species as referring to Center for the Protection and Preservation of the Natural Environment in Albania (PPNEA). Hunting is prohibited in the area, the complex exhibits exquisite architecture. The lagoon and the surrounding ecosystem are part of the managed natural reserve, but this lagoon system has been identified as a critical region vulnerable to climate change impacts. Rising sea levels and changes in precipitation intensity have challenged water supply, agriculture, fisheries, infrastructure and natural ecosystems.

## **2 Application of GIS method for the tourist maps in Lezha Municipality**

The tourism sector is dynamic, always looking for new and creative ways to improve visitor experiences and streamline destination administration and Geographic Information Systems (GIS) integration has become a game-changer in recent years, completely altering how tourism is organized, run and enjoyed. In the tourism industry, GIS, a technology that records, examines and makes sense of geographical and geographic data has emerged as a vital instrument for improved decision-making, resource management and customized experiences for travelers and destination stakeholders. Fundamentally, a geographic information system is a potent instrument that uses spatial data to generate, examine and display maps facilitating a more profound comprehension of the spatial connections within a certain region.

The mapping of tourist resources via advanced methods in the Municipality of Lezha has been implemented via several methods, but first, we will mention the application of the Geographical Information Systems (GIS), which has increased the ease of practicing the sustainable development of tourism as well as promoting tourists. The first phase involved the collection of primary data from the important areas visited in the Municipality of Lezha, as well as their analysis. These use the literature or

even field visits where several tourist potentials, such as natural, cultural, and culinary traditions or areas of importance in agrotourism, are evident. A significant number of these beaches are popular and populated beaches, protected natural areas or cultural monuments. Here, we can mention some of the main ones:

**The main tourist attractions of Lezha Municipality:** Skanderbeg Memorial; Lezha Castle; Ethnographic Museum; Kune Lagoon-Vain; Shëngjin Beach; Rana e Hedhun Beach; Tale Beach; Kune Beach; Vain Beach; Church of St. Veneranda; The church of St. Barbara; The Church of Saint Euphemia, Kallmet.

After the inventory of tourist attractions and the collection of relevant information, new itineraries are planned that will be useful for elite tourism. These tools will be created with the help of advanced methods of processing tourist information data, the attributes that the application of the Geographic Information System in tourism gives us, and cartographic and information processing methods through ArcGIS 10.5 software. In our study, mapping was performed in several case studies; as in the beginning, mapping of the entire territory of the Municipality of Lezha was carried out, and zonal division was also performed with maps of several different types of tourism that will be at the service of tourists. Maps could be used to encourage tourists who visit coastal areas to visit other types of tourism, such as for enthusiasts of various adventures, such as canoeing, cycling, hiking, birdwatching, and sport fishing. Therefore, the geographic information related to the function of tourism has been processed, georeferenced and divided into maps according to the areas of tourist importance to be visited with special types of tourism.

**Model 1: Map of tourist resources in Municipality of Lezha**

These steps were taken, as a start, by working through ArcGIS 10.5 software and choosing the Base Map model with Relief, again to better understand the geographical phenomenon, and then the layer of the surrounding territorial-administrative boundary of the Lezha Municipality. After that, the next phase of digitizing the attributes on the map was undertaken, such as the disposal of all natural, and cultural attributes or various important objects to be visited, forming a digital tourist map.





**Figure 3:** Map of tourist resources in Municipality of Lezha  
(Source: Renaldo Xhanej., 2024)

### Model 2: Mapping the city of Lezha

This case was made through the inventory of the important areas visited in the city of Lezha by realizing the zoning of the city of Lezha from where the map of the territory of the city was made with the ArcGIS program using Basemap OpenStreetMap, in this way, the map was enlarged, and there were more qualified roads and more appointments. This has been achieved in this way because Lezha has several attractions, such as the Skanderbeg Memorial, the Lezha Castle, and the Ethnographic Museum, as well as several services offered in Lezha to become a cultural tour for tourists.



**Figure 4:** Map of the city of Lezha with cultural itineraries (Source: Renaldo Xhanej., 2024)

The western edge of Lezha is the 186 m tall hill on which the castle sits. It does not only dominate the seacoast, but it also closes almost all the roads that lead inside the city. Thanks to its favorable geographic position, this hill has been inhabited since the middle of the first millennium before Christ. The footprints of the 5th century wall, the fortifying walls and the Akropolis of the ancient Lissus are marvelous even today. In the 9th century, the medieval castle of Lezha was built on top of these historic ruins. This gave Lezha the role of an urban center. *The memorial of Scanderbeg* is one of the most important monuments in Albanian history. In addition to the walls of the church, in this object, you will also find an apse with the sculpture of Scanderbeg, the fresco of Saint Nicholas, windows and three arches on the door of the church. 25 bronze shields which mark the 25 most important battles of Scanderbeg hang on the wall. On the marble plate sit copies of the sword and helmet of Scanderbeg. *Obelisk* is a monument in the heart of the city, the League Square. It is a memorial to the League of Lezha held on 2 March 1444. On this day, our national hero, Gjergj Kastriot Scanderbeg, brought together all the Albanian princes on the war against the Ottoman Empire. The League was the first event of a legal union among the Albanian princes. Obelisk was built using 346 lime blocks, each with a weight of 1 ton. It has the typical ancient shape of a trapezoid with a narrow base.

*The Catholic Cathedral of Saint Nicholas* –This cathedral was inaugurated in 2007. The project of architect Vicentini has perfectly combined the liturgical and esthetic needs. In addition to being a cult object, the cathedral is a work of art because it has the first clock tower in Lezha close to it. It can be found in the heart of the city, neighborhood Beslidhja. *The Mosque of Lezha* (1997), a cult object of the Muslim believers, it has an interesting architecture. It can be found in street “Luigj Gurakuqi”. *The Orthodox Church of the Metamorphosis of Christ, the Savior* –The church was inaugurated in 2005 in an obvious place, in front of the main square. This cult object can be visited for its artistic values as well

**Model 3: Map of Shengjin, which is the most important area for visiting near the coast**

We cannot talk about tourism in Lezha without including Shengjin, with the beach, the port and the lagoon; in other words, the relationship of Lezha with the sea. Called Nymphaeum in antiquity, the name was connected to the forest of Fairies located between Shengjin and Velipoje. Later, it was called Medea, after the name of the Argonaut princess, Medea, the name of which is found several times in north-western Albania. After the conversion to Christianity, the name took another form “Saint John of Medea.” Today

survives only the “Saint John” part and its port. But few know Shengjin as a port. He is mainly known for its beautiful beach surrounded by pine forests and protected by the mountain who sits as a crown. Situated in the crossroads of the main roads, the Shengjin beach manages to accept 100 000 vacationers per day. The beach combines with the active life during the peak season with some of the best restaurants, bars, clubs and live music spaces,



**Figure 5:** Map of Shengjin showing the most important areas to visit near the coast (Source: Renaldo Xhanej., 2024)

making it one of the most important resources for tourism in the eastern Adriatic. About 3-4 km away from Shengjin, a rare geo-monument, Rana e Hedhun is a beach that has yet to be exploited. There, it looks like the sand is attacking the mountain, because the slope is filled with fine sand, which gives it its name. It can be reached by car. On the way, there are several picturesque beaches. Kune-Vain Lagoons, these two lagoons lie in between the city of Lezha and the Adriatic Sea in both sides of the Drin River

estuary. Although they are always mentioned together because of their importance, they are two separate entities and different importance. If in Kune, you can go for the wonderful beach, in Vain, you can go for the tranquility of the forest or hunting. The lagoons host some of the best restaurants in the region

For this case, the zoning of the coastal territory of Shëngjin was performed, where the most important attractions to be visited around the coastal area were georeferenced through the application of the ArcGIS program. The main attractions that have been digitized include natural attractions, such as Rana e Hedhun Natural Monument, the Kune-Vaini Lagoon Area, all the cultural heritage sites and the services that may be of interest to tourists in the coastal area of Shengjin.

