



# Valuing biodiversity assets through ecotourism in South-East Europe

A review of the situation in and recommendations for the trans-boundary region of Sharr/  
Korab-Koritnik/ Mavrovo mountain areas.

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The information and views set out in this report are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the official opinion of the GIZ.

On behalf of the

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## List of Abbreviations

ANTA	Albanian National Tourism Agency
ATA	Albanian Tourism Association
BHA	Balkan Hiking Adventure
BNA	Balkan Natural Adventures
CABRA	Conservation of Agrobiodiversity in Rural Albania (GIZ project Albania)
CDI	Community Development Institute
CHwB	Cultural Heritage without border
COSiRA	Competitiveness of the private sector in rural areas (GIZ project Kosovo)
CSBL	Conservation and Sustainable Use of Biodiversity at Lakes Prespa, Ohrid and Shkodra/Skadar (GIZ regional project Albania, Macedonia, Montenegro)
D4D	Democracy for Development
EPW	Development Cooperation with Private Sector
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GIZ	Deutsche Gesellschaft für internationale Zusammenarbeit
INCA	Institute of Nature Conservation in Albania
IPA	Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance
IUCN	International Union for Conservation of Nature
K-K	Korab-Koritnik
KATA	Kosovo Alternative Tourism Association
KEPA	Kosovo Institute of Nature Protection
KIESA	Kosovo Investment and Enterprise Support Agency
LAG	Local Action Group
LEIWW	Rural development by integrated forest and water resource management in SEE (GIZ regional project South-East Europe)
MES	Macedonian Ecological Society
NAPA	National Agency for Protected Areas Albania
NP	National Park
ORF-BD	Open Regional Fund South-East Europe Biodiversity
PA	Protected Area
PoB	Peaks of the Balkan
PPP	Public Private Partnership
PPNEA	Protection and Preservation of natural environment in Albania
PtoP	People to People
RAPA	Regional Agency for Protected Areas Albania
RDA	Regional Development Agency
REC	Regional Environmental Center
SARED	Support to Agriculture and Rural Economic Development of Disadvantaged Mountainous Areas (GIZ project Albania)
SEE	South-East Europe
SNP	Sharri National Park
SoRi	Social rights for vulnerable groups (GIZ regional project South-East Europe)
SWG RRD	Standing Working Group for Regional Rural Development
TEK	Traditional Environmental Knowledge

TEM Transboundary Ecosystem Management (ORF BD Sub-project)  
TEM region Korab-Koritnik, Albania– Sharri National Park, Kosovo, Sar Planina and Mavrovo  
National Park, Macedonia  
UNDP United Nation Development Programme  
UNEP United Nation Environment Programme  
UNWTO United Nation World Tourism Organization  
WTTC World Travel & Tourism Council

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# 1. Introduction

## 1.1 Context of the assignment and research questions

This report is the product of a three-month teamwork elaborated within the frame of an ASA assignment<sup>1</sup> within the GIZ Open Regional Fund Biodiversity Project (ORF BD) and attached to its Transboundary Ecosystem Management (TEM) project. Focusing on the trans-boundary area of conservation areas stretching over North/East Albania, South/East Kosovo and North/West Macedonia and to some extent reaching out to Montenegro (Prokletije National Park), the TEM project aims at supporting inclusive regional planning, monitoring and management actions with focus on local benefits and engagement. There are three protected areas located in this TEM region: Natural Park Korab-Koritnik in Albania, Sharri Mountains National Park in Kosovo and Mavrovo National Park in Macedonia. A fourth key conservation area not yet protected is Sar Planina in Macedonia. This area is in a long-awaited process to be finally proclaimed as protected area. If proclaimed, this area will then constitute one of the largest coherent trans-border protected areas in Europe (Cvetanoski 2016). The future development of those pristine landscapes with its diverse flora, fauna and ecosystems and of the people living in and from the natural resources is highly dependent on how planning and management will consider a sustainable and integrated management approach. The natural and cultural assets of this trilateral conservation area may provide great potential for nature-based tourism development. **Ecotourism** is dedicated to a sustainable impact on nature and local people and is highly interrelated with well preserved and diversified nature. Hence, this report raises the question ***how the concept of ecotourism in TEM region is understood and used as an approach conducive towards nature conservation and improvement of the well-being of local people.***

This paper has the **objective** to contribute to ongoing and future projects in this region and beyond concerned with ecotourism development. Therefore, this paper intends to improve knowledge and understanding regarding the complex field of ecotourism by providing tourism related stakeholders and actors, be it governmental organisations, local product developers, tour operators, NGOs or development agencies, with suitable recommendations and helpful suggestions for the development of sustainable tourism products linked to nature conservation objectives. To that end, it provides a coherent information basis for each respective area in order to make challenges visible and to highlight opportunities.

It aims to answer the following **specific research questions**:

- What are **specifics** in each of the three target areas in TEM region concerning tourism development?
- What is the **future potential** of ecotourism development for the TEM region?
- Which measures are needed for ecotourism to **contribute** in the short and long term to **biodiversity conservation** of the protected areas and to the **livelihood situation** of the local residents?

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<sup>1</sup> ASA is part of the programmes of the non-profit limited organization Engagement Global Offering Work and Study Exchanges aiming at solidary, fair and sustainable development.

## 1.2 Structure of the report

In order to narrow down the complex concept of ecotourism, the report follows a deductive method beginning with the general **concept and principles of ecotourism**, followed by the **linkages between ecotourism concept and biodiversity conservation** objectives and ending with the issue of **(eco)tourism within the TEM** area.

In the second empirical part, the trilateral conservation areas will be compared concerning their initial situation in environmental, economic, legal and touristic terms. Based upon desk research, **43 in-depth interviews** were conducted with actors and stakeholders from each of the three countries. In addition, the ASA team carried out various **field visits** to assess the tourist perspective. Based on the information collected, a **profile** of the three target areas was created pointing at specific challenges and opportunities. The following **comparative analysis** summarized the most important findings.

The third part contains the **conclusion**, which connects the revealed findings of theory and practice in order to provide recommendations for future sustainable tourism development for all relevant actors and stakeholders at international, national and local level.

The combination of theoretical and empirical research ensured a profound analysis of the potential of ecotourism for each of the three TEM areas, as well as for the whole TEM region.

## 2. Ecotourism - in Theory

### 2.1 Definitions and meanings

Nowadays, sustainability is an omnipresent term, an approach or idea aiming at the conservation of resources for future generations, which affects every sphere of life. Accordingly, the global tourism sector has undergone various modifications. Apart from needs for recreation, relaxation or entertainment, tourists increasingly demand to enjoy a healthy environment and to have a positive impact on local nature and people (The International Ecotourism Society 2017). Contributing to the environment and culture in a sustainable way became a substantial aspiration for so-called **ecotourists**. The International Ecotourism Society (2015) defines **ecotourism** as

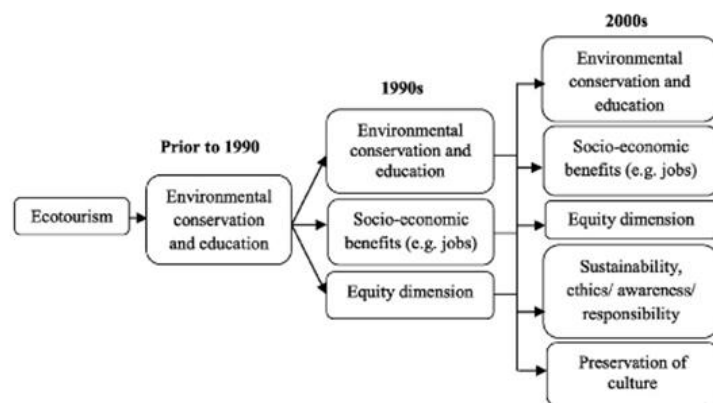
“Responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment, sustains the well-being of the local people, and involves interpretation and education”.

There are multiple names for alternative approaches to conventional tourism. They all claim to have a more sustainable impact on nature and people in place: *Nature (-based) tourism*, *ecotourism*, *sustainable tourism*, *community-based tourism* and *green tourism* are only an exemplary selection of terms with similar meanings. **Ecotourism**, in contrary to similar terms like ‘nature tourism’, is not associated with a touristic product but rather with a **conceptual approach to responsible travel to natural areas** (Beyer/GIZ 2014: 31). In this paper, the term ecotourism will be used as the approach combines economic, environmental and social aspects focusing on impacts on protected and natural areas and their respective biodiversity.

**Biodiversity** is hereby understood as: "The variability among living organisms from all sources including, inter alia, terrestrial, marine and other aquatic ecosystems and the ecological complexes of which they are a part; this includes diversity within species, between species, and of ecosystems." (Spenceley et al. 2017: 9)

### 2.1.1 Evolution and relevance of Ecotourism

The concept of ecotourism as we know it today developed in the **1980s** foremost appearing in the context of the environmental movements and meant to be a forward-looking solution to the (unsustainable) growth of mass tourism (Beyer 2014:60). It was mainly perceived as "visitation to natural areas for the purposes of enjoyment and education"



1 Evolution of meaning of ecotourism (Cobbinah 2015:1)

(Cobbinah 2015: 1). From the

**1990s** on, scientists incorporated more aspects in their research resulting in a more complex and broader definition today. Graphic 1 illustrates the enhanced differentiation of the term ecotourism. This complex diversification is one of the reasons why the term runs the risk to be misapplied by actors dealing with ecotourism. Generally, ecotourism **cannot be viewed one-dimensionally**. It interacts with **environmental, social, economic and cultural dimensions**. Due to the scientific dissent over a commonly shared definition of ecotourism, some authors have identified and developed underpinning principles that are based on the various attributes of ecotourism (Stevens/Jansen 2002: 5-6, Cobbinah 2015: 182, Monkogogi/Biki 2015: 53). These principles help to clarify the meaning for operational purposes and are used as the guiding idea for the overarching goal to detect the potential of ecotourism in the TEM region. Each of the principles is shortly outlined and critically reviewed in the following.

### 2.1.2 Ecotourism principles

#### Environmental and Cultural Conservation

The first principle is based on the early, traditional definition of ecotourism aiming primarily at **environmental conservation and cultural preservation through the reduction of harmful impacts on society, cultural heritage and the environment**. Literature research implies that environmental conservation still remains the fundamental principle of ecotourism (see Honey 2008).

Many scientists lately conducted research on the impact of Eco touristic activities in nature parks all over the world. A high number of authors conclude positive impacts of ecotourism on nature conservation and social aspects. The Chitwan National Park in Nepal, the Kilum-Jijm forest in Cameroon or the Osa peninsula of Costa Rica are some examples Chatterjee provides for successfully applied ecotourism approaches (Chatterjee 2015: 11). In all those cases, **biodiversity became "an income-generating asset that works rationally for natural resource management"** (ibid.). At the same time, this principle is criticized by various authors. They consider ecotourism to be rather threatening to the (new) natural destinations than a meaningful tool to preserve the local biodiversity. Drumm and Moore argue that some people have abused and misused the term only to attract conservation-conscious travellers to natural sides, without considering and respecting the potential negative environmental impacts (see Drumm/Moore 2002). In fact, a large number of articles claim ecotourism not to be very effective in promoting



conservation of biodiversity due to poor planning and an "infrastructure and management inadequate even unsuitable for ecotourism" (Chatterjee 2015: 11). An increasing number of tourists, which exceed the capacity of the place, can lead to erosion of natural resources for which tourists come (see Drumm: 2008).

### **Community participation**

In order to ensure a sustainable and long-lasting impact of ecotourism on the region, it is necessary to maximize "the involvement in, and the equitable distribution of economic benefits to host communities and citizen entrepreneurs" (Monkgogi/Biki 2015: 53). A community-based management that gives local stakeholders a voice in the decision-making process has two advantages. First, it increases the personal attachment and makes the locals feel responsible. Second, it prevents that only one side benefits from generated income and enables an equal distribution (Beyer 2014: 60). "Once the locals have some tangible benefits and they are involved in the conservation policies, they consider themselves as stakeholders in the process and support the conservational policies" (Chaterjee 2015: 8). These "tangible benefits" need to be clarified and well communicated. Especially in economically disadvantaged countries, the communication and visibility of best practice plays an essential role for community participation. Inclusive and community-based planning has effects on independent resource management as the example of Apo Island and Handumon protected areas in the Philippines demonstrate. The local community successfully manages their own sanctuaries "with a sense of accomplishment and pride in having control over a central part of their live" (Chaterjee 2015: 8)<sup>2</sup>.