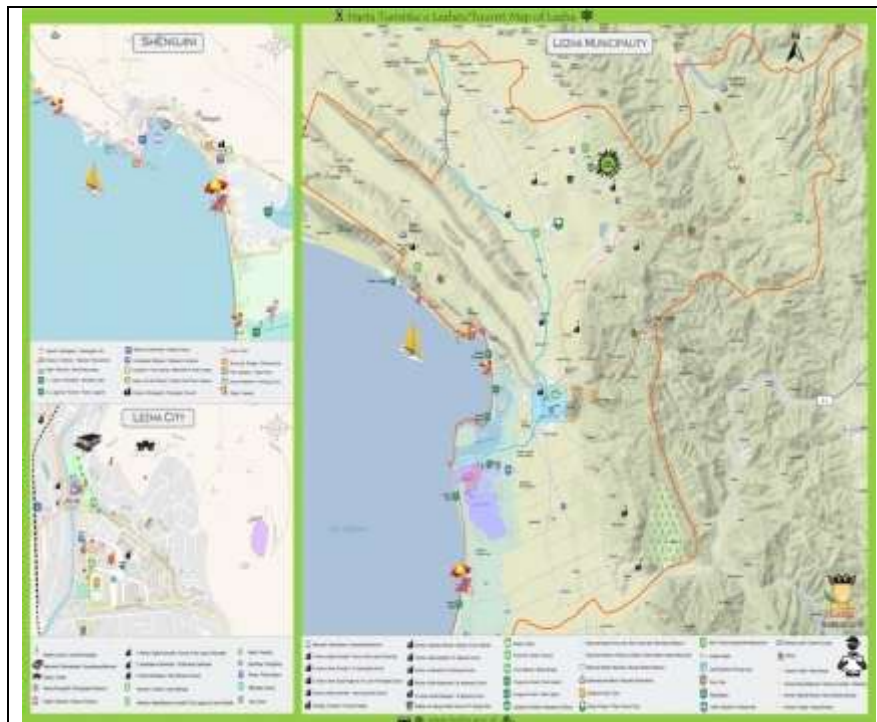
### **3 Tourist mapping the territory of Lezha Municipality using GIS platform and Adobe Illustrator**

Based on GIS platform (ArcGIS) and map mapping software (Adobe Illustrator), we study the rapid mapping technology, design and develop the rapid mapping system driven by the spatially based geographic database, and realize the automatic conversion of GIS data to map mapping software and rapid mapping functions. The use of contemporary methods through the Adobe Illustrator program not only to synthesize the phenomena of the area but also to illustrate the itineraries in a comprehensible way. Adobe Illustrator is a computer application dedicated to vector drawing and the design of graphic elements for almost any type of media and device, and can be used in editorial design, professional drawing, web layout, mobile graphics, web interfaces or different designs. The use of contemporary methods of the Adobe Illustrator program is a method that, by means of technological information systems, realizes the processing of tourist data in the form of very clear visual images illustrated with photos, icons or well-structured writing models. Tools such as Adobe found the need to design and create specific programs for its full development and thus facilitate the laborious work of digitizing some of the illustrations. The Adobe Illustrator program is the best model for creating brochures, maps and in the case of our study, the maps created and worked on in this program are easy to understand so that the information is very clear for all layers of the population. Using the Adobe Illustrator Program, several different map models for the territory of the Lezha Municipality have been created. The maps created by GIS are modeled on top with icons, labels, writings, and photographs so that the geographical elements that are important to visit are

understood. easier.

**Model 1: Tourist Map of Lezha Municipality with Adobe illustrator**

In this model, GIS processed maps of the territory of the Lezha Municipality and the zone of Shengjin were constructed, and then, the Adobe Illustrator program, was used to model them with different icons, labels or texts to be as clear and comprehensible to the eyes of tourists.



**Figure 6:** Tourist Map of Lezha Municipality with Adobe illustrator (Source: Renaldo Xhanej., 2024)

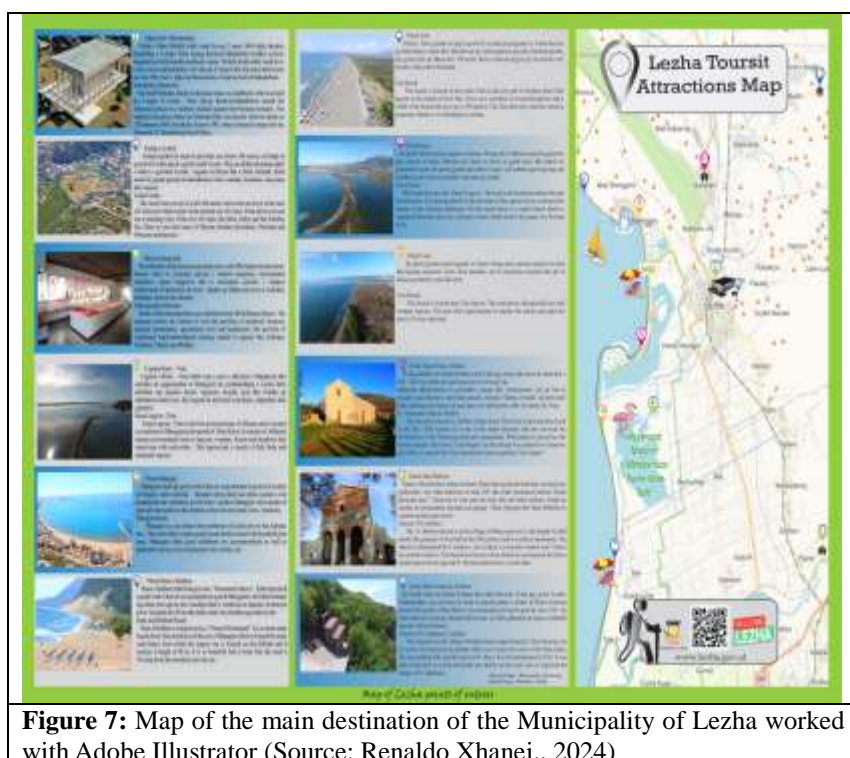
The symbols in the map are the most important way to convey information, and vivid symbols can efficiently and quickly convey and express the basic information of the map to the readers. Using concise map symbols instead of spatial data and visualizing the geographic location, quantity and distribution of elements through different symbols can clearly reflect the characteristics and distribution patterns of feature elements and provide a clearer and more intuitive understanding of feature elements.

**Model 2: Map of the main destination of the Municipality of Lezha worked with Adobe Illustrator**

In this model, maps were taken from the Open Street Map, and information



was processed on which the main tourist attractions are located and presented with the corresponding icon and number on the map to find the main tourist destinations more easily. Adobe Illustrator gives us the opportunity to add texts or photos that are more understandable, and for tourists, the program gives us the opportunity to create map-type brochures. After you add your basemap and layers into the Maps for Adobe Creative Cloud extension, the map is ready to be synced to Illustrator. The vector layers imported from the OSM basemaps are organized into a detailed layer structure that can be individually selected for customization and editing. Whether you want to change your color palette or select from Adobe font options, working in Illustrator is a fun way to expand your map design skills.



**Figure 7:** Map of the main destination of the Municipality of Lezha worked with Adobe Illustrator (Source: Renaldo Xhanej., 2024)

It is necessary to study the knowledge reasoning technology in depth, reason out the new knowledge to deal with special notes according to the existing notes, and establish a more complex rule base on the existing note configuration rules, so as to improve the degree of automation and configuration efficiency of the notes. It is necessary to study the reverse conversion of cartographic data to GIS data, and synchronize the update of

source GIS data based on the latest cartographic data. It is also necessary to study the collaborative mapping technology, so as to further improve the efficiency of map compilation.

## Conclusion

In this paper, we study the rapid mapping technology based on GIS platform and map mapping software, study the automatic map mapping method, design and develop the spatial basic geographic database-driven rapid mapping system, realize the automatic lossless conversion of GIS data to map mapping software according to the established mapping rule base, realize the automatic configuration of symbols, notes and automatic processing of element relationship and so on.

The results of this project are likely because several maps with new itineraries will be added to the tourism industry of Lezha. Lezha tourists will have more opportunities to visit more natural and cultural attractions. With the creation of tourist maps of Lezha, tourist offerings will be more competitive, adding to international tourists who are more inclined toward elite tourism. The most beautiful and important areas to visit in the territory of Lezha are useful guides for tourist agencies, in tourist service offices, at hotel counters, and in the creation of tourist maps. They promote different types of tourism in coastal areas that inform tourists who visit them about the many touristic values that this area has.

This also affects the increase in the workflow of businesses that are more advertised for good services in tourism. The maps created and itineraries with advanced methods will also be digital for the communication lines of tourism, tourist agencies, websites that focus on local guides, pages of the Tourism Directorate of Lezha Municipality, and guides for national and international local guides. It will be distributed on the internet with the special brand as well as with the personalized barcode. It will be attached to the stickers in hotels so that tourists can see it, and with a scan, they can obtain information about the areas they want to visit in the Lezha area and stay longer in the area.

**Acknowledgments:** The authors would like to thank the local authorities of Municipality of Lezha and University of Shkodër “Luigj Gurakuqi”, for the provided support in data collection and in the technical suggestions.

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## CLIMATE CHANGE IMPACTS AND ADAPTATION STRATEGIES IN ALBANIA'S TOURISM SECTOR: A CASE STUDY OF THE SHKODRA REGION

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### ABSTRACT

This paper analyzes climate change impacts and adaptation strategies in Albania's tourism sector, with a special focus on the Shkodra region. It is one of the first attempts in this context, which represents both a significant strength and a limitation. Tourism is rapidly becoming the main economic sector in Albania, contributing significantly to employment and GDP. While tourism is a contributor to climate change, it is also increasingly threatened by it. This paper explores how reduced thermal comfort, degradation of natural resources, freshwater scarcity, and coastal erosion due to sea level rise and urban development impact tourism. The study utilizes existing literature, secondary data, and primary data from field research. Findings indicate that climate change drivers such as temperature changes, altered precipitation patterns, sea level rise, and extreme weather events significantly impact tourism. The paper concludes with various adaptation strategies, including infrastructure development, diversification of tourism products, community engagement, capacity building, and policy interventions aimed at enhancing tourism sector resilience.

**Keywords:** *climate projections, policy interventions, resilience, tourism sustainability.*

### 1. Introduction

#### 1.1 Background and importance of the study

Tourism is fast becoming the main economic sector in Albania, contributing significantly to employment and the gross domestic product (GDP)<sup>1</sup>. However, the sustainability and growth of this sector are increasingly

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<sup>1</sup>[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tourism\\_in\\_Albania](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tourism_in_Albania)

threatened by climate change. The impacts of climate change on tourism include reduced thermal comfort, degradation of natural resources such as freshwater availability, and coastal erosion due to sea level rise and urban development<sup>2</sup>. These changes pose significant risks to tourism activities everywhere, including Albania and the Shkodra region, which are heavily reliant on environmental and climatic conditions. In this context, the main objectives of this paper are to analyze the impacts of climate change on the tourism sector in Albania, with a focus on the Shkodra region; to identify the main climate change drivers affecting tourism; and to explore various adaptation strategies to enhance the resilience of the tourism sector.

### **1.2 Overview of climate change impacts on tourism**

Climate change is one of the greatest challenges that humanity is facing. The main cause of climate change is the greenhouse gas emissions (GHG) derived from human activities. The consequences of climate change are already being felt around the world, with effects such as increasing temperatures, varying precipitation patterns, rising sea levels, or the increase on the frequency and intensity of extreme weather events. The tourism sector is highly vulnerable to the impacts of climate change, including present-day increased climate variability and extreme events. At the same time, tourism activity contributes to GHG emissions to the extent of 8% to 10% globally (including direct, indirect, and main supply chain emissions)<sup>3</sup>.

The Mediterranean region, which includes Albania, is the world's leading tourism area and accounted for one-third of global tourism in 2022<sup>4</sup>. The tourism industry here is vulnerable to climate change, particularly in low-income countries. Many studies project a decrease of climatic comfort for tourism in the Mediterranean in the next decades, particularly during summer. Water scarcity may create additional constraints for tourism. Mediterranean coasts are also characterized by narrow sandy beaches that are highly valuable for coastal ecosystems and tourism. The net economic effect on tourism will depend on the country and the season (fig. 1). On the other hand, there is adaptive potential in the extension of the period with favorable climatic conditions for urban tourism in northern Mediterranean cities<sup>5</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup> MedECC, 2020. Climate and Environmental Change in the Mediterranean Basin – Current Situation and Risks for the Future. First Mediterranean Assessment Report.

<sup>3</sup> World Tourism Organization (2024 ), Policy Guidance to Support Climate Action by National Tourism Administrations, UN Tourism, Madrid.

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.ascame.org/new/the-new-normal-for-mediterranean-tourism/>

<sup>5</sup> Ali, E. et al. 2022: *Cross-Chapter Paper 4: Mediterranean Region*. In: Climate Change

Albania, as part of the Mediterranean region will also be affected by these issues, which will be analyzed further below.

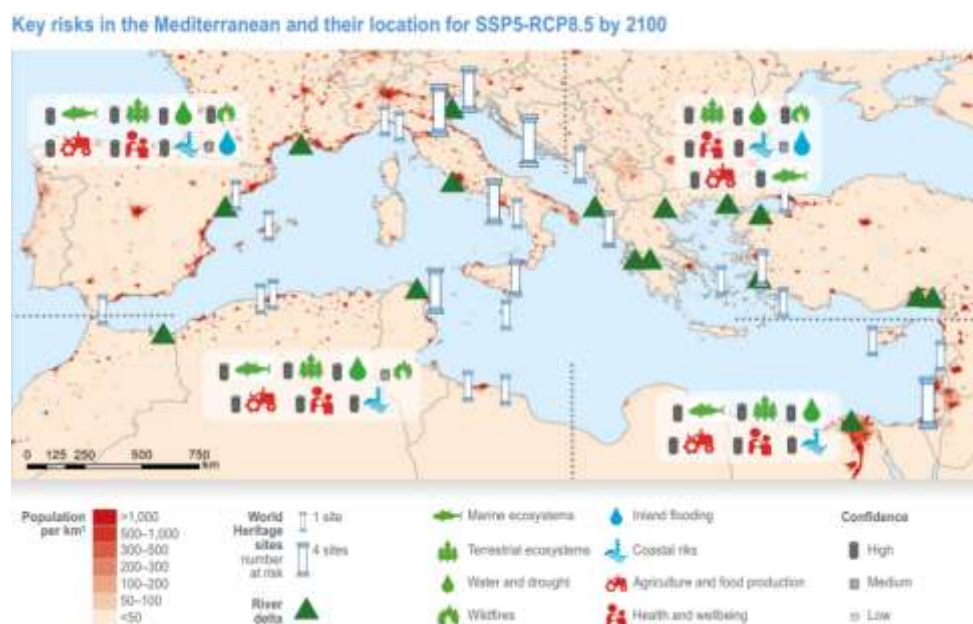


Figure 1. Key risks from climate change in the Mediterranean by 2100  
(source: Ali. E et al. 2022)

### 1.3 Climate change impacts in Albania

Albania has a Mediterranean *climate* with mild and humid winters and hot and dry summers<sup>6</sup>, with some continental characteristics in the south-eastern part of the country (fig.2). Annual average air temperatures range from 11.3 °C in mountainous areas to 21.8 °C in lowland and coastal areas, while minimum annual average temperatures range from -0.1 °C to 14.6 °C, respectively. Albania has experienced an increase in mean annual temperature of 1°C since the 1960s, mainly during the summer months<sup>7</sup> (fig. 3). Climate projections show in 2050 a further increase in temperature and heat waves, a decrease in total precipitation, an increase in the frequency and duration of extreme events like floods and droughts, and a

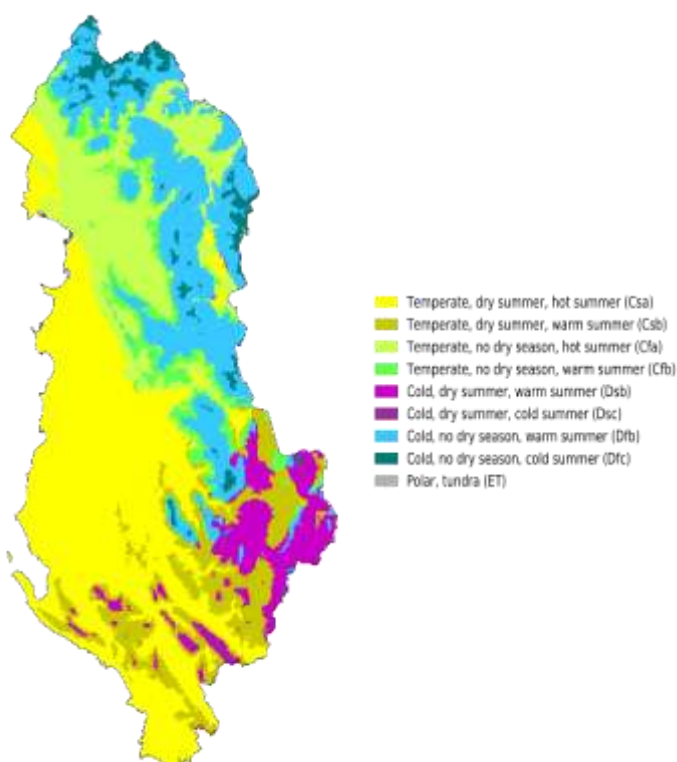
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<sup>6</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Koppen\\_climate\\_classification](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Koppen_climate_classification)

<sup>7</sup> World Bank Group, 2021: *Climate Risk Profile: Albania*.

rising sea level<sup>8</sup>. Albania's coastal area is also at elevated risk due to sea level rise as well as flooding from rivers, storm surges, and coastal inundation. Moreover, the likely increase in frequency and intensity of heavy rains could make the coastal region even more vulnerable<sup>9</sup>. With a growing tourism industry<sup>10</sup>, climate change impacts related to it are inevitable for Albania too.

Köppen-Geiger climate classification map for Albania (1980-2016)



Source: Beck et al.: Present and future Köppen-Geiger climate classification maps at 1-km resolution. *Scientific Data* 5:180214, doi:10.1038/sdata.2018.234 (2018)

Figure 2. Köppen-Geiger climate classification map of Albania (1980-2016)<sup>11</sup>

<sup>8</sup> MTE (Ministry of Tourism and Environment) & UNDP, 2022: *The Fourth National Communication of Albania on Climate Change*; Tiranë.