Excluding the local population from the decision-making process can cause the problem of unsustainable practices (Chaterjee 2015: 8) and hinders the successful implementation of ecotourism in the long term. Another risk and problem are one sided empowerment and ignorance towards other, less powerful stakeholders. Tosun (2000) explained in his paper about "**Limits to community participation in the tourism development process in developing countries**" (Tosun 2000) that bureaucracy and strong centralized public administration systems together with the unwillingness of the politicians to contribute power hinder a participatory approach within the local community.

Well lists six ways for communities to receive greater benefits from protected area tourism: "1. **Compensation** or restitution for park-caused problems, 2. **Direct financial benefits** for local individual and organization, 3. Use of natural resources in parks or in buffer zones, 4. **Direct participation in tourism enterprises**, 5. Institutional support for **community projects** and 6. **Capacity building**" (Well 1997: 34).

### **Economic benefits**

The principle of economic benefits belongs to the most complex points. It is commonly accepted that ecotourism can generate income and serves as a good source of income especially for remote areas. But it is particularly important to ensure a **reinvestment for the benefit of nature**. This aspect **distinguishes conventional tourism from ecotourism**.

Of special importance is the management of **sustainable supply chains of ecotourism**, which includes utilizing resource optimization (for production system), welfare improving (for consumer

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<sup>2</sup> There is no comparable scientific research conducted in the SEE region. For that reason, a global example was given here.

system), and realizing consistency with environment (for environmental system) by maximizing revenues for re-investment in conservation (Monkgogi/Biki 2015: 53). The altitude of multipliers and leakages are key indicators for the sustainability of economic benefits. "Economic multipliers result from the process by which tourists spending stimulated further spending and increased economic activity" (Well 1997:11). There can only be multiplier effects if there are unemployed or under-employed resources.

Positive multiplier effects can be **limited by leakages**, which reduce the positive economic impact of tourism because of revenues derived from incoming foreigners which leave the country or national investors coming from the capital cities: "High leakage rates for nature tourism are likely to persist in relatively undeveloped locations" (Well 1997:12), as the local sites are generally unable to provide many of the goods and services demanded by visitors (Well 1997). **Small-scale investments, support of social enterprises and community-based actions** can be approaches to foster the positive multiplier effect and reducing leakages.

**Revenues made from ecotourism shall in the long term benefit the conservation of nature.** Managing those financial channels is a crucial point to avoid exploitation of natural resources and ensure long-term conservation of the biodiversity. Consequently, there have to be clear strategies to make **sustainable investments** in organized ways to channel the money back to nature. The 'Guidelines for tourism partnerships and concessions for protected areas' published by IUCN suggest to generate sustainable revenues for conservation and development through responsible partnerships and concessions, which guarantee the mobilization of resources for protected areas management (Spenceley et al. 2017: 8). The handbook for tourism planning in the development cooperation<sup>3</sup> emphasizes the potential and relevance of collecting fees (entry fees, usage fees, hunting fees) for financing PA management and benefiting the local population (Beyer 2014: 66). They highlight the importance of **immediately obvious financial benefits** for both, the local population and the park management in order to have a positive impact on the local biodiversity as ecological damages are mainly due to local poverty (Beyer 2014: 67). Hence, **concessions, responsible partnerships and strategic fees can be instruments** for managing the sustainable impact on nature of revenues gained from ecotourism.

### **Empowerment of Vulnerable Groups**

Ecotourism has a strong social purpose as well. Every touristic activity is supposed to be in accordance with the local population who in return shall be respected by the tourists. Optimally, ecotourism improves the local living conditions in a sustainable way and ensures that the generated income does not drain off to somewhere else. It is thereby inevitable to involve local people in every strategic phase in the tourism development. Especially in developing countries, scientists emphasize the importance of a "participatory tourism development" (Chatterjee 2015: 9) that empowers the people and guarantees a long-lasting positive impact on their environment.

**Gender equality** is also part of this principle and gains increasing scientific attention. Recent studies provide evidence for both positive and negative impacts on gender roles through ecotourism. Horton (2009), for instance, highlights the case of Costa Rica, where women began to be actively engaged in business development. Ecotourism had increased their possibilities to emancipate themselves from patriarchal gender standards as they became financially independent. In contrast to Horton's findings, Chatterjee cites several authors who claim the

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<sup>3</sup> Translated into English, in German: "Handbuch Tourismusplanung in der Entwicklungszusammenarbeit"

contrary. Lenao and Basupi analysed the impact of ecotourism development on female empowerment in Botswana and came to the conclusion that “without deliberately emphasizing protection of women’s roles in such management structures [they even] have a potential to disempower women” (Lenao/ Basupi 2015: 55). They point out that women would still fulfil traditional tasks and are not put in management positions when they do not own the business. The different opinions on the chances of ecotourism to empower women show that there is a thin line between stimulating empowerment and fostering traditional, often patriarchal stereotypes. „The greatest challenge in the future is to ensure that women are not just consulted, but listened to, when deciding whether to pursue ecotourism and how to pursue ecotourism.“ (Scheyvens 2000: 345).

### Education of visitors and local people<sup>4</sup>

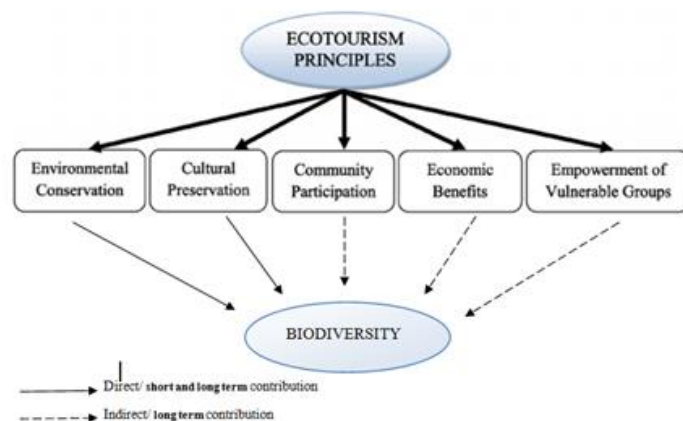
“Educating both visitors and local people as to the importance of conserving natural and cultural resources” (Monkgogi/Biki 2015: 53) is another principle of ecotourism. It is commonly regarded to be **essential especially for the long-run**. Ecotourists are generally interested in the local nature and demand detailed information on biodiversity, flora and fauna. Accordingly, there has to be a **certain minimum of expertise and infrastructure/knowledge available** at the destination for foreign and local tourists.

If the implementation process of ecotourism is not accompanied by education of the local people, the benefit for nature and the local acceptance cannot be ensured. Cobbinah conducted research in Ghana on the understanding of ecotourism principles and agents by the local population. He found out that only the first two principles are commonly known, whereas community empowerment and education was rarely put into context of ecotourism. But only when all of the principles are respected and met, ecotourism can be sustainable and successful in the long term.

## 2.2 Ecotourism and Benefits for Nature Conservation

### 2.2.1 Linking Ecotourism with nature conservation and biodiversity

With regard to the overall purpose of the paper evaluating the potential of ecotourism for biodiversity in protected areas of the TEM region, the following chapter links the previously explained tourism principles with biodiversity conservation. The UNWTO developed a "Practical Guideline for the Development of Biodiversity-based Tourism Products" in 2011 addressing the main target groups in tourism development: tour operators, tour



**2 Ecotourism Principles and Biodiversity (illustration based on Stevens/Jansen 2002: 5-6, Cobbinah 2015: 182, Monkgogi/Biki 2015: 53)**

<sup>4</sup> "Local People" includes local residents, as well as decision makers on local, regional and national level

agencies, non-governmental organizations and others who are involved in the process of developing tourism products (UNWTO 2011). Due to "... insufficient local expertise to create tourism that is beneficial to the local community and maintains the local biodiversity ...", the guidelines seek to close the knowledge gap between local and external actors by providing them with ideas on "... planning, management, marketing and monitoring of such biodiversity-based tourism products ..." (UNWTO 2011: preface). UNWTO claims that if ecotourism is managed in an inclusive and sustainable way, it can have positive effects on biodiversity conservation targets. In order to achieve that, **inclusive planning** is important, as a successful outcome is more likely when the expertise of different actors is brought together. Another essential factor is **long-term planning** and thinking. Biodiversity conservation can only be achieved when long-term contributions play a role in the management of ecotourism businesses and projects. In contrast to short-term and visible economic outcomes and profit, effects on biodiversity conservation and sustainable use can only be seen and measured over a longer period of time.

The three principles of "Community Participation, Economic Benefit and Empowerment of Vulnerable Groups" play a crucial role in the establishment of a sustainable form of tourism. Scientists agree upon the fact that a meaningful and sustainable impact on biodiversity heavily relies on the synergy of the four principles. Unfortunately, they are often overseen in the implementation process and long-term effects are not always taken into account. Short-term thinking is often caused by a lack of experience and knowledge, which means missing education (Monkgogi/Biki 2015, Scheyvens 2000, UNWTO 2011).

### 2.2.2 Ecotourism development and management in protected areas

In this chapter, the assessment findings of the TEM region will be summarized. Hypothetically, ecotourism can be applied everywhere in natural areas and is not limited to protected areas. As the pleasure of pristine nature is a fundamental asset of ecotourism, PAs are however of special interest for the target group. In the early stages of protecting landscapes, people tried to protect nature mainly through the absence of any human intervention and prohibition of access. Nowadays, people are more aware that there are positive and negative effects of both human intervention, presence and access as well as strict human absence for the biodiversity on-site. In addition, there is a clear trend towards integrating and empowering the local population in the process of managing tourism and nature protection in protected areas (Spenceley et al. 2017: 30; Beyer 2014 :35f.).

Through the establishment of different intervention zones by IUCN, every PA should have clearly defined zones for various types of human intervention and access in its management plan. In fact, many protected areas today face problems caused by a lack of visitation. Issues and consequences caused by the lack of visitation are illustrated in table 3 below by IUCN (IUCN 2014:27f.)

Issues and reasons	Consequences
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of market awareness with the tourism sector and among travellers of the protected area.</li> <li>• Difficult, costly, time consuming access to the protected area.</li> <li>• Lack of tourism infrastructure (e.g. access, accommodation, information facilities)</li> <li>• Lack of support services and facilities (e.g. restaurants, retail, transport).</li> <li>• Lack of attractions, both natural and cultural</li> <li>• Lack of unique selling propositions, with better competing destinations elsewhere.</li> <li>• Poor quality of tourism experience.</li> <li>• Products and services are not matched to market demand.</li> <li>• External factors, such as political instability, civil wars/conflicts, security, terrorist threats and human rights issues</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Low revenue from entrance fees due to low visitation.</li> <li>• Visitors go to more cost effective destinations that are quicker and easier to reach.</li> <li>• Low revenue due to short length of stay.</li> <li>• Lack of economic benefits to local people, meaning that the area is not valued by them.</li> <li>• Uncompetitive destinations, and tourists go elsewhere.</li> <li>• Visitors go to alternative, special, places.</li> <li>• Word of mouth means friends and family also learn about poor experience, and do not travel to the protected area.</li> <li>• Low levels of visitation, and subsequent lack of political support.</li> <li>• Visitors go to protected areas in countries that are perceived as peaceful and safe.</li> </ul>

**3Lack of visitation in PA: Issues, Reasons and Consequences (IUCN 2014:27f.)**

**A Tourism Development or Business Development Strategy** is absolutely necessary for planning and implementation of ecotourism activities within PAs. These strategies should be developed in a participatory manner with key stakeholders combining tourism business know-how, local stakeholder perspective and PA managers.

They contain precise information about proposed locations for specific touristic activities and infrastructures, responsibilities, visitor carrying capacities, long-term visions, access restrictions, tourism development and operational budget, stakeholders etc.

Based on the *Guidelines for Sustainable Tourism and Visitor Management in Protected Areas* among others published by IUCN, the following table provides an overview about specific touristic activities and their potential impact on PAs. The trade-off between opportunities and challenges needs to be considered in any tourism development strategy in protected areas.

Principles	Opportunities	Challenges
<b>Environmental / nature conservation</b>	Maximizing conservation benefits through sensitive infrastructure planning, remediation of damage caused, and visitor mitigation techniques (e.g. trail hardening, waste management, usage of natural resources for construction etc.)	Negative impacts on the environment such as pollution (e.g. waste disposal, carbon emissions), unsustainable resource use (e.g. water, energy), and damaging sensitive areas (e.g. through poorly developed or sited infrastructure) need to be avoided or minimized.

<b>Cultural Conservation</b>	<p>Improving the social and cultural impacts of tourism in protected areas by promoting and conserving local cultural attractions, showcasing local culture (e.g. stories, craft, design, music, and food), providing appropriate interpretive services and educational opportunities.</p>	<p>Negative impacts on local people, such as commodification of culture, crime, overcrowding, displacement of local communities to accommodate tourism development, and pressures caused by extreme temporal fluctuations in levels of visitation. High cost living and inflation emanating from tourism affect ordinary people most.</p>
<b>Economic Benefits</b>	<p>Stimulating local economic linkages through local ownership of tourism assets, management of tourism businesses, employment, alternative livelihoods and entrepreneurship in the tourism chain (e.g. guiding, craft, food and beverages, transport etc.).</p>	<p>Lack of economic linkages, due to a lack of information, opportunity, access to finance, adequate policies, or consistency. In some developing countries, a lack of basic education can also be a challenge. <b>Cash drain</b> off to the cities or foreign countries.</p>
<b>Empowerment of Vulnerable Groups</b>	<p>Tourism development needs to ensure that revenues are used to empower vulnerable groups like unemployed, youth and women. Economic and social enhancement can diminish the migration pressure in remote villages in and around PAs.</p> <p>The involvement of women in decision-making processes empowers them socially. Their excellent knowledge on natural resources can be used for many activities (guiding, instructing, displaying, and selling). Empowering women runs the chance to benefit from their shared knowledge and sensitiveness towards the sustainable use of natural resources.</p>	<p>Weak tourism planning and implementation related to PAs run the risk of enforcing patriarchal structures by excluding women from planning and decision-making processes in tourism development. Economically disadvantaged people are the ones who are suffering most from restrictions within PAs. If there are no economic benefits from a managed PA and adequate compensations for resource restrictions, illegal activities such as mining, hunting, trading, logging and construction practices will continue.</p>

**4 Opportunities and Challenges for tourism management in PA (based on: IUCN 2014:26)**

### 3. Ecotourism - in TEM region

Now that the theoretical background has been narrowed down to ecotourism and its various impacts on biodiversity in protected areas, the paper will focus on the three TEM areas of interest and their state related to nature conservation and environment, economy and tourism. As the area of the TEM project is situated in the SEE region, the assessment acknowledged that Albania, Kosovo and Macedonia are in the association process for EU membership. They all aim at adjusting to and complying with EU standards related to nature protection and tourism. The combination of desk-research, 43 qualitative in-depths interviews and field-studies lead to the following comprehensive information.

#### 3.1 Detailed findings sorted by countries and topics

##### 3.1.1 Albania

###### Environment

Despite Albania being a small country, it hosts one of the richest biodiversity in Europe. Its diverse landscape containing coastal lines, lakes and mountain ranges constitute a valuable asset for every kind of nature-based tourism. According to the National Agency for Protected Areas Albania NAPA, over 18% of the nature in Albania is proclaimed to be under protection and benefits from the protection of law about protected areas (NAPA 2017).

The National Biodiversity Strategy Action Plan has been reviewed in 2017 by an expert team (Spase 2015). They came to the conclusion that the **financing of biodiversity conservation**, and the status of environmental awareness, the **linkages between biodiversity and society** and the mobilization of domestic and international financial resources are priority actions, whereas the administrative and legal part of developing visions, strategies and an action plan on the national level have been formally established and agreed upon (Spase 2015: 9).

In 2015, the NAPA was established and is now together with its regional offices (RAPA) responsible for the management of the protected areas in Albania. In 2017, the Ministry for Environment and Tourism was merged and is currently in a process of constitution. On the 21.12.2011 the Council of Ministers declared the decision No. 898, which proclaims the mountains natural ecosystem **Korab-Koritnik as a “Natural Park” with a surface area of 55.550 hectares** (Keci/ Krog 2014:9). The Koritnik-Gjallica-Korabi mountain chain is situated in the North-East part of the Albanian territory and extends from the borders of Kosovo to the Deshati Mountain in southern part bordering with Macedonia. The northern part of the mountain of Korab is characterized by an alpine landscape of steep rocky peaks, whereas the southern part is gentler.



5 Map of Natural Park Korab-Koritnik (Keci/Krog 2014)

The Natural Park Korab-Koritnik contains the highest mountain of Albania, the Mountain Golem Korab with a height of 2764 m. The Korab-Koritnik Natural Park stretches from the municipalities of Diber (20.663 2ha) to Kukes (34.886 2ha) and contains some **19.000 inhabitants**, living within the natural part boundaries (Keci/Krog 2014:9).

The K-K ecosystem hosts a rich diversity and density of flora and fauna, having several threatened fauna species, including big mammals like the lynx and brown bear, and critically endangered plants, like the Albanian Knotgrass, Degen Buttercup or Wettstein Buttercup (Keci/Krog 2014:149), can be found in the pristine areas of the protected park. Mainly due to “a relatively low number of inhabitants in the area, low investments, low level of agricultural production and the remote geographical location” (Keci/Krog 2014:10), the K-K ecosystem is generally well preserved. However, the area faces several natural and anthropogenic pressures, which increased over the last years and are serious threatening this unique ecosystem. The most striking pressures to the natural habitats as summarized in the management plan in 2014: **deforestation** leading to fragmentation of forest habitats; **erosion** in mountain areas due to several natural and manmade reasons. Once eroded, a natural return of the forest is almost not possible. **Pollution** of water resources increases the nutrients in the water due to a lack of waste water treatment facilities. As a result, aquatic habitants, endemic and rare species and quality of drinking water are affected. **Illegal hunting**, especially of the rare carnivores, like Brown Bear, Lynx and Wolf are threats to the wildlife. Additional pressures taking place mostly at the edges of the park but affecting the bordering ecosystem is the **littering** alongside the roads and villages nearby due to poor or absent waste management and lack of environmental awareness and appreciation.

The management plan of the park contains comprehensive information about the state of ecology. The lists of flora and fauna still serve as the main reference point for data concerning the environmental conditions of the park. There is no responsible institution for monitoring and maintaining the nature park. There are complaints that the management plan was and still is not implemented Due to missing human capacities and insufficient financing.

The meetings with respective interested groups<sup>5</sup> showed that Korab-Koritnik received little to no political attention within the last years in terms of financing touristic development and environmental protection. NAPA has not yet focused on Korab-Kortnik, whereas PPNEA and NaturAL are currently working with botanic experts on further assessments to update the partly outdated data on big mammals and state of the biodiversity today as they regard the Korab-Koritnik region as the "probably least known and accessible" (De Sanctis 2017) protected area in terms of research conducted.

Some international experts, attracted by the undiscovered nature in Northern Albania, contributed to a more comprehensive and updated set of data on the ecology though. The Italian Biologist and Ethnologist Andrea Pieroni, for instance, conducted several studies about Ethnobotany, Traditional Environmental Knowledge and Wild Plant Use in the mountains of Korab-Koritnik Natural Park. His studies offer an important set of data about: wild food plants and their traditional uses (Pieroni 2017: 60-62); traditional food and use of domestic plants (ibid. 2017: 63-65); food, medicinal and ritual uses of local plants (Pieroni 2014.2: 183-188); most commonly used wild food and medicinal plants in the Mt. Korab villages surrounding Peshkopia (Pieroni 2014.1: 189 f).

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<sup>5</sup> for that case relevant: PPNEA; REC, NAPA, RAPA, NaturAL



As an ethnologist, Pieroni is not only interested in the diversity of plants and their traditional use, but also in the emotional attachment of the people living so close in and with nature. Through the research conducted in his extensive field-visits in North Albania, he ascertained a **loss of traditional environmental knowledge due to migration and demography**.

According to Pieroni, this can lead to several alarming ecological concerns, such as:

"[t]he fact that the ecological availability of these plants is not connected to their actual domestic use may facilitate their **overexploitation**" and "**Local appreciation** for the sustainable use of natural resources is then a crucial issue in their management and conservation, especially when faced with external demands to quench market pressures." (Pieroni 2014.2: 192). He strongly recommends for "**regulatory requirements, community-based educational programs**" and urges a "germane re-vitalization and valorisation of the TEK" in order to become of strategic importance for the development of sustainable eco-tourism activities and the small-scale trade of local herbal and wild food plants in the region" (Pieroni 2017: 66).

### **Main findings Environment/nature conservation Korab-Koritnik**

- The **19.000 people** living in the remote areas within the borders of the park need to be targeted as to raise their awareness and find solution for compensation measures in order to balance their losses experienced while observing the law and restrictions of the Natural Park
- Need for monitoring and research, data of management plan outdated and no coherent efforts made for a better quality of data collection, analysis and storage
- No Natural park directorate/office in place, only rangers of forestry associations as the responsible institution for management, monitoring and law enforcement
- Without proper data and ongoing monitoring, no reliable statements about state of environment and development planning permits can be made
- K-K is slowly, but increasingly gaining more attention from NGO's, tourism operators and researchers
- Personal attachment to tradition and nature needs to be encouraged in order to strengthen the ties to cultural heritage and thereby increase ecological understanding and appreciation for sustainable use of natural resources. As women have comprehensive knowledge about TEK, they shall receive special attention in related projects. Empowering them to actively participate in future projects needs to become priority.

### **Economy**

Compared to other municipalities in Albania, **Kukes** and **Diber** belong to the economically most disadvantaged areas. An unemployment rate of 12,5%/ 4,5%, an international migration rate of - 23,79% /-27,99% and over 10.686/ 13.369 families benefitting from social assistance pictures the state of economy in North Albania (INSTAT 2017). During the field interviews the poverty and remoteness of those areas, especially Kukes, was always the first impression associated with Korab-Koritnik region.

The establishment of a new and ambitious business sector, such as ecotourism, needs to be implemented considering the **essential challenges** people face over there. Especially the stakeholder meeting in Kukes revealed a big uncertainty towards tourism development and environmental issues. With regard to their disadvantaged economically situation, they wish **simple but effective projects**, which show immediate improvement. **Short-term thinking is a**

**matter of existential fears.** As ecotourism requires long-term approaches, a mixed approach of **tangible support and investments** and **intangible education and empowerment** need to be developed appropriately.

In Diber people appear to be more open-minded towards the idea of ecotourism partly because they see the monetary impact of tourism in the centre of the Municipality in Peshkopia and partly because the municipality has declared the development of tourism products as one of its priorities (RDA2 2017: 248). Unfortunately, an examination of the stated priorities and the focus of investments reveals that there is a clear priority setting on infrastructure, whereas tourism is not even listed in the planned investments apart from spending 345 million ALL for "Fixing thermal water and urban recreation of the area and construction of the recreation park "Iugina e Sherimit"<sup>6</sup> (RDA2 2017: 249).

The newly established *Rural Development Agencies* are in a process of assessing the conditions in order to tackle the issues, but only the RDA2, responsible for the municipalities of Dibra, Tirana and Durres published a detailed profile of the region based on all the available data. Unfortunately, there is not yet a similar profile available for the municipality of Kukes. The profile of Region 2 combines the most comprehensive data available on the regional development of the Diber Municipality (RDA2 2017: 243 ff.). It clearly shows the gap between announced priorities regarding tourism development and the real focus of governmental spending in infrastructure. That finding pretty much matches the statements of the non-governmental actors interviewed. Financial support for a sustainable way of tourism development exists only on paper and hence hinders an effective establishment of a touristic infrastructure.