<sup>9</sup> World Bank Group, 2021: *Climate Risk Profile: Albania*.

<sup>10</sup> According to INSTAT (National Institute of Statistics of Albania), 10 million tourists visited the country in 2023, a 30 % increase from the previous year

<sup>11</sup> [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Koppen-Geiger\\_Map\\_ALB\\_present.svg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Koppen-Geiger_Map_ALB_present.svg)

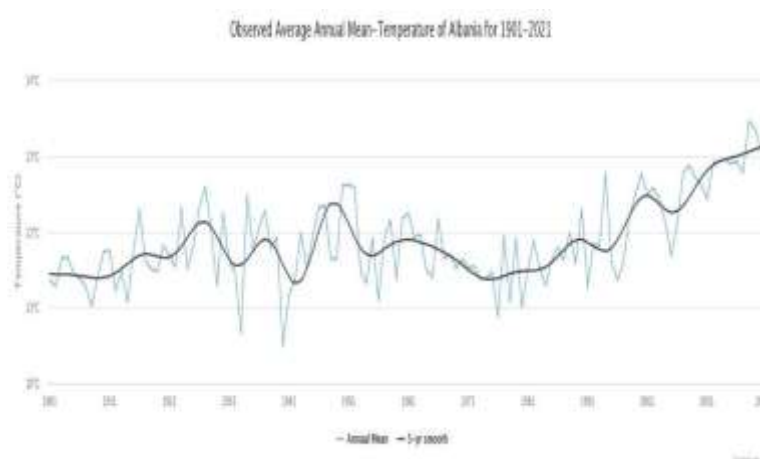


Figure 3. Evolution of the average annual mean temperature (in °C) in Albania (1991-2021)<sup>12</sup>

## 2. Methodology

This study uses a mixed method approach. It involves both primary and secondary data sources to provide a comprehensive analysis of climate change impacts and adaptation strategies in Albania's tourism sector, with a focus on the Shkodra region. Primary data were collected through field research conducted in the Shkodra region. This included especially direct observations: field visits were made to key tourist sites in the Shkodra region to observe and document physical evidence of climate change impacts, such as coastal erosion, changes in water levels, and damage to infrastructure. Secondary data were obtained from a variety of sources, including: scientific reports (national and international scientific reports on climate change and tourism); statistical data (data from research institutes, government agencies, and international organizations were used to analyze trends in temperature, precipitation, sea level rise, and extreme weather events); and a literature review (existing literature on climate change impacts and adaptation strategies in the tourism sector was reviewed). This included academic articles, conference papers, and policy documents. The study acknowledges some limitations, as: data availability - the availability of detailed and up-to-date climate data for the Shkodra region is limited and this may affect the accuracy of projections and impact assessments; and

<sup>12</sup> <https://climateknowledgeportal.worldbank.org/country/albania/climate-data-historical>

scope of field research - due to time and resource constraints, the field research was limited to specific sites within the Shkodra region which may not fully capture the regional variability in climate change impacts.

### 3. Case Study Area

#### 3.1 Overview of the Shkodra region

For the purpose of this study, the Shkodra region has been identified with Shkodër County. It lies in north-west Albania, and includes the Western Albanian Alps, the Mbishkodra and Nënshkodra Lowlands, and the central mountainous region of Puka. It has a surface area of 3562 km<sup>2</sup>, a population of 202,895 inhabitants (in 2019) and includes the districts of Shkodër, Malësi e Madhe, and Pukë. Approximately 80% of the surface is mountainous. The climate is Mediterranean; the average annual temperature ranges from 7.5°C in Vermosh to 14.8°C in the city of Shkodra. The average annual rainfall is about 2000 mm, one of the highest in Albania. Summer is dry, usually. The region of Shkodra is known for its rich hydrographic resources. There are the Drini, Buna, Shala, Kiri, Cemi rivers, streams, and water sources. To the western part of the city of

Shkoder, lies the Lake of Shkodra, the largest in the Balkans. Climatic factors have influenced the presence of a rich vegetation of more than 1,700 species.

Approximately 30% of the surface is covered with forests; there is also a variation of wild animals<sup>13</sup>.



Figure 4. Map of Shkoder county and some of its main touristic attractions (*source: Shkoder county*)

<sup>13</sup> <https://qarkushkoder.gov.al/qarku-shkoder/>



### 3.2 Trends of tourism development in the Shkodra region

During the last years, even the region of Shkodra has followed the positive trend that Albania has had in terms of the number of visitors. The official statistics for the number of visitors passing through the border points of the Shkodra region show a more or less constant increase of 30% per year for the last 4 years. A good part of these visitors are tourists who visit Shkodra as part of touristic packages of Croatia and Montenegro. Most of them are visitors from Western Europe, but there is an increasing presence of visitors from Eastern Europe and other countries as well. They mostly visit Shkodra city for a day trip and return back to Montenegro. Only a small part of them continue their journey to other Albanian cities or destinations. Extending their stay in Shkodër is one of the most important challenges facing tourism in the region today. There is an increasing trend in the number of visitors who come to Shkodër on self-organized tours (by motorbikes, bicycles, campers, etc.). Their stay time is longer, due to the very nature of their organization and travel, but improving information, promotion, and services for them would certainly increase the stay time. A very important contingent of visitors to Shkodër consists of Albanian vacationers from Kosovo and North Macedonia and those who emigrated mainly to Europe. They prefer sand and sea tourism, so they choose to relax on the beach of Velipoja (fig. 5). Their vacations usually last from 1 to 2 weeks and are mainly concentrated in the summer period. The latest trend is the increase in the number of Albanian visitors from Kosovo and Macedonia who visit Shkodra in an organized way (mainly school students). They are mainly oriented towards cultural and didactic tourism, and these visits serve mainly to illustrate the subjects of history and geography<sup>14</sup>. Agrotourism has also been increasing in the region during the last few years.



Figure 5. Velipoja and Thethi, two of the main touristic destinations in the Shkodra region (*source*: the author)

<sup>14</sup> <https://qarkushkoder.gov.al/tendencat-e-zhvillimit-t-e-turizmit-ne-shkoder/>

### 3.3 Climate change in the Shkodra region

The effects of climate change are already well visible by increasing air temperatures, melting glaciers and decreasing polar ice caps, rising sea levels, increasing desertification, as well as by more frequent extreme weather events such as heat waves, droughts, floods, and storms. Climate change is not globally uniform and affects some regions more than others. On the following diagrams, you can see how climate change has already affected Shkodër County during the past 40 years<sup>15</sup>. The data source used is ERA5<sup>16</sup>, the fifth generation ECMWF<sup>17</sup> atmospheric reanalysis of the global climate, covering the time range from 1979 to 2021 with a spatial resolution of 30 km. The below graph shows an estimate of the mean annual temperature for the larger region of Shkodër County (fig. 6). The dashed blue line is the linear climate change trend. It can be clearly noticed that the temperature trend is positive, and that it is getting warmer in Shkodër County due to climate change, especially during the last 20 years.

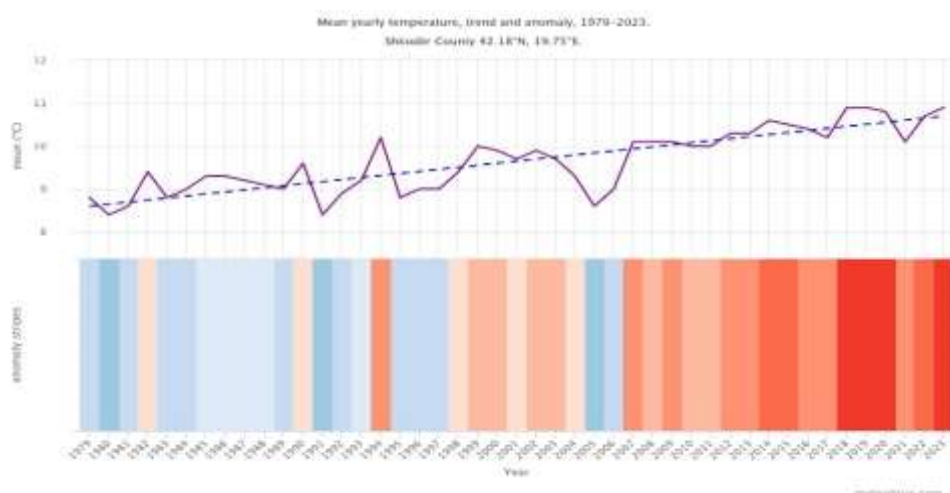


Figure 6. Mean yearly temperature, trend, and anomaly in Shkodër County (1979-2023)<sup>18</sup>

<sup>15</sup> [https://www.meteoblue.com/en/climate-change/shkoder-county\\_albania\\_3344950](https://www.meteoblue.com/en/climate-change/shkoder-county_albania_3344950)

<sup>16</sup> **ERA5** is the fifth generation ECMWF reanalysis for the global climate and weather for the past 8 decades: data is available from 1940 onwards.