<b>Economic Indicator</b>	<b>Kukes</b>	<b>Diber</b>	<b>Albania</b>
Population 2012/2016	86.923 / 80.428	139.340 / 127.318	2.900.401 / 2.876.101
Crude rate of net international migration, 2016	-23,79 %	-27,99 %	+ 16,88%*
Registered unemployed job seekers, 2016	10053 (12,5%)	5676 (4,5%)	119710 (4,1%)
Active enterprises/Female owner, 2016	1.780 / 316	2.935 / 705	160.679 / 43.003
Prefectures Contribution to real growth, 2015	-0,11 %	0,36 %	2,1 %*
Main Economic Indicators, 2015 GDP Share of AL	1,80%	3,3 %	100%
Average number of families benefiting from social assistance 2012/2016	12.327/10.686	14.317/13.367	98.810/80.147
Average monthly social assistance fund by prefectures in ALL 2012/2016	47.786.000 / 45.660.000	51.473.000 / 58.367.000	360.921.000 / 342.935.000

**6 List of Economic Indicators (based on: INSTAT Albania 2017)**

<sup>6</sup> See our experiences at the thermal springs in Peshkopia in chapter: 4.1.1.4

## Tourism

### Albania

Considering the special historic heritage of Albania being isolated from the rest of the world until 1990, the small country is still in an early stage of international tourism development. As an international destination, Albania is little known and faces therefore still image uncertainty. However, during the first years of transition, there have been made numerous attempts to develop this industry leading to a remarkable growth of the tourism industry in some regions. According to the data of an Economic Impact Assessment recently conducted by the WTTC, there is a positive trend in the tourism industry increasingly contributing to the national GDP and employment sector (WTTC 2017). They forecast that this trend will continue and increase the revenues from tourism industry remarkably.

With a view to the official promotion material of ANTA and their web page, the 'hot-spots' for tourism development become obvious: ancient cities and villages like Berat, Gjirokastra or Butrint, the coastal line of Durres Vlora or Himara, and national sights like the Albanian Alps, as well as the Albanian lakes (ANTA 2017). Some of those destinations received substantial financial support by various donors recently and already benefitted from increased tourism<sup>7</sup>. The mountainous region of North-East Albania including the Nature Park of Korab-Koritnik is only mentioned as containing the highest peak of Albania. The Albanian coastal regions are already confronted with mass tourism during the summer season leading to issues of seasonality, limited capacities and unsustainable handling of waste, water and electricity. Accordingly, the little or not yet explored regions foremost the mountainous and remote areas in the north and north-east of Albania face fundamentally different issues and preconditions. ***Due to the noticeable differences in regional tourism development, general statements made by the WTTC or the Tourism Agency regarding the promising future for the tourism industry cannot be applied to the Korab-Koritnik region as there is no region-specific data and the initial situation is very different.***

At the time of this project, there is no official Albanian Tourism Strategy available as the Ministry of Environment and Tourism is still in process of consolidation. Their financial and strategic focus for the next years will show whether they acknowledge ecotourism to take an important future role for sustainable development and agenda 2030 processes.

In 2012, a Strategy Challenge Management Report has been prepared by a group of students in cooperation with the University of Lausanne and the UNWTO in order to offer a proposal for a nationwide Albanian tourism strategy from 2012 to 2017. They consider the relatively low level of tourism development in some parts of Albania as an opportunity to position the country strategically on the world as "experience travel market" for being "new and little known" (Chanel et al. 2012: f.). For the needs of that target group, the diverse and mostly unexplored natural landscape of Albania provides great potential subject to the condition that Albanian's tourism industry manages to position itself on a sustainable tourism market, which requires cooperation among all actors, a common marketing strategy and sustainable financing (Chanel et al. 2012: 2f.).

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<sup>7</sup> Albanian Alps, Lakes of Shkodra, Prespa and Ohrid as well as the Southern Coastal Region were all part of GIZ funded projects resulting in a considerable amount of promotion material and increased national attention. However, ecotourism was not declared to be a substantial focus of their agenda.

## Data on Tourism

The Institute of Statistics Albania provides data based on the information gathered at the border-crossing points. As there is no reliable region-specific data, those tables can only provide convincing information about changes of tourism purposes. As the table shows, the total number of arrivals increased, whereas the purpose of holiday decreased from 59% of the total number to only 32%. The tourists coming to visit their relatives and friends, mostly Diaspora people, have absolutely decreased but stayed relatively the same. The same-day visits make a noticeable bigger part of the total number.

Generally, it is important to always critically assess the data provided. Even through the total number of tourists increased and is often cited and used as a proof for the increasing importance of the tourism sector, the data shows that, in relation to the total number of arrivals, other purposes than holiday and especially same-day visits seem to become more important. Especially the cross-border region north-eastern Albania experiences this kind of tourism and needs to tackle that issue by making use of the potential, accomplish attraction, which make those people stay for a longer time.

Arrivals by purpose of visit	2012	2016
Total	3.226.460	4.735.511
Holiday	1.919.160 (59%)	1.492.898 (32%)
Friends/ Relatives	89.999 (0.3%)	18.299 (0,3%)
Same day visits	71.292 (0,2%)	507.078 (10%)
Others	1.527.615 (47%)	2.071.955 (47%)

**7 Arrivals by purpose of visit 2012/ 2016 (based on: Institute of Statistics INSTAT Albania 2017)<sup>8</sup>**

### Korab-Koritnik

Tourism in the north-eastern part of Albania is similar to the economic sector disadvantaged compared to the rest of Albania. Neither the National Tourism Agency, any private company, NAPA, nor the Municipalities of Diber or Kukes promote the Korab-Koritnik region via internet. Only to domestic tourists the region is known for the highest peak of Mt. Korab and some thermal springs closed to the city of Peshkopi.

Desk Research and conducted interviews in Kukes and Peshkopia revealed that there is limited cooperation between both administrative units (Kukes and Diber) in terms of a common approach to tourism development<sup>9</sup>. Material, which has been produced concerning tourism development in the region, always addresses only one of the municipalities despite similar natural values and shared Natural Park of Korab-Koritnik. There is no common strategic vision for tourism in the Korab-Koritnik Natural Park, even though enhanced regional cooperation is an important precondition of starting trans-boundary cooperation and the monitoring of touristic activities in the park requires agreements and collaboration of both sides. The coordination of tourism development in accordance with the environmental conservation of K-K Natural Park strongly requires the municipalities of Diber and Kukes to work closely together towards the common goal to create economic and ecological benefits from ecotourism.

<sup>8</sup> see tables: <http://www.instat.gov.al/en/themes/industry-trade-and-services/tourism/#tab4>

<sup>9</sup> see "lessons learned" chapter for Albania

Being in the field and talking to local stakeholders<sup>10</sup> showed that there have been recently some efforts made to promote agricultural products regionally. Fairs in the city of Peshkopi for instance shall serve as a first step to give local farmers a chance to come into contact with regional competitors and promote their products in public. For ecotourist purposes, there is a lack of information about the organic and sustainable production and the quantities per pack are not suitable for tourism purposes.

There are two touristic maps produced in a project framework about touristic offers in Kukës and Dibër. They provide a first overview about the regional infrastructure, hiking and biking trails, accommodations and restaurants. As this material was built out of nearly nothing comparable for the purpose of touristic information, it creates meaningful groundwork. Nonetheless, the maps still lack information on biodiversity value and characteristics and does not include reference to sustainability aspects of listed restaurants or accommodation.

## **Dibër**

In the framework of an IPA cross-border programme in 2013, a brochure has been produced by the Deshati Local Action Group addressing the touristic offer of the Korabi-Deshati Region in cooperation with the Macedonian Side of Deshati mountain range in the Mavrovo National Park. The brochure highlights several natural and cultural monuments, traditional food, fests and dances on both sites of the borders (Deshati LAG 2013). The same LAG has developed a Tourism Strategy for 2014-2019 for Dibër.

They put as their general goals: increase the importance of tourism for the local economy and improve social and cultural conditions and quality of life for inhabitants of the region (Deshati LAG 2014: 7). Even though ecotourism does not belong to their main strategies and goals, which rather concentrate on strengthening the economic impact of tourism in general, they treat sustainable tourism as an underlying principle for local development. Attached to the document, there is a detailed action plan about the implementation steps for tourism development. It becomes obvious that the LAG is responsible for most of the actions, which makes the functioning and implementation of the plan highly dependent upon the LAG and probably explains why the process of implementation stopped and is currently not active.

In 2016, Fatbardh Cena published a study called "Protected areas in the district of Dibër and assessment of their tourism" (Cena 2016). She highlights several problems, which include the mismatch of written legislation and what is actually practiced, the missing cooperation and research quality of experts and scientists, a lack of touristic infrastructure and environmental awareness (Cena 2016: 19f.). She asks to stop "dreaming" about future tourism development and be more proactive, concrete and improve the cooperation channels, involve local and national institutions, letting residents participate in decision making processes (Cena 2016:20).

Peshkopia is the administrative centre of Dibër and pivotal point for potential ecotourists to gather information and start their tours into the Korab-Koritnik Natural Park. Due to the thermal springs attracting domestic tourists for health treatments, tourism plays already an important role in the employment market. Even though in this particular case this form of tourism is not suitable for ecotourism purposes<sup>11</sup>, it ensures that the municipality prioritizes

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<sup>10</sup> see annex 1)

<sup>11</sup> see subtitle 'personal experiences through field visits' in Dibër

tourism development. As a consequence, there is a newly opened Tourism Information Office in Peshkopia, which is well sign-posted on the main pedestrian street, but poorly equipped with ecotourist products or relevant information on biodiversity assets of Korab-Koritnik. Besides one of the two maps developed by the GIZ "Welcome to Diber", there is no information on the northern part of Korab-Koritnik, nor on the Macedonian site. The capacities in form of the facility, staff members and financing are there, but need to be better equipped and staff trained in speaking English and providing relevant knowledge for ecotourism.

As yet, Peshkopia does not manage to bridge between the city and the rural areas within the park due to missing product and market concentrated on the city centre and the thermal springs. As an individual traveller you may find occasional information on accommodations, one camping site in the park<sup>12</sup> and several tour guides<sup>13</sup>, but it remains a **complicated and time-consuming procedure to gather all the relevant information for individual tourism**.

## Kukes

For Kukes municipality, there exist visions, strategies, programmes and detailed SWOT analyses about 'sustainable' tourism development, which mistakenly create an image of serious advance, but in reality, there has been little to no process made over time (EuroPartners 2015: 38). The key issues are well-known among the stakeholders. But the approaches to address sustainable tourism development differ, the number of external stakeholders working parallel is confusing and there is neither a coherent vision, nor any measurable effort in order to find solutions to tackle known problems and make use of the identified potentials.

Again, as so often experienced during this study, the slow or non-existent process of ecotourism development is not a matter of missing accessible information on challenges and potentials, **it is in fact a matter of taking the next proactive step towards implementation**, which requires coordination, financial priority setting and communication by all involved actors.

The following paragraph lists three development programmes concerned with tourism development illustrating the plenty of existing approaches in theory. In 2008, UNDP undertook a 43 months programme called "**Kukes Region Tourism and Environment Promotion – KRTEP**" aiming at the development of a strategic vision, building local capacities and institutions, promotion of cooperation among stakeholders and awareness raising about local development values and potential of the Regions' eco-touristic and cultural values (UNDP 2008). Despite being quite out of date, this programme provides content-wise comprehensive information as it directly combines tourism development to environmental conservation.