<sup>17</sup> The European Centre for Medium-Range Weather Forecasts is an independent intergovernmental organisation supported by most of the nations of Europe. It operates one of the largest supercomputer complexes in Europe and the world's largest archive of numerical weather prediction data

<sup>18</sup> [https://www.meteoblue.com/en/climate-change/shkoder-county\\_albania\\_3344950](https://www.meteoblue.com/en/climate-change/shkoder-county_albania_3344950)



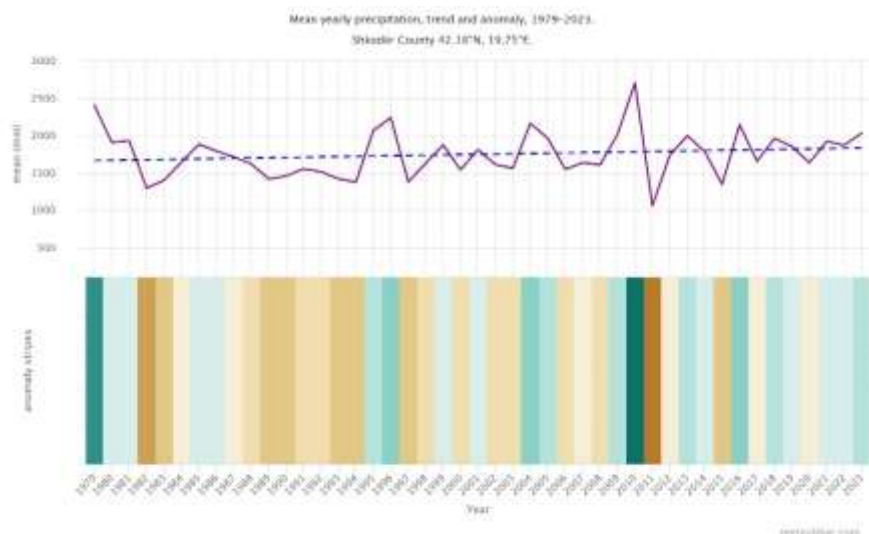


Figure 7. Mean yearly precipitation, trend, and anomaly in Shkoder County (1979-2023)<sup>19</sup>

Meanwhile, the above graph shows that there are some small trend anomalies regarding the mean yearly precipitation, especially after the really wet year in 2010: anyway, it seems more difficult to find an exact tendency of precipitation patterns – the biggest issue here might be their annual (monthly) distribution and extreme events related to it, which are not visible in this graph.

#### 4. Climate Change Impacts on the Tourism Sector of the Shkodra Region

Based on the data and the methods used for the purpose of this study, some of the main impacts in the tourism sector of the Shkodra region due to climate change will be related to:

##### *a) Changes in temperature and precipitation patterns*

As shown in the previous section, the Shkodra region, like much of Albania, is experiencing significant changes in its climate, and projections for 2050 indicate a further increase in temperatures and a likely decrease in total precipitation. These changes are expected to result in more frequent and intense heatwaves, which will reduce thermal comfort for tourists, especially during the summer. In fact this is already happening: based on

<sup>19</sup> [https://www.meteoblue.com/en/climate-change/shkoder-county\\_albania\\_3344950](https://www.meteoblue.com/en/climate-change/shkoder-county_albania_3344950)

the own experience of the author of this paper as a licensed tourist guide, guiding in July and August in the city of Shkoder during the last few years, has become really uncomfortable and, in some cases, risky for the health of the tourists due to the extreme heat (maximum temperature reaching 40°C). In fact, most of the organized groups by tourist agencies are avoiding the tours during this period; on the other hand, the rising temperatures will favor an extension of the touristic season and suitable TCI<sup>20</sup> values, which is now beginning earlier than before (from early April) while continuing later (till the end of October). In fact, this might be one of the few advantages from climate change in the tourism sector, but in the long run, even the “sand and sea” tourism industry in the Velipoja coastal area, might be affected by rising temperatures and extreme heat. Meanwhile, the expected reduction in precipitation also poses a threat to freshwater resources, which are vital for both the natural environment and tourism activities, especially during the summer months.

***b) Effects of sea level rise and coastal erosion***

One of the most significant impacts of climate change in the Shkodra region regarding tourism will be sea level rise, which contributes to coastal erosion. This erosion threatens the region's beaches, which are a major attraction for tourists. The best example comes from the Velipoja coastline, the main “sand and sea” destination in Shkoder county<sup>21</sup> (fig. 8). According to the few studies done<sup>22</sup>, there is a tendency of increased erosion in some part of it, due to global factors (climate change and sea level rise) but also local factors (like the reduction in the sediment deposition of Drini to Buna river, and, as a result, to the delta of Buna in the Adriatic Sea, too) caused by the construction of three large hydroelectric plants during the communist period (the last one, Komani, in 1985), (fig. 9). Rising sea levels and increased storm surges can also damage coastal infrastructure, including hotels, restaurants, and recreational facilities. The risk of coastal flooding also poses a threat to agricultural land and natural habitats, further reducing the attractiveness of the region as a tourist destination.

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<sup>20</sup> TCI (Tourism Climate Index)

<sup>21</sup> This coastline is about 14 km long and 200-500 m large, and is considered one of the best in Albania.

<sup>22</sup> Balla, A. et al: “Evolucioni morfoteknik dhe morfologjik i zonës bregdetare Shëngjin – Grykëderdhja e Bunës”, Studime Gjeografike IV, Tiranë 2014



(*source*: Google Earth, accessed July 2024)



Figure 9. Erosion along Velipoja coastline (*source*: the author)

### c) *Extreme weather events*

The frequency and severity of extreme weather events, such as floods and droughts, are expected to increase due to climate change. These events can disrupt tourism activities, damage infrastructure and cultural heritage, and pose safety risks to tourists (fig.10). For instance, the Shkodra region has experienced significant flooding in recent years, the most important one in 2010 and the most recent one in 2022, which has impacted both urban and

rural areas. Usually floods in the region occur during the winter season, but spring and autumn can not be excluded either, so they might interfere with the touristic season too, in the future. Droughts, on the other hand, can lead to water shortages, affecting both residents and tourists. And related to them, fires are becoming more common and problematic recently in many countries of the Mediterranean, especially in summer, Albania included<sup>23</sup>.



Figure 10. Damage to infrastructure and cultural heritage by floods in the Shkodra region (*source*: the author)

#### ***d) Impacts on tourism economy, infrastructure, and services***

The economic impacts of climate change on tourism in Albania and the Shkodra region might be multifaceted. Reduced thermal comfort, degradation of natural resources, and damage to infrastructure can all lead to a decline in tourist arrivals and revenue. Climate change will also affect tourism infrastructure and services in the Shkodra region. Increased temperatures and extreme weather events require improvements in infrastructure resilience, such as better thermal insulation, reliable water and electricity supply, and robust building standards to withstand flooding and storms<sup>24</sup>. Additionally, the tourism sector must invest in services that cater to the changing needs of tourists, such as providing more shaded areas, water-saving technologies, and promoting alternative tourism activities that are less sensitive to climate changes<sup>25</sup>. The net economic

<sup>23</sup> Like the recent case in Shengjin, close to Velipoja, on 30.07.2024.

<sup>24</sup> Laçi, S & Skenderi, F: “Bregdeti i Shqipërisë përballë sfidave të ndryshimeve klimatike”, Studime Gjeografike IV, Tiranë, 2014.

<sup>25</sup> Avdia, B: “Climate change and its impacts on tourism development-the case of Albania” Scientific Bulletin – Economic Sciences, Volume 20/ Special Issue EtaEc 2021.

effect of climate change on tourism in Albania and the Shkodra region in the next years will depend on their ability to adapt and mitigate these impacts.

### **5. Adaptation Strategies for the Tourism Sector**

Based on our case study and the literature review, some necessary adaptation strategies for the tourism sector in Albania and the Shkodra region in a changing climate that have been identified, are listed below:

#### ***a) Infrastructure development***

Improving the resilience of tourism infrastructure is crucial to adapting to climate change impacts in the Shkodra region. This includes:

- *Thermal insulation and energy efficiency:* upgrading buildings with better thermal insulation to maintain comfortable indoor temperatures and reduce energy consumption for heating and cooling.
- *Water management:* implementing water-saving technologies and infrastructure to ensure a reliable supply of freshwater during periods of drought. This can include rainwater harvesting systems, efficient irrigation techniques, and water recycling initiatives.
- *Flood protection:* constructing flood defenses, such as levees and drainage systems, to protect coastal and low-lying areas from flooding. Coastal reinforcement and beach nourishment projects can also help mitigate the effects of sea level rise and erosion.