The **Program for Development of the Kukes Functional Area** in 2015 developed by the EuroPartners Development team brought the tourism area into economic focus. The paper contains a list of tourism potentials and is important due to its detailed assessment of challenges and threats of tourism development to nature and society. Missing accommodation capacities, poor service quality, infrastructure, road signs, lack of intensive promotion, problem of properties and illegal constructions, lack of coordinated approach and integrated touristic offer are among the listed obstacles to sustainable and good practice tourism development. In contrast to the

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<sup>12</sup> camping side webpage: [http://www.campingkorab.com/D/home\\_de.htm](http://www.campingkorab.com/D/home_de.htm)

<sup>13</sup> there is no webpage providing an overview about regional tour guides, the GIZ funded webpage <https://tourism.albinfo.al/> was offline at the time of the study

ideas of the Kukes Region Tourism and Environment Promotion from 2008, the Development Program from 2015 puts ecotourism lesser in importance for regional development.

The Kukes municipality published a '**Territorial Development Strategy of Kukes Municipality**' in 2015, which formulates a vision for the development of Kukes, putting tourism as one of the three main pillars being an "Eco-alternative that promotes the natural potential, that the attractive and unused lake and mountainous relief offer and historical and cultural values." (DLDP 2015). Overlooking the reality, it becomes obvious that all those development programmes have never been implemented successfully:

For Kukes town tourism plays a minor role. There are some hotels and restaurants, but as there is no functioning tourism information centre and the town do not manage to attract people for overnight stays, there is little measurable impact of and benefit from tourism. The city has the advantage of being well connected both to Tirana and Kosovo due to a recently built highway. With regard to the increasing number of people staying only for one day in Albania (INSTAT Albania 2017), the city should cooperate with the surrounding villages in Korab-Koritnik in order to hold more appeal for a longer stay in the region by developing products which reach out to the remote areas. The strategic location near to the Kosovo border and at the entry point for the Korab-Koritnik Natural Park could be treated as an opportunity for future development. This would require cooperation, communication and networking across the borders and among the regions and remote villages. People from the Kukes municipality appeared to be rather frustrated, feeling left behind and disadvantaged compared to the more successful regional competitors, like Shkodra or Thete. They requested better promotion from national entities and more attention on Kukes. However, without a noticeable effort coming from Kukes municipality and all the actors involved, a promotion even if supported is unlikely to lead to desired impacts.

### Personal experience through field visits

For the sake of gaining a more realistic estimation for the regional conditions, a two-day field visit to Korab-Koritnik was carried out to allow taking the viewpoint of an ecotourist, who is interested in the natural value and authenticity of the region expecting a certain appreciation of nature.

This much is certain, the beauty of those pristine landscapes combined with the authenticity of rural life is impressive and meets the demands of global ecotourism expectations. Our well-marked hiking trail led to places with breath-taking views and absolute remoteness and on the way bear droppings were discovered as well as various birds and interesting insects observed. Unfortunately, there were several obstacles, which diminished the overall impression especially from an ecotourist point of view. As the visit was well prepared and included a guide, transport and accommodation it would have been difficult to get around with limited information available in the internet. Noticeably the only functioning tourism information centre in Peshkopia was under reconstruction and celebrated their reopening a few days later.

The guide was friendly, spoke an average to low level of English, but could not satisfy the desire to receive background information on flora and fauna, even though he participated on several trainings already. The first night was spent in a hotel placed on the edge of a traditional mountain village in Radomire, which is one of the entry points for climbing the highest peak of Albania, the Mt. Korabi. Being located out of the heart of the village disconnects the tourist from the villagers, so that neither they nor the tourists come in direct contact, which reduces the

possibility of conflicts but also of exchanges and friendly point of contact. The hotel served however traditional and organic food and was equipped with simple but clean rooms and sanitary.

On the second day, the accommodation was provided by the only family household staying close to the Korab- Koritnik. This family can serve as a good example for an authentic experience by offering a friendly and authentic insight into their everyday family life and little agriculture attached to their home. They served traditional food and invited the guests to participate in the preparation of the traditional dish. It was unavoidable to come across an alarming amount of unmanaged waste. Even though the guides try to avoid those sceneries whenever they guide tourists, it is simply not possible to deny this striking issue.

As a guest, the experience of great hospitality was fantastic, which ironically can even be an impediment to the development of tourism entrepreneurship as hospitality is taken for granted and people are suspicious of treating it as a business.

While driving from one village to the next, many construction sites for roads mirroring the huge investments in infrastructure of the municipalities of Kukës and Diber were encountered. The 170 km from Tirana to Peshkopi took 4,5 hours due to the bad state of the road. While this essential connecting road from the capital to the Natural Park definitely needs to be modernized, the conditions of roads are considered as a minor obstacle with regard to the demands of ecotourists. Missing knowledge about ecotourism and the visibility of environmental degradation seem the most important hindrance.

On the last day, a visit to the well-known and attractive health tourism hotspot - the "hot springs" of Peshkopi – was possible. Being there was eye-opening in terms of what kind of urban development and tourism should be avoided. Crowded streets, together with uncontrolled construction, produced an image of chaos, as well as a harmful and disrespectful impact on the environment.

During the two days, interviews with two hotel owners in Radomir, two tour guides and some villagers were carried out. It became clear that there are misunderstandings of what tourists and especially ecotourists expect and demand from their destination. The remoteness and traditional way of living rather evokes embarrassment instead of pride among local people. People who started to work in the tourism industry are those who are disconnected with their traditions and the rural way of living, whereas it is difficult to come into contact with those who are living in close communion with the nature. Of particular importance are women as a quasi-non-existent target group in the field of tourism.

Based on the described impressions during the field visit, adequate and continuous stakeholder communication became evident as one crucial target for future sustainable tourism development.

The missing interaction between tourists, locals, touristic providers (such as guides, hosts, agencies) and experts creates confusion and hinders a socially acceptable and nature-friendly development.



## Lessons learned in interviews<sup>14</sup>

- Promotion and marketing strategies from CABRA, Coastal Project and ChwB as best practice → TEM-Region has the same natural potential, only economically disadvantaged
- Promotion must not raise unrealistic expectations as that can lead to disappointment and image damage --> risk of clash of expectations if neither guides, nor tourism centres, accommodations or residents provide basic knowledge on the assets and benefits of the nature they live and work in
- **Story-Telling approach** as tool for visualisation and tangibility: 1) Stories of dedicated and successful individuals as role models 2) Prominent people (Kadare) for attention seeking
- **Rural Women** and their TEK as a chance for women empowerment and involvement in tourism business (Collecting recipes of rural women → book with recipes and individual stories → **Slow Food, Ethnobiology**)
- Unbalanced distribution of knowledge and information! Brochures, flyers and maps in English and good quality may exist but are not published and furnished in tourism centres → ensure publication of information material before project ends!
- Many projects faced problems due to **ownership issues**<sup>15</sup>. Official documents about the legal ownership of the properties were missing, so that some applicants could not benefit from financial add. Ownership problems are common in Albania and hinder implementation progress.
- Ensure sustainable continuation and maintenance after project ends by involving locals to a much greater extent in all project phases (e.g. Project CSBL renaturation of a little stream near Ohrid lake → after two years the "green Center" was demolished and the stream deeply polluted again)
- Information stays at expert levels, no public communication → Future brochures about biodiversity/cultural or natural heritage have to be provided in an **understandable way for the respective target group – thematic interpretation**<sup>16</sup>!
- Two best practices from CABRA experience regarding educating marketing strategies: 1) Narrative Label<sup>17</sup> - **Slow Food**, 2) **Short-Chain Approach** --> support short supply chains through better networking and awareness raising about organic farming and biodiversity --> increase value and quality through branding
- Extend existing **promotion material** (Welcome to Kukes/Diber Maps by GIZ, Sharra Region Material by SWG/RRD) with biodiversity aspects and Korab-Koritnik Natural Park information --> prevent parallel structures and doubling
- Education of young people (future generation crucial due to migration pressure in remote areas) in school about biodiversity and natural values is of special relevance (REC)

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<sup>14</sup> see annex 1)

<sup>15</sup> the GIZ project SARED (Support to Agriculture and Rural Economic Development of Disadvantaged Mountainous Areas) for instance could not accept some applications for grants due to missing ownership documents.

<sup>16</sup> Thematic Interpretation describes an approach of "educational activity aimed at revealing meanings and relationships to people about places they visit and the things they see and do there and acknowledges as the art of helping people to learn, a communication process" (Amin et al. 2014: 263), see Amin et al. 2014 for further practical information on "Thematic Interpretation Approach in Environmental Adult Education"

<sup>17</sup> see "Narrative Label- A revolution in food communication" published by the Slow Food Community: [https://www.slowfood.com/slowlife/wp-content/uploads/ING\\_etichetta\\_narrante\\_guida-1.pdf](https://www.slowfood.com/slowlife/wp-content/uploads/ING_etichetta_narrante_guida-1.pdf)

- Region disadvantaged compared to rest of the country: cut off from the national tourism development trends --> positive as environment is not yet suffering from mass tourism, negative as to the status of touristic infrastructure and local awareness
- Information gap --> accessible material is based on the work of experts and is disconnected from reality and level of implementation; management plan goes far beyond the existing capacities and know-how --> "lost" knowledge leads to confusion and inefficiency
- Touristic infrastructure lacks basic structure --> There was not a single tourism operator that covers the needs of an ecotourist interested in information about nature and nature-based products. Only limited printed or online available material provides misleading or even false information<sup>18</sup>. However, cell coverage and access to WiFi are adequately supplied
- Regional communication problems --> before fostering trans-boundary cooperation, actors from Kukes and Diber need to improve their regional cooperation in terms of a commonly shared vision on future tourism development. They share the same environmental assets and could both benefit from the implementation of a PA management institution. The benefits but also requirements of ecotourism need to be communicated and discussed on all channels and especially with local people
- Prevent cash drain to the capital or abroad --> PtoP actions, start-ups and small enterprises as guarantee for community revenues, **small-scale investments to be encouraged**
- **Infrastructure and mobility** as basic requirement for future touristic development --> public transport and cross-border routes need to be established and promoted

### 3.1.2 Kosovo

#### Environment

After the war in Kosovo newly established institutions took priority over environmental protection. Environmental institutions began their work under difficult conditions and are still suffering from a lack of funds, capacities, and data (MESP 2011) and overall development needs competing with environmental requirements. The Strategy for Environment Protection (MESP 2013) contains the overall goals for the institutions concerned with environmental protection. The administrative duties in the field of nature conservation are carried out by the Ministry of Environment and Spatial Planning and the Municipalities, while the professional work in this sector is the responsibility of the Kosovo Environmental Protection Agency (KEPA).

During the past few decades, efforts have been made to create a better source of data and information on the state of environment. As a first step, the "Red Book of Vascular Flora of the Republic of Kosovo" was published in 2013, and another Red book about fauna is in the works (MESP 2013). According to the available data, there are 2,800 to 3,000 species of vascular flora present in Kosovo.

In terms of fauna, there is no reliable data presenting exact numbers. Based on findings made through monitoring and inventorying activities of biodiversity in protected nature areas during 2015/16 by KEPA, the MESP concludes a "relatively good" status of fauna (MESP 2017: 24 and National assessment of management of information and data base for Biodiversity in Albania, GIZ/Open Regional Fund for Biodiversity, BIMR project, May 2017).

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<sup>18</sup> see "Welcome to Kukes/Diber" maps, information centres marked in the map do not exist, Legend misleading; see "Sharra Region" material, which point to information centres in Kukes and Brezovica, which do not exist

As to the medium term aim of EU integration of Kosovo, the country needs to create a legal and adequate institutional framework in accordance with the environmental EU standards and specifically the EU Nature Directives<sup>19</sup>. In 2010, the Assembly of Kosovo adopted the **new Law on Nature Protection**<sup>20</sup>, which was more detailed than its predecessor, and referred to EU directives including Natura 2000 network. The law sets the categories of protected areas, which are, according to the law of 2010, divided into 8 categories of designation falling under different legal responsibilities depending on their degree of importance.

Two National Parks have been established in Kosovo in 2012 "Sharri" and "Bjeshket e Nemuna", from which only the Sharri National Park has a Spatial and Management Plan approved in 2015<sup>21</sup> which is under implementation.

The scientists Zeqir Veselaj and Behxhet Mustafa, in their study on "Overview of Nature Protection Progress in Kosovo," reviewed the efforts made concerning environmental protection in the last decade in Kosovo (Veselaj 2015). They concluded, what other actors have confirmed in the conducted interviews: "The change on the ground compared with the legislative progress is very slow" (Veselaj 2015: 9). Existing legislation can therefore not indicate the real state of development. In addition, their review shows that despite an increased surface area and number of protected natural areas, there remains several urgent problems in the field of environmental conservation in Kosovo.

They criticize the slow process of practical regulation in implementing the law, a lack of management institutions for protected areas, and limited human resource capacities and financial resources. The most recent information available concerning the "State on the Environment in Kosovo" in 2017 underlines the previous argument made by the scientists about a lack of proper financing. The Annual Report published by the Ministry of Environment and Spatial Planning in 2017, shows that the total budget and capital investments in the environment **decreased** from 47,785,028 € in 2014 to 39,357,027 € in 2016. This development seems to be in contradiction to the increased surface of natural areas under protection and limits the possibilities of progress in implementation by the institutions and environmental sector.

With regard to the state of protected areas, the Annual Report gives clear recommendations concerning the "Establishment of management bodies for protected areas" and "Capacity Building of employees in protected areas" (MESP 2017: 25). In addition to the information provided by the MESP, the Ministry for Forestry and Rural Development published several reports and statistics on the state of forestry in Kosovo available on their webpage<sup>22</sup>.

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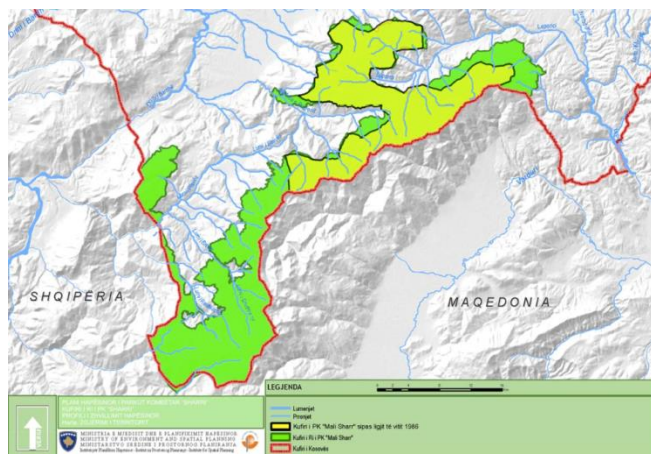
<sup>19</sup> see chapter 3.2.1

<sup>20</sup> see [http://www.gazetazyrtare.com/e-gov/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=334&Itemid=28&lang=en](http://www.gazetazyrtare.com/e-gov/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=334&Itemid=28&lang=en)

<sup>21</sup> there are two SIDA experts currently working on a Management Plan for the other NP

<sup>22</sup> see [albanianforest.org](http://albanianforest.org)

## Sharri National Park



8 Map of Sharri National Park (UNDP 2015)

In the framework of this study, the Sharri National Park describes the TEM area of interest within Kosovo. It is located in South-East, South and South-Western part of Kosovo and borders Northern Albania and Western Macedonia. The total area of the park is **53.469 hectares**, covering five municipalities: Kacanik (3 villages), Strpce (9 villages), Suhareka/Suhareke (4 villages), Prizren (13 villages), and Dragash (22 villages). There are 51 villages in total, belonging to the five municipalities with a registered **population of 62,426**, lying along the border of the National Park. Permanent settlements within the Park can only be found as the following: "Some wooden houses for use by shepherds in the summer, tourist facilities, and objects in Prevalle and Breovica/Brezovice. Around 500 houses are present." (UNDP 2015: 20). Forest and pastures dominate the area, comprising 82% of the Park's surface area. A specific characteristic of the Sharri Mountain National Park is its extremely rich biodiversity; with over **2000 plants species**, representing about **65% of the flora in Kosovo, and 200 species of birds, and 69 species of fauna**. Of special significance are the mammals species of lynx (*lynx lynx*), martes (*martes martes*), brown bear (*ursus arctos*), deer (*Capreolus capreolus*), mountain goat (*Rupicapra rupicapra*), wolf (*Canis lupus*), fox (*Canes vulpes*), wild boar (*Sus scrofa*), badger (*meles meles*), wild cat (*Felis sylvestris*), and blind dog (*Spalax monticola*) (Directorate of Administration of National Park "Sharri" 2017: 11, 13). There are 15 strict nature reserves falling under the most protected zone comprising an area of 9363.51 hectares (17,5% of the total land area of the Park).

The interviews show, that Sharri National Park is famous for its natural assets and traditions. Despite no existing official branding, people associate the Sharri Mountains with high quality products, principally to the production of Sharri cheese and Sharri honey, as well as the breeding of Sharri dogs.

The Sharri Mountain National Park Office is the responsible administrative unit for monitoring, managing, and maintaining the Natural Park. The well-developed Management Plan covers all relevant aspects of nature conservation, tourism development, and other relevant topics. The implementation of the given tasks **lags behind the plan due to limited capacities and financing**. The proposed number of employees is "52 plus temporary and seasonal staff" (Directorate of Administration of National Park "Sharri" 2017:76), which is not the case. At the moment, there are **18** staff members employed, of which are 8 rangers and 4 seasonal workers.

With regard to the statements made by the Office staff and written in the Management Plan, the Sharri Mountains National Park faces several problems: Illegal logging, natural fires, waste deposit, and governance issues concerning the permits for construction of hotels, especially in the municipality of Prizren (Prevalle).

Jupolli conducted a survey among the local population within Sharri National Park in her study on "Planning and Management Issues in Sharr Mountains National Park, Kosovo: Livelihoods of Local Communities and their Perceptions" in 2010. Her survey revealed issues,

which are according to the interviews conducted with management park staff, still present today. One of the locals claimed: "[d]espite differences, many politicians are united in a common cause. They have already raised their villas in the beautiful forests of Kosovo in Prevalle. This is against the laws that they themselves have adopted" (Jupolli 2010: 50). These political issues result in a lower level of compliance with the National Park law. This is apart from poverty and lack of environmental awareness part of the reason, why the overall perception of the local community is predominantly negative towards the National Park (51%) (Jupolli 2010: 67).

As far as region specific research on domestic flora is concerned, the Red Book of Vascular Flora of the Republic of Kosovo offers a detailed overview about species, distribution, habitats, and level of protection. Moreover, the research conducted by the Italian Biologist and Ethnologist Andrea Pieroni in 2016 established a comprehensive list of "local food and food-medicinal uses of wild plants and mushrooms in the study area (including unusual food uses of cultivated plants)" (Pieroni 2016: 87-89). Together with an international expert team<sup>23</sup>, he researched the "Traditional food uses of wild plants among the Gorani of South Kosovo" (Pieroni 2016) predominately living in the municipality of Dragash/Dragas, which belongs to the Sharri Mountain National Park.

## Economy

The Municipalities within the Sharri National Park belong to the Economic Region South (Prizren, Dragash/Dragas, Suhareka/Suvareka) and East (Kaçanik, Shterpshe/Strpce) of Kosovo under the supervision of the Regional Development Agency South and East. When looking for region-specific economic data, the Institute for Statistics provides only limited information. Their annual Surveys on Labour Force (Kosovo Agency of Statistics 2016) do not provide regional assessments. The most comprehensive, but quite outdated data can be found in the Regional Development Agency South and East Strategies 2010-2013 (RDA East/South 2010).

According to the statements made by the RDA South, they were not able to implement the strategy developed in 2010 by 2013 due to a lack of capacities and insufficient budgeting. Hence, they are still working with the outdated plan. The overviews of the regional profiles provided by the RDA South and East reveal the relatively disadvantaged economic situation compared to the centre and west of Kosovo. Both regions are characterized by a remarkably high degree of unemployment (RDA South 2010: 13). 44,1 % of the 25-39 aged individuals in the region of south Kosovo (RDA South 2010:12) and 32.6 % of the same age group in the eastern region (RDA East 2010: 25) were registered as being unemployed in 2008. As the main economic activities in the Sharri region are agricultural production and trade, farming is the most important employer for the rural population.

In the urban settlements of Prizren and Dragash, the economy is mostly based on the retail industry, small enterprises, and food processing (SWG 2014: 13). Due to a high degree of unemployment and reliance on the agricultural sector, development and diversification of the economy is one of the biggest challenges facing the Sharri Region.

According to the Regional Development Strategy of the South effective for Prizren, Dragash/Dragas and Suhareka/Suvareka, the development of tourism is one of the three main priorities covering three measures concerning "Improving the existing tourism base", "Highly

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<sup>23</sup> see annex 13)

enriching and diversifying the existing tourism offer" and "Providing improved information and promotion of tourism offer of the region" (RDA South 2010: 29f). For the eastern municipalities of Kaçanik and Shterpshe/Strpce, tourism is not a priority in the strategy, but is mentioned as a measure for fostering the economy (RDA East 2010: 32). The fact that tourism is ranked as a higher priority in the South of Kosovo is mainly due to the pulling factor of the attractive city of Prizren, known for its tourism sights.

As far as agricultural economy within the Sharri Region is concerned, the webpage of the NGO FINCH supported by the GIZ provides information on farming, beekeeping, minor forest produce, culture, tourism, women in business, and accommodations (FINCH 2017).

## Tourism

The natural assets of Kosovo provide favourable conditions for the development of ecotourism activities. The mix of Continental and Mediterranean climate make year-round tourism products possible. However, being known as the "youngest" European State, Kosovo is in the early stage of tourism development, but has shown significant increases over the last years. Reliable data on tourism is difficult to acquire, but a new cooperation agreement between the Agency for Statistics and Kosovo Border Police have been approved in order to facilitate and enhance the collection of data and statistics for tourism<sup>24</sup>.

According to the NGO "Democracy for Development," Kosovo has lagged behind other Balkan countries in tourism development, "not only regarding investments, the number of visitors, or the impact of tourism in the employment and GDP of the country, but also in terms of the education of tourism staff and workforce" (D4D 2017: 29). The fact, that there is no Ministry or Department, but only a small Division responsible for tourism development attached to the Ministry of Trade and Industry, equipped with a budget of only 0.1 million Euro, underlines the limited priority paid to tourism by the Government of Kosovo (D4D 2017.1).

Nevertheless, data on the tourism development in Western Kosovo shows that the number of tourists and the length of their stays have significantly increased from 146,600 visitors in 2014 to 256,054 in 2016. Accordingly, the number of employees in the tourism sector increased from 968 in 2014 to 1,216 in 2016 (D4D 2017.1). During the field-visit in Peja several tourism stakeholders were met, and it became evident that the clear responsibilities and cooperation among the actors have contributed to its positive development. A significant effect on the positive development in Peja has been the "GIZ supported Peaks of Balkan Programme promoting development of hiking trails in Albania and Kosovo." Data on visitors and their overnight stays illustrates the sudden increase after the promotion of PoB from 2014 onwards (Tourism Information Point Peja 2017. annex 9, 10). The largest number of tourists visits Kosovo during the summer season<sup>25</sup> which is believed to be primarily due to the Diaspora still having a great impact on the economy.

Improvements in infrastructure have contributed to improved connectivity between Albania, Kosovo, and Macedonia, and have made the South/East region of Kosovo to one of the best geo-strategic positions in Kosovo (RDA South 2010: 9).

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<sup>24</sup> see <http://ask.rks-gov.net/en/kosovo-agency-of-statistics/add-news/kas-signed-cooperation-agreement-with-the-kosovo-police-for-facilitating-the-collection-of-data-and-statistics-for-tourism>

<sup>25</sup> see annex 9)

The tourism infrastructure in Kosovo shows great regional differences. Even the capital Pristina has no functioning Tourism Information Office, whereas the municipality of Peja is the most advanced in terms of access to tourism infrastructure as the recently published "Report on promoting the establishment of Tourism Information Offices (TIO)" proves (Division of Tourism 2017). They conclude in their recommendations, that "all municipalities, with the exception of the municipality of Peja, the staff of existing TIOs needs training and capacity building, therefore it is recommended to provide vocational training for employees working in the new as well as in existing TIO's" (Division of Tourism 2017: 16). Furthermore, they note that Public Private Partnerships "did not function well since the staff could not generate sufficient revenue in order for the office to operate" (Division of Tourism 2017: 16). In the early stage of tourism offices, it is therefore highly recommended that the municipalities initially offer the opening of TIOs with public statute, whereby the municipality manages their offices and ensures their functioning.