#### ***b) Diversification of tourism products***

Diversifying tourism offerings can help reduce the sector's vulnerability to climate change by spreading risks across different types of activities and seasons. Strategies include:

- *Ecotourism and nature-based tourism:* promoting activities that leverage the natural beauty and biodiversity of the Shkodra region, such as hiking, bird watching, and nature tours. These activities are less dependent on specific weather conditions and can be enjoyed year-round.
- *Cultural and heritage tourism:* developing and promoting cultural and historical attractions, such as museums, traditional festivals, and heritage sites. These attractions can draw visitors regardless of climatic changes.

- *Adventure and sports tourism:* encouraging activities like mountain biking, rafting, and winter sports in areas where seasonal changes can enhance the experience.

**c) *Community engagement and capacity building***

Engaging local communities and building their capacity to adapt to climate change is essential for sustainable tourism development. Key actions include:

- *Education and awareness:* providing training and resources to local stakeholders on climate change impacts and adaptation strategies. This can include workshops, informational campaigns, and collaboration with educational institutions.
- *Community-led initiatives:* encouraging community-led adaptation projects that leverage local knowledge and resources. Examples include community-based reforestation programs, local water management initiatives, and the promotion of sustainable agricultural practices and nature-based solutions.
- *Partnerships and networks:* establishing partnerships between local communities, government agencies, and the private sector to share knowledge, resources, and best practices for climate adaptation.

**d) *Policy interventions***

Effective policy interventions are critical to creating an enabling environment for adaptation in the tourism sector. These include:

- *Regulatory frameworks:* developing and enforcing regulations that promote sustainable tourism practices and infrastructure resilience. This can include building codes, environmental protection laws, and zoning regulations that limit development in vulnerable areas<sup>26</sup>.
- *Incentives and support:* providing financial incentives and support for businesses and communities that implement adaptation measures. This can include grants, low-interest loans, and tax breaks for investments in sustainable infrastructure and practices.
- *Strategic planning:* integrating climate change considerations into national and regional tourism development plans. This ensures that adaptation measures are coordinated and aligned with broader development goals.

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<sup>26</sup> Krymbi et al: “Organizimi i hapësirës bregdetare të Velipojës, sfida drejt zhvillimit urban”, Studime Gjeografike IV, Tiranë, 2014.

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## **CHALLENGES OF SUSTAINABLE TOURISM DEVELOPMENT AT DRISHT**

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### ***ABSTRACT***

This study aims to determine the problems, challenges and strengths of the tourism sector, taking as a case study Drisht, in the municipality of Postribë, Albania. At Drisht, cultural heritage and scenic beauty represent the main assets of tourism, constituting an advantage together with an aspect of authenticity. These elements can contribute to the tourist development of Drisht, to the point of becoming a popular destination, like other regional and national ones, but they must be maintained in the long term because they determine its success as a tourist destination. The descriptive approach applied in this research describes the current situation and proposes solutions. The problems faced by the local population consist of few work activities, poor access to public transport, running water and the problem of waste. The problems affecting the tourism sector consist of the lack of hostels, information points, signage, etc. The challenges to be faced in the future are linked to environmental protection, coordination between institutions and marketing. The provincial tourist phenomenon as a tourist destination, thanks to the presence of cultural and natural elements (the medieval castle, the Kir river, the Cukal and Maranaj mountains), is able to guarantee a multiplicity of offers, mainly divided between summer and winter offers, with various proposals for both active holidays and relaxing holidays. Historic houses characterize the landscape of the Drisht area, especially in the “Kala” (Castle) neighborhood. The restoration and conversion of these houses into accommodation facilities, together with their stories and the history of the place in which they are located, create a possibility of valorization. Furthermore, this process can contribute to the recovery and conservation of properties, currently in ruins, while generating a type of experiential tourism, with a strong cultural component. The municipality, which previously issued a couple of permits for mining activities, must concentrate and invest in the tourism phenomenon, giving

its importance in economic and employment terms, and for this reason it must renew its environmental policies, and put tourists and his needs at the center, in order to guarantee him a high level experience, while safeguarding a driving sector of the local economy. The findings of this paper can serve as data for policy makers in formulating sustainable tourism development strategies and as a reference for research that can be conducted in the future.

**Keywords:** *Archeology, culture, natural heritage, small communities, natural tourist attractions.*

## 1 Introduction

Sustainable tourism, in addition to providing better living conditions for the population, promotes the preservation of natural and cultural heritage. This principle has a special value for historical areas, as in the case of Drishti Castle, a cultural monument with values and potential to become a favorite destination in northern Albania for tourists. It must be said that the tourism sector requires medium and long-term management plans, developed with the cooperation of all the actors involved in this activity, to be sustainable, with a positive impact on the society, environment and economy. "Sustainable tourism" is defined<sup>1</sup> as an activity linked to "Time" (it is sustainable if it lasts over time without damaging the environment and cultures), and with "limitation" (of visitors staying at the same time or the number of housing units, beyond which one cannot go). The "excess", although an indicator of success in the short term, risks preventing, in the long term, the maintenance of the characteristics that determined the initial success of the destination. If the costs/benefits are considered, it turns out that for long-term comfort, it is better to limit the quantity and increase the quality. Sustainability is more synonymous with quality.

This study aimed to evaluate the tourism potential of Drisht with a focus on its cultural and natural attractions and their role in fostering sustainable tourism. The choice of topic is linked to the fact that I professionally carry out archaeological research on this site, and the results can serve to improve the policies that are intended to be undertaken in Drisht. The article, divided into themes, discusses the legal framework and recommendations related to sustainable tourism, continues with an overview of the current

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<sup>1</sup> Campestrin, G. (2019/2020). Sostenibilità Ambientale e Turismo: Il caso del Trentino.

state of Drishti and concludes with challenges, strengths and recommendations. The study's findings suggest that local authorities can effectively develop Drisht as a sustainable tourism destination. This development involves investing in eco-friendly infrastructure, promoting conservation, and engaging the local community, ensuring tourism aligns with environmental conservation. Such an approach not only enhances the tourist experience but also preserves the natural ecosystem for future generations. Furthermore, transitioning Drisht into a cultural-nature tourism hub could yield substantial socio-economic benefits. The expected increase in tourism can stimulate job creation, boost local trade, and improve amenities, contributing positively to the region's overall development. This case study provides a roadmap for similar center aiming to develop cultural and natural sustainable tourism.

## 2 Sustainable Development and tourism: Concepts of sustainability

In 2015, at the United Nations Summit on Sustainable Development, the document "Transforming our world: Agenda 2030 for sustainable development" was approved<sup>2</sup>. The document composed of 17 "Sustainable Development Goals" includes three areas:

- Social (is based on equality. The objective is collaboration to satisfy individual and collective needs for health, well-being and expression of cultural identity);
- Ecological (renewal of resources, waste treatment, preservation and protection of ecosystems and natural capital);
- Economic (economic growth, income and jobs for the population). Since these areas are interconnected, planning and governance must always take into account their mutual relationships. To achieve the final objective of sustainable development, economic and social development must take into account environmental protection. The sustainable development include some goal<sup>3</sup>:

1. *End poverty in all its forms everywhere.*

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Available from: <https://unire.unige.it/handle/123456789/3480>

<sup>2</sup> United Nations. (2015) General Assembly Resolution A/RES/70/1. Transforming Our World, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. [cited 2016 Feb 10]. Available from:

[https://www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/migration/generalassembly/docs/globalcompact/A\\_RES\\_70\\_1\\_E.pdf](https://www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/migration/generalassembly/docs/globalcompact/A_RES_70_1_E.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development A/RES/70/1, p.14.

2. *End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture.*
3. *Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages.*
4. *Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all.*
5. *Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls.*
6. *Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all.*
7. *Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all.*
8. *Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all.*
9. *Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization and foster innovation.*
10. *Reduce inequality within and among countries.*
11. *Make cities and human settlements inclusive safe, resilient and sustainable.*
12. *Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns.*
13. *Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts.*
14. *Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development.*
15. *Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss.*

Sustainable tourism in World Heritage sites is defined as activities that do not damage their values, in the long term. The site must be preserved over time because it translates into benefits for the social, economic, cultural and natural environment of the area in which it develops<sup>4</sup>. The relationship between heritage and tourism is twofold: cultural heritage provides destinations to the tourism sector while tourism provides economic revenue to monuments and communities. Tourism infrastructure can damage sites if it is not managed responsibly. Close collaboration of the entire tourism sector including local communities in planning and management is necessary. Since the planning and management of sustainable tourism represents a challenge, the World Heritage Center has developed the "UNESCO Guide to Sustainable Tourism": composed of practical "How

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<sup>4</sup> Report on the international workshop « Advancing Sustainable Tourism at Natural and Cultural Heritage Sites». Available from: <https://whc.unesco.org/archive/2010/whc10-34com-INF.5F.1e.pdf>

to" guides, which help to identify the most appropriate site management solutions<sup>5</sup>. The model, based on cooperation between stakeholders, aims to achieve profitable, equitable and ecologically sustainable tourism development.