### **Tourism within the National Park**

There are nine tourist areas within Sharri National Park according to the third category of protection zone, combining a stretch of land of 7.1 % of the total protected area. The natural attractions of Sharri National Park (forests, mountain pastures, water flows, glacial lakes, climate, beautiful landscapes, skiing terrain, and recreation, and the favourable geographical position) hold a huge potential for various forms of ecotourism. The Directorate for Administration of Sharri National Park consider the development of various forms of stationary tourism as especially important as long as they comply with the criteria for conservation of natural values (Directorate for Administration of National Park "Sharri"/ KEPA 2017: 15). At the moment there is only one regulated tourist resort of winter sports tourism located in Brezovica, near the Macedonian border.

The Management Plan estimates the capacity for visitors and buildings undertaking various activities based on gathered data and information from guards and other supervisors of SNP, resulting in a **maximal total number of visitors per year of 105,400, out of which Bresovica/Bresovize totalled 45,000; and Prevalle 38,500 can host the most tourists** (UNDP 2015: 24). Another table illustrates the locations and their respective tourism infrastructure and number of buildings. As far as the number of buildings for tourism purposes is concerned, the municipalities of Prizren and Bresovica/ Bresovize are dominating with 126/ 150 constructions (UNDP 2015:24 f.).

Brezovica is the touristic hot spot within the NP, and as it belongs to one of the eight zones for touristic activity, proposals have been made for a major expansion of the facilities there (UNDP 2015: 25). As the Management Plan states, the Investment Master Plan does not include any environmental impact evaluation, and therefore carries the potential risk of harmful consequences for the local environment and nature. The further development of the ski area remains uncertain at the moment of research. The Management Plan contains a detailed table envisioning the "Recreation Opportunities in Sharri National Park", listing their potential benefits and risks. It follows a summary of benefits and risks associated with tourism in Sharri National Park, covering the issues of capacity limits of tourism development (UNDP 2015: 37).

A recently conducted survey on "The Possibilities of Tourism Development Potentials in Prizren and Dragash Territories - South Kosovo" prepared by Blerta Begolli and Nermin Kastrati, revealed some interesting findings, which emphasize the problems stated above.

It clearly illustrates the state of the economy, environment, tourism, and culture in the National Park, and provides a comprehensive source for information on all relevant stakeholders, accommodations, and character of tourists visiting the park. The SWOT analysis summarizes the main opportunities and challenges matching with our impression during the interviews and field visits<sup>26</sup>.

At the moment there is limited touristic offer for ecotourist visitors who are interested in experiencing the nature of Sharri National Park. There are indeed several marked hiking trails, and we came across several projects currently marking additional trail, but there is not a single comprehensive hiking map available either online, or at the Tourism office in Prizren.

The tourism office in Prizren is the only functioning information centre in the Sharri region and is a kind of PP Partnership as the Municipality provides the facility and a private operator is responsible for running the office. In any case, it suffers from insufficient revenue flows and offers to operate reliably. The findings of the Tourism Division emphasized the need for financial supervision from the municipalities' side (Tourism Division 2017).

The Tourism Association South has a clear focus on the Sharri Region and was involved in many attempts to foster regional sustainable development, aiming to create better conditions for rural and ecotourism. For instance: Slow Food initiatives, training of women to retain their skills in doing traditional wedding drawings, and/or improving the quality and branding of farmers' products in order to make them competitive.

Compared to the beginning of the association's work, when its members did not understand the benefits from membership and many projects stopped due to lack of capacities and financing, the situation today has improved in terms as there is a general appreciation for their work and members are collaborating. Nonetheless, the support of the municipality is considered to be essential to implement such projects successfully. On top of that, the Association highly recommends not replicating the "Peja" adventure tourism model<sup>27</sup>. Indeed, the Sharr mountains share the same potential for adventure tourism, but from a strategically point of view, a new concept with different target groups may create a more appealing and unique destination for that area in Kosovo.

As mentioned above, the Sharr region is well known for some quality natural products, for its ethnic diversity, and various cultural traditions. Built upon that existing image, the Association recommends to encourage a more **culture/tradition-based tourism** development and branding. In the end, a handful of passionate individuals from the Directorate for Management of Sharr National Park and the Tourism Association undertake a key role in providing information and managing existent tourism demands. However, as the Management plan warns, "the SNP directorate does not have the capacity and mandate to act as a full provider of tourism infrastructure and services in the National Park. Many of the **required infrastructure and services need to be provided by local municipalities and communities** outside the territory of the park (...). Accordingly, any strategy for developing tourism in the National Park must include measures to generate **sufficient revenue for the Administration to perform its functions and to safeguard the environmental and cultural values of the park**" (UNDP 2015: 38).

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<sup>26</sup> see annex 3)

<sup>27</sup> In 2017 the Adventure Park in Peja opened including Zip lining, Via Ferrata, a giant swing, several playgrounds a many more adventurous attractions, see [http://www.ropescourses.eu/en\\_US/news/133/74/Adventure-park-in-Peja-Kosovo-is-finished/](http://www.ropescourses.eu/en_US/news/133/74/Adventure-park-in-Peja-Kosovo-is-finished/).



The **Directorate is seen as a pivotal point** for enabling the potential of positive synergies between tourism and nature protection. If revenues derived from ecotourism partly go back into the park's management, environmental benefits could be ensured as they will contribute to better monitoring, maintenance, and conservation of the park's natural assets, which in turn enhance the attractiveness of the destination. Tour operators who offer guided tours in the Sharri Mountains are: Sharri Ecotours<sup>28</sup>, FINCH (birdwatching)<sup>29</sup>, Balkan Natural Adventure<sup>30</sup>, ZETOUR<sup>31</sup>, Readyclickandgo<sup>32</sup>, Balkan Hiking Adventure<sup>33</sup>.

### Personal experience through field-visits

#### Prizren - Gate to the National Park

Prizren is the probably most appealing city at the gate to Sharri National Park. Due to the famous Dokufest in summer, and the attractiveness of the old city with its castle and ancient bridges, Prizren itself is quite experienced when it comes to tourism. You find several hotels and hostels, as well as family stay opportunities in the city. Public transport from Pristina to Prizren is cheap and easy to find, whereas public transport within the National Park is insufficiently developed for tourism purposes. Promoting activities which reach out of the city seem to be of secondary importance for Prizren municipality, but have been promised by the newly elected party to be examined in the future.

#### Sharr Mountains

Offered tourism activities in the Sharr mountains are: hiking, snow shoe hiking, and skiing. Mountain biking trails have not yet been established but envisaged<sup>34</sup>. The favourable natural advantages, as well as the year-round season, allow a lot more possibilities for creating family friendly activities like horseback riding, paragliding, zip lining, and climbing. According to the tourist operators from Peja, the Sharr Mountains have great potential for a hiking trail as promoted under the Via Dinarica<sup>35</sup> initiative similar to the one in Peja.

Leaving Prizren by car, a well-built, curvy road goes through the Sharr mountain region; passing several villages and a surprisingly large number of hotels and restaurants before arrival at the main touristic point of Brezavica. This



**9 Littering in the Dragash Municipality (picture taken in November 2017)**

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<sup>28</sup> sharriecotour.com

<sup>29</sup> sharriregion.com (tour offers are in planning)

<sup>30</sup> bnadventure.com

<sup>31</sup> zetourkosovo.com/tours/

<sup>32</sup> readyclickandgo.com/tour/prizren-day-trip/

<sup>33</sup> balkanhikingadventure.com, webpage currently not functioning

<sup>34</sup> RideAlbania and Sharri Ecotour are currently checking out possible trails in order to establish a cross-border package for mountain bike tourism

<sup>35</sup> see viadinarica.com

well-known ski resort<sup>36</sup> is currently for investment reasons in a bad condition. Opening times are unreliable and only some of the lifts are functioning.

The natural beauty of the Sharr Mountains is undeniable, no matter if one looks at white-glittering snowy landscape, the wide prairie of pasture land, or dense forests; the views are breath-taking. All the natural preconditions for ecotourism are in place. A close eye on the surroundings and the question whether more tourists could contribute to nature conservation is the crucial point the research focused on during the field trips. However, nobody can avoid coming upon a devastating amount of littering in river beds or simply everywhere all around the villages. Even through the situation is much better within the National Park due to lack of settlements, there is no chance to miss these unfortunate scenes on the way to the more remote areas.

The field visits included a guided snow-show tour, but it was impossible to evaluate the quality of sign-posting hidden under the deep snow. However, the hiking trails in and around Brezoviza are said to be well-maintained and various actors have made efforts to enhance the trails all over the Sharr region step by step. An up-to-date hiking map though is missing. Every tourist relies very much on the limited number of active guides, which can be booked through the tourism office in Prizren or via internet.

The most popular products of the region, Sharri cheese and honey are available alongside the road, in the villages, and in Prizren town. A coherent branding, which would improve quality standards is still subject of discussion. A protected brand could further promote the Sharri region, foster the business of the domestic dairy producers and beekeepers, and make the products more attractive as a touristic product.

During the field-visit, a remarkable male dominance in tourism services also embedded in socio-cultural context was noticed, which becomes especially striking when compared to Prizren, where gender roles appear to be nowadays less rigid.

### **Access to information material**

The Kosovo Investment and Enterprise Support Agency (KIESA) developed various promotion materials for Kosovo including Prizren, Gorani people, Sharr Mountains, Brezovica, and Dragash. There is a clear focus on culture and tradition, whereas biodiversity or natural assets are not mentioned at all. Being a tourist, one probably cannot come across those materials other than by chance as they are not displayed in any tourism office and do not appear by researching through key words in the internet.

Besides the obstacles to access the KIESA material, there is generally information material of average to good quality about Prizren and the Sharr Mountains by other providers available on the internet and in the tourism office in Prizren, including an audio guide, which provides information on natural sights too.



**10 Tourism Information Board in Dragash Municipality (picture taken in November 2017)**

<sup>36</sup> see <http://www.kosovo-info.com/kosovo-tourism/brezovica/>

However, when it comes to organizing independent day trips into the mountains, the tourism offers are limited and the planning rather time-consuming.

There are a couple of active tour guides offering organized hiking tours in the Sharr mountain region. As the positive experience with the guided snow shoe tour showed, they are passionate nature lovers and full of ideas for further tourism development. The idea of ecotourism is a matter they take personally. Due to the quite well-established tourism infrastructure in Peja, they even offer tours to the Sharr Mountains.

The SWG promotion material contains the only existing trans-boundary information on hiking trails, traditional food, culture, nature, and accommodations. Even though some of the information, especially about the Albanian side are outdated (there is no functioning information office in Kukës for instance), it provides the most comprehensive and handy advice for the cross-border region of the Sharr Mountains. What is also important to mention, is the condition of several tourism information boards encountered on field-trips. In Prizren there are both, some old, decrepit and some well-maintained boards. In Dragash the boards have been destroyed intentionally and partly were surrounded by garbage<sup>37</sup>. This symbolizes the missing awareness and acceptance of this kind of touristic infrastructure on the ground, and the few tourists coming across such boards might feel unsettled.