Now let's see what the situation looks like in Drisht, included by the Albanian Government in the "List of 100 Tourist Villages"<sup>6</sup>, a monument of culture (1st category), managed by the Regional Directorate of Cultural Monuments, Scutari, an archaeological area where the Institute of Archeology Tirana carries out research, and where a residential neighborhood is also located.

### **3 Drishti**

#### **3.1 *The geographical context***

Imagine a castle on a rocky hill, surrounded by a river and nestled at the foot of green mountains, a settlement that connects the plain with the interior of the territory through ancient roads, a neighborhood of old buildings built over the centuries, a castle that it hosted the people and resisted the attacks that wanted to take it over, a center that has undergone several destructions and reconstructions, surviving to the present day. This is Drisht, 15 km north-east of the city of Shkodra, in the so-called

Mbishkodra area, part of the municipality of Postribë<sup>7</sup>. From a geological point of view Postriba belongs to the Plio-Quaternary and is located at the point where three structural zones collide: Faciale of Alps, Krastë-Cukal and Mirditë<sup>8</sup>, which led to the creation of rocky overlays with surprising landscapes and steep peaks intertwined with unique valleys and canyons full of diverse vegetation and water sources. The karst phenomenon present in the limestone massifs has led to the creation of caves with complicated shapes (like that of Prekal). Postriba is rich in water resources, where the main place is occupied by the Kir river which originates at the foot of Mount Lebun (above the village of Plan 1400m) with a total length of 52km (at the final point it joins with the Drin river, near the Castle of Rozafa). Historically, in addition to irrigating the land, the river was used to drive mills for grinding cereals. Cultivated land is located on both sides of the Kir River, in irregular shapes with limited surface area that locals call

<sup>5</sup> Unesco World Heritage Sustainable Tourism Toolkit. Available from: <https://whc.unesco.org/en/sustainabletourismtoolkit/>

<sup>6</sup> Lista e 100 fshatrave, miratuar me VKM nr.21, datë 12.01.2018, "Për disa shtesa në VKM nr. 709, datë 29.10.2014.

<sup>7</sup> Spahija, 2010, vll. I, kp. I, f, 39; Cordignano, 1933, f. 124.

<sup>8</sup> Gjeta, 2009, f. 63 - 100.

kopshtije<sup>9</sup>. The positioning of Postriba along the Kir River valley, between the mountains of Cukal (1721 m) Gish (1734 m) Duell (1366 m) Sulë (1113 m) Maranaj (1576 m), where a variety of relief types intertwine with fertile alluvial fields, gentle mountainous hills and alpine areas, where the two main economic branches developed: agriculture and livestock, has made this area populated since ancient times. The numerous traces of an ethno-cultural and archaeological nature made over the years testify to the many riches. The province has numerous inhabited centers, some of which (Kratul, Drisht, Vorfë) belong to the proto-urban phase, evidenced by tumulus tombs and material culture<sup>10</sup>. These settlements located on hills with a favorable and dominant geographical position also control the communication routes. The ruins of Drisht Castle are located on two rocky hills (Castle Hill and Muzhila), separated by the Drishti Stream. From the Castle (*Citadel*), the field of vision is wide: on the South- West side is Scutari, a part of the villages of Postriba, Rrethina, Malësi e Madhe; to the south there is Mazreku, Shurdhahu and Danja with which Drishti was connected via land routes that passed from the village of Vilze through Qaf Kryqe. The strategic position (natural protection, presence of water resources, stone as a raw material for construction) favored the birth and rapid development of this fortified centre. In this settlement there is a continuity of life from the prehistoric period to the present day.

### 3.2 *The current situation*

Drisht Castle with the rich history and extraordinary landscape, the cultivated lands formed by the interaction between the population and the physical environment especially the Kir River are some of the reasons that attract the visitor from the tourist point of view. The Castle, a Cultural Monument, is managed by the Regional Directorate of Cultural Heritage of Scutari, an institution dependent on the Ministry of Culture. The boundaries of the protected area approved by decision 586, dt. 17.03.1948, law 609 of 24.05.1948 and with decision 4874, dt. 09.23.1971, includes the territory inside and outside the walls, bordered from the North-West and South by the Kir river and the Drishti Stream, while from the East by the neck that leads to Tyrbe. Although the Castle is advertised as a destination for local and foreign tourists, there is no facility providing information or services of any kind. Both the interpretative panels of the monuments and the signposted routes to guide visitors are missing. The museum without staff has only one open room set up with

<sup>9</sup> Kopliku, 1937, f. 175.

<sup>10</sup> Gurakuqi, 2000, f. 15 - 19.

ethnographic materials foreign to the territory. The museum building is undergoing degradation due to humidity and lack of maintenance. Over the last 30 years the castle together with its monuments has been excessively damaged by natural factors but above all by human activity. The vegetation that covered the structures also made it difficult for visitors to circulate. Erosion affected the collapse of the structures and their covering with aggregates. The alternation of climatic conditions (winter-summer, frost-drought) has accelerated the processes of destruction of the wall structures. Human activity has had a major influence on the site. The hill of Muzhil (Civitas Vetus) considered as an external district (in the 13th-15th centuries the city bazaar took place here), once surrounded by walls along the entire ridge and numerous traces of buildings, was looted after 1990. Private individuals, taking advantage of the fact that the area was not protected and the proximity to the road, took away the stones, leaving only traces of foundations in the most jagged points of the hill. This material (limestone) was used in the construction of the new village Drisht or as a raw material for the production of lime. Not even St. Mary's Cathedral whose foundations are preserved in the highest part of Muzhila Hill escaped this destruction. In 2009 the Albanian Development Fund (FShZh) invested in the construction of the road from the center of Drisht village to the Kala neighborhood. The works, in addition to the topographical alienation, also damaged specific monuments. Thus, on the western slope of the hill, since the construction of the road, the medieval cobbled street has been divided into two parts. As if that wasn't enough, in 2019 this road was rebuilt again by the FShZh as part of the project "Revitalization and improvement of values of Drishti Castle"<sup>11</sup>, the section of the cobbled road that goes down to the Drishti Stream, was covered with aggregate to build a parking lot. The ancient aqueduct that took water from Kroi i Kurti and brought it to the castle's Saranxhë was damaged by roadworks, from Lama and Spahive to Qafa e Sh'Palit. A chapel was also damaged during the works, from which a façade, part of the apse and the floor with stone slabs remained. In this segment is also located the necropolis which is not yet studied. The eastern gate, that of Sh'Pali, has been widened to allow the passage of large tonnage vehicles. The road inside the castle, between the two gates, was once paved with river gravel from which only the stretch from the mosque to the western gate is preserved in- situ. The rest, from the eastern gate to the center of the Kala neighborhood including the square in front of the mosque,

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<sup>11</sup> Raport për veprimtarinë e kryer nga Prefekti i Qarkut Shkodër për vitin 2022. <https://www.prefektishkoder.gov.al/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/.pdf>

was replaced with stone and concrete slabs. In the center of the Kala neighborhood, behind the mosque building on the crest of a hill, a two-story building was built (year 2009) designed as a museum. In the years 2014-2015 the Muslim Community carried out the total reconstruction of the mosque, within the archaeological area, on a historical monument (the walls were raised, the roof was built from scratch, the main facade was transformed and it was built a new reinforced concrete minaret)<sup>12</sup>. The inhabitants of the Kala neighborhood have built additions to their buildings, with stones taken from ruined buildings. The limited area of arable land within the castle walls has "forced" the inhabitants to build terraces and level the land, interfering with the archaeological layers and also damaging the architectural remains. The phenomenon of treasure hunting is very problematic, an activity that has infected all the inhabitants of the Kala neighborhood without excluding children. This illegal activity is favored by extreme poverty. The lack of restoration interventions has led to the damage and loss of many monuments. The "Kroi Kurtit" aqueduct could be repaired as long as the source has water and some swans are still in situ. The city wall with the defensive towers on the wall of the north-west facade collapsed on the external side of the enclosure and there was never any intervention for their restoration. Currently, eight families with around 30 inhabitants live in the Kala neighborhood. Youth unemployment and the lack of social life have influenced the depopulation of the area. There are 9 children attending school, 2 of which are in high school. Residents are engaged in agriculture, animal husbandry, construction and less in services. None of the residents of the Kala neighborhood have a job with social security. Economic impossibilities are the main reason why they still live here. In general they have a low standard of living, in some cases even below the national poverty level. Electricity has been a big problem for a long time but recently investments have been made to improve the situation. The problem of drinking water continues to remain relevant as the entire Kala neighborhood receives water from a single tap located in front of the mosque. In addition to running water, there is also a lack of sewerage.

### ***3.3 Protection and conservation***

These are themes implemented sporadically in Drishti Castle, at least since 1989, when, in addition to the archaeological excavation, consolidation works were carried out and the monument was guarded by an inhabitant. The administrative reorganizations undertaken over the years (the last one

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<sup>12</sup> Hecqard 1858, pp. 136 - 143.



in 2007) have created sometimes parallel structures for the study and conservation of monuments whose work has not been coordinated. Archaeological excavations financed by the Institute of Archeology (IA) Tirana have been carried out in Drisht since 2015. To carry out the excavations, in addition to approval from the Institute of Archaeology, the approval of the National Council of Archaeology, chaired by the Minister of Cultural Heritage, is also required. The research projects funded by the IA cover the excavation part. Restoration work must be carried out by DRKK or IMK specialists. Archaeological activity is invasive and therefore each project must also have a restorer who, depending on the case, intervenes in the consolidation or restoration of the structures, in order to preserve them. There are many cases in which the archaeologist has discovered important monuments but due to the lack of protective, consolidating and restorative interventions, the monument left at the mercy of fate was destroyed in a short time. Recently in the Citadel of Drishti a cistern of filtered water<sup>13</sup> preserved in excellent condition was discovered which requires the restoration of the above ground part since on the one hand it presents the risk of a possible accident and on the other irresponsible people instead throw stones into the internal part risking its collapse. During the 2015-2018 campaigns, various damages were found to the city walls and to particular monuments. In all the reports filed with the competent institutions, the need for repairs was underlined. In 2018, restoration works were carried out on the surrounding wall of the eastern facade, from the Sh'Pali gate towards the Citadel, by DRKK Shkodër, but without respecting the construction techniques and losing the originality of the monument. Recently the Ura Mesit-Drisht-Kala road was rebuilt again by the Albanian Development Fund, while the Drisht-Shllak road leading to Kodra Muzhilës has not been repaired for 30 years. Citadel and Varosh are damaged due to human interventions. The foundations of the fortification walls, with the defensive towers, are preserved along their entire length. In the Citadel in some places the walls reach a height of 7 meters. Their restoration would have a positive impact on the monument. Given the increase in the number of visitors, it would be appropriate to continue archaeological research combined with the study of monuments and material culture. The monuments discovered in recent years require immediate attention (Stere of the Citadel, the church of Santa Prêne, the Cathedral of Santa Maria, etc.). The cobbled street could be a tourist attraction for the architectural value and historical fact (walking on a street built centuries ago). Archaeological research must be

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<sup>13</sup> Pushimaj, 2017, f. 235 - 286.

intertwined with the work of DRKK Shkodër in order to design information panels. In addition to cleaning the area from waste, local government institutions must also think about promoting the Castle and including it in the itineraries of tourist agencies. The Citadel offers a panoramic view but getting there is difficult as there is no signage and anyone visiting for the first time finds it difficult to find their way. To improve the protection of the castle and its values, in 2019 the documentation for the protected area, Zone A, Drishti Castle, was submitted to the IMK<sup>14</sup>, proposing its expansion towards the Muzhila hill, rich in material and architectural culture. But the balance maintained until the 1990s has been “broken”. On the hills around Drisht, permits have been granted for quarries (for the extraction of stone, gravel and lime production) with negative visual impact and environmental pollution of air and water. In Kratul, where the walls of a fortification are preserved, the local government has granted permits for the extraction of marble. After the intervention and insistence of the inhabitants of the Kodër Boks, the works were interrupted but the destructive activity will remain part of the site forever. Fishing in the Kiri River using electricity and explosives as a simple method of catching fish has far-reaching consequences as it kills all life in the area it spreads leading to habitat depletion. Another negative phenomenon is the dumping of waste (inert, food, industrial) on the banks of the Kir river. The visual and environmental impact together with air, water and soil pollution are incalculable and have long-term costs.

Even though Drishti is part of the forest zone it is "covered" only by bushes. The cutting without criteria has "saved" the oak forests only in the deep mountain areas: Cukal, Maranaj, Sumë, Prekal where roads are opened every day for illegal logging. These destructive activities, for the environment, the habitat of birds and wild animals, are worrying and would not have been allowed if there had been a clear management plan and responsible institutions.

#### **4 Potential and challenges**

Drishti Castle, thanks to its geographical position and its potential (authentic natural environment, historical and cultural aspect), can influence the lives of the inhabitants of the entire province. To highlight the potential it is necessary to intervene on the road system, restore the environment

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<sup>14</sup> Raport - Propozim për ndryshimin/zgjerimin e kufijve të zonës arkeologjike Kështjella e Drishtit – Shkodër, nr. Prot.1240/1, datë 03.10.2019.

(cleaning waste, eliminating artificial obstacles). The competent actors, in addition to adequate cooperation, must have a clear vision of the importance of large-scale archaeological excavations and the implementation of restorations respecting authenticity. The ruined buildings, once restored, can be transformed into accommodation facilities for tourist use, promoting local traditions. A clear strategy could motivate visitors to stay longer and, consequently, residents to produce local products and not leave the country. Maps can be developed: by age group, difficulty or interest, with different themes, from mountain tourism with the Drisht-Maranaj or Drisht-Cukal itineraries; sports, routes for cyclists and motorcyclists with itineraries that connect historical monuments; recreational activities, swimming, diving and fishing in the waters of the Kir River; cultural, visits to the archaeological sites Kratul, Mazrek, Domen, etc. The ecclesiastical history of Drishti can be a separate topic organized in the form of an itinerary. Gastronomy, with the well-known and appreciated organic products of the area, can serve both to increase tourism and to improve the lives of residents. The site has all the conditions to host a summer school of archaeology, as a tool for introducing new generations to archeology and for information and awareness.

The involvement and commitment of the residents of the Kala neighborhood through work or educational activities would help raise awareness and preserve the monuments. Clandestine excavations as a problematic phenomenon would be curbed with the deployment of guards residing in the area. The full operation of the museum, in addition to its cultural/educational role, would also impact the local economy by generating revenue from souvenir tickets and employment.

Tourism in Drisht faces many challenges. The local workforce, without experience in the tourism sector, negatively affects the quality of communication and service. Vocational education at secondary school level in the tourism sector present in Shkoder can help provide employment opportunities and support the implementation of sustainable tourism in this region but the preparation and training of staff are long-term processes that need to be taken into consideration. The residents of Drishti, lacking awareness of sustainable tourism, throw household waste into the Kir, cut down forests to obtain wood for heating and practice hunting birds and wild animals using traps or shotguns. These practices should be stopped through awareness. Although there are no statistics on the number of visitors based on the testimonies of the inhabitants of Drishti the number of tourists in this area is still low. Marketing is an important factor that economic actors and local units must implement.

### ***Conclusions***

Lately, tourism in Albania has been characterized by a positive trend. The advantage consists of numerous natural resources such as coasts with sandy beaches, suitable climate, clean seas and a rich cultural heritage. Although important for improving social well-being, tourism is far from reaching its full potential to become the locomotive of sustainable growth and prosperity, due to the sector's structural shortcomings linked to the dominance of the sun-sea model and the lack of product diversification. Our research is a case study focused on the Drishti Castle, nestled in NorthEast Shkodra, which can be transform from a primarily agricultural community into an important hotspot for cultural and naturale tourism. The findings highlight the need of awareness about the role of sites in tourism development and the need for sustainable practices. Local authorities should leverage the potential of Drisht by adopting a thoughtful and sustainable approach to tourism development. By investing in eco-friendly infrastructure, promoting conservation efforts, and involving the local community, Drisht can ensure that tourism evolves in harmony with the environment. Such practices will not only enhance the experience for tourists but also ensure the preservation of the cultural-natural ecosystem for future generations. The transformation into a tourism hub can bring significant socio economic benefits also to the residents of Drisht. The tourists influx will lead to job creation, the increase of local trade and improved amenities contributing also to the overall development of the region. The balance between economic growth and environmental protection requires the design and adoption of integrated policies that anticipate the problems resulting so far from the unplanned development of coastal and mountain tourism (as in Shengjin beach, or in Theth National Park). Sustainable and responsible tourism is based on interactions between people (tourists/residents) and the territory. This activity may be put at risk by lack of knowledge of tourism issues from local data or ineffective regulatory and legal criteria. The sustainability of tourism is endangered or even cannot be achieved in the absence of real cooperation between the actors involved in the process of planning and promoting a destination. The attractiveness of Drishti as a tourist destination can be increased if the potential that the area offers, such as ecotourism, mountain tourism, river tourism, etc., is promoted. This will also have an impact on the reduction of the flows currently created by mass tourism on the coasts or in the Alps but also on the prolongation of tourists' stay.

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