### Lessons learned in Interviews<sup>38</sup>

- "Umbrella organisation" missing, which could function as a regional coordinator (Destination Management Organization West serves as best practice)
- National Park Management Office in Prizren provides expertise about natural values and their conservation, due to limited capacities they are in an ongoing struggle to implement the management plan
- **Diaspora families** as important target group for ecotourism activities → Especially the "next generation" as they need to keep being attracted to return (experience and investments and the potential for constructive cultural exchange) → Diversification of family friendly ecotourism offers (Horse riding, Nature Camps in the Mountains<sup>39</sup>)
- Women in rural areas of the Sharri region are currently excluded from tourism development → priority additional target group for future projects (FINCH already actively involved having a special woman division)
- **Sound legal framework, classifications, standards, strategy papers** → insufficient implementation due to lack of human resources, capacities and financial support (eg: Sharri National Park, Rural Development Agency South)
- Use of **existing resources for new touristic facilities**, for instance abandoned buildings
- People need visible and well promoted **best practice examples** to get attracted to and get familiar with meanings of ecotourism
- Strengthen the network between University (Biology/Tourism Faculties) and Destination of the Sharri Mountains to create a win-win situation of practical experience, creative, modern project ideas and trained human resources

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<sup>37</sup> At the moment of the study, there were a few projects building more of these Information Boards. There is concern of the concept and meaningfulness of those Boards particularly without adequate information and involvement of locals.

<sup>38</sup> see annex 3)

<sup>39</sup> FINCH Camp "Linthi"

- Conventional economic promotion is priority for Municipalities in Sharri region → awareness raising on political level for ecotourism advantages for employment and prosperity (need for **increased budget for touristic infrastructure and environmental education**)
- Prizren can serve as pull factor but must manage to spread **and bridge tourism to remote areas**
- **Diversity of nature, ethnicities, food and traditions** as unique selling point in order to create a distinguishable and innovative destination for the Sharri Region (Sensitiveness towards ethnical diversity must be acknowledged for every activity)

### 3.1.3 Macedonia

The following assessment of the state of ecology, economy and tourism in Macedonia is less detailed than of Kosovo and Albania due to limited time spent in the country. The findings are based on desk research and 5 conducted interviews in Macedonia.

#### Ecology

Currently, the database for protected areas (MoEPP 2017) includes 86 areas covering a surface of 230083 ha or 8,97% of the territory of the Republic of Macedonia. Most of the area falls into the category national parks with around 4.47% then natural monuments with 3.07% and the multipurpose area Jasen with 0.97% of the national territory. There are three National Parks falling under the category II covering 108338 hectares: Mavrovo, Galicia and Pelister.

Responsible administrative unit for Nature Protection is the Ministry for Environment and Physical Planning (MoEPP) (NCP 2017). MoEPP has recently joined the IUCN network and drafted the National Strategy for Nature Protection 2017-2027 implemented with financial assistance from the SDC. The strategy includes the most important information related to the natural values of geology, geomorphology, hydrology, biodiversity and landscapes. Moreover, it suggests measures and actions and their time frame, financing and responsible institutions (IUCN 2017<sup>40</sup>). It might provide the most thorough information on the state of biodiversity once it is published.

Macedonia is a predominantly mountainous country, cut by larger or smaller valleys, gorges plateaus and highlands. It has about 15 mountain ranges higher than 2000 m, but only the Sharr Mountain has more than 20 peaks higher than 2600m. Macedonia can be divided into two main regions: the Western part with carbonaceous rocks and the Eastern part with a great diversity of siliceous rocks. The precious natural heritage of a diverse biodiversity faces several threats, which are among others: non-compliance with legislation and weak enforcement, illegal timber extraction, which is foremost, a threat to the poverty-stricken areas, uncontrolled **collecting of medicinal plants for the pharmaceutical industry**, erosion, overfishing, industrial pollution and forest fires (BIOFOR 2001).

#### Area of Interest

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<sup>40</sup> unfortunately, we had no access to the original draft document

Our focus area in Macedonia contains Mavrovo National Park and the Shara Planina Mountain massif, both bordering with Albania and Macedonia. The Mavrovo National Park is the largest and oldest protected area of Macedonia and borders with Albania and Kosovo. It was first proclaimed 1949, followed by a Reclamation in 1952, which encompasses an area of 72204 hectar (Mavrovo NP 2017). The webpage of the National Park provides general information on tourism in the park, but several links about biodiversity or management in the park are inoperative. There is a management plan from 2007, which is not only outdated, but was also disputed concerning the stated zoning and borders. There is neither Park Management, nor any organization responsible for monitoring or maintaining the NP. Frequently, there have been public debates over planned hydro-power projects in the NP and in 2017 the issue raised international awareness being lodged with the Bern Convention Secretariat (Canter for Environmental Research and Conservation 2017).

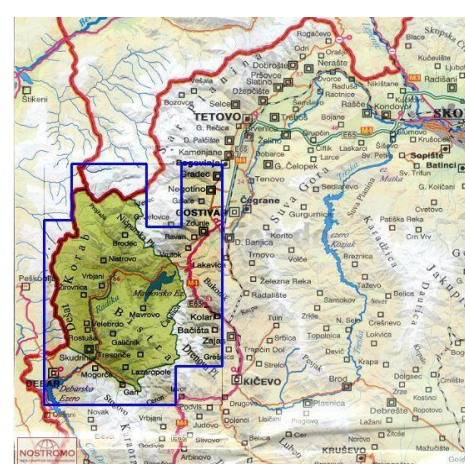
The territory of Sharr Planina Mt. is abundant in natural resources of diverse types, such as geological and geomorphologic forms, glacial lakes and mountainous watercourses and exceptionally rich biological diversity represented in different habitats (forests, pastures, peat bogs, silica and karst rocks and whetstones, etc.), species diversity including high number of endemic, rare and relict plants, animals and fungi, as well as significant varieties and types of plants and animals. Apart from this, there is valuable cultural heritage reflected in the specific landscape formed for millennia by traditional livestock breeding and forest exploitation (SWG 2014). Based on this, the **2004 Strategy for Protection of Biological Diversity with Action Plan** has envisaged **proclamation of Sharr Planina Mt. for a National Park**. To this day, the Sharr Planina Mountains are not protected by law after a long history of public discussion over the proclamation as a national park. Since 1997, when the process of proclamation started, several actors have been advocating the proclamation.

But due to an ethnic conflict in 2001 in Macedonia, which particularly affected the North-Western part, the officers from the Ministry of Environment and Physical Planning considered the area unsafe hindering the implementation of any serious measures for its future development (Mejzini 2007:45). Eventually, the final proclamation law is expected to be passed in 2018.

The most popular platform advocating the cause of Sharr Planina are the "Friends of Shara", which is a new collective cooperation of different NGOs and local stakeholders lead by the Macedonian Ecological Society. The latter conducted several studies on the ecology of Sharr Planina.



11 Map of proposed area for NP Shara (MES 2010)



12 Map of Mavrovo NP (Mavrovo NP 2017)

The booklet of "Natural Values of Shar Planina Mt." is a profound information basis for the mountains' natural assets and highlights the impact of man-nature interactions (MES 2010). Because of its not yet proclaimed protected status, the identified threats to the biodiversity assets are increasing due to a missing legislative framework and responsible institutions for surveillance and conservation. The threats of loss or reduced vitality of certain species are due to excessive use of certain medicinal and aromatic herbs, uncontrolled hunting and fishing, unregulated recreation as well as impact from climate change on species and habitats (MES 2010: 73). According to MES the loss of species can be illustrated through many examples: "Balkan Lynx, nesting couples of Griffon and bearded vultures have disappeared from the mountain, population of the brown trout have declined, Munika pine is almost extinct from the mountain" (MES 2010: 73). In 2013 the biologist Andrea Pieroni recorded and evaluated the "Traditional medicinal plant knowledge among Albanians, Macedonians and Gorani in the Sharr Mountains". He has concerns about overexploitation of taxa collected for household use and sale on regional trade network (Pieroni 2013: 2076).

## Economy

The Sharr Mountains belong to the statistical and economical region Polog including 8 municipalities, of which 6 belong to the Shar region: Jegunovce, Tearce, Tetovo, Bogovinje, Vrapchishte and Gostivar (FoS 2017).

According to the data published in 2016 by the State Statistical Office but conducted in 2014, the Polog region is the weakest economical region of Macedonia in terms of produced GDP per capita (State Statistical Office 2016). Hence, the region suffers from economic problems, resulting in high migration, high rates of unemployment, illegal logging for firewood, illegal harvesting of medicinal plants and illegal hunting.

## Tourism

In 2012, the law on tourism development zones was established regulating the main parts of tourism development and competencies of the National Agency for Promotion and Support of Tourism. There is no focus on ecotourism or sustainable tourism written in the respective laws or in the agenda of the Agency, apart from the description of the tourism development zones, where you find a reference to ecological standards. "Tourism development zone (...) is a separately surrounded and marked area that represents functional whole formed due to tourism development by implementation of standards regarding the services, as well as efficient use of the resources by applying the highest ecological standards in which activities are being performed under terms regulated by this and other law." (Law on Tourism Development Zones, Article 4). Another law established for the means of tourism in 2016, is the law on "Manner and Procedure in the Organization of Informative Tours for Foreign Tour Operators and Journalists to the Republic of Macedonia", which supports so-called "fam trips"<sup>41</sup> for foreign tour operators and journalists to increase the promotion of Macedonia as a tourism destination. This law might be an opportunity to promote the Sharr region internationally.

The region could be interesting for foreign ecotourism operators as to their unexplored touristic landscape and could at the same time increase the Agency's focus on ecotourism. In addition, the

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<sup>41</sup> a free or low cost for travel agents or consultants, provided by a someone, who wants to promote their offer

Agency promotes a Macedonian National Brand: Timeless Macedonia. Several high-end promotion brochures picture Macedonia as a destination for every kind of touristic activity. Even though the Agency established and marked several trails in the Sharr Mountains and produced a respective map, the staff interviewed claimed to be not aware of the state of proclamation of the Sharr Mountains. In contrary, they provided false information on the local acceptance of such proclamation while referring to outdated opinion polls. The non-existent cross-linking between nature conservation related and touristic stakeholders became apparent during the discussions with the Agency for Promotion and Support of Tourism and the MES.

Data on arrivals in the statistical region Polog, including the municipalities of Mavrovo NP and Sharr Mountains, show that the numbers stagnate from 2011 to 2015, whereas the other regions could increase their numbers considerably<sup>42</sup>. There is no tourism strategy or vision for the Sharr Mountains. The national and regional Mountain Associations and mainly the oldest Mountain Club Ljuboten serve as tour operators for the Sharr Planina region at the moment. They guide tours on demand and have several mountain huts, where guests can stay overnight. They are well known in the region and are well socialized with the local population. In the scope of a project implemented by MES, Friends of Shari supported by German partner Euronatur, a hiking map containing 54 trails and information on biodiversity and landscapes has been produced. The SWG RDD introduces and promotes the Sharr region as a whole on a webpage, which is connected with the hiking trail routes from Balkan Hiking Adventure<sup>43</sup>. They provide plenty of information regarding culture, food, agriculture, tourism and biodiversity<sup>44</sup>. Nonetheless, the non-existent touristic infrastructure (no info centre, or hiking maps or any promoted touristic offer) makes it difficult for tourists entering from the Macedonian site to come across any of the existent products.

The Macedonian Ecological Society is the leading NGO in the field of nature protection. They maintain a strong partnership with the universities and therefore combine experts in every ecological scientific field. In the framework of FoS engagement in the Sharr region, there had been plenty of smaller projects taking place concerning the promotion of sustainable use of nature resources and values. Their **bottom-up approach** changed the local attitude towards the proclamation of the Sharr Region as a protected area and towards the benefit of natural assets. According to MES, the people are well aware about the potential of their environment for ecotourism and partly came already up with their own ideas. Accordingly, there developed a quite active civil society, the Bela Vista Institute for Rural Regional Development for instance works since 2001 in the field of cultural tourism and eco-rural development. They are already experienced and open for respective cross-border activities. This year, they organized the 7th farmers festival of chestnuts, honey and wine<sup>45</sup>.

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<sup>42</sup> see table on regional arrivals in Macedonia (Annex 13)

<sup>43</sup> the webpage of BHA is currently not available

<sup>44</sup> see seerural.org, **Information on biodiversity**: [http://seerural.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/11/1.-General-brochure\\_Sharra.pdf](http://seerural.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/11/1.-General-brochure_Sharra.pdf), p. 7f.

<sup>45</sup> Information derived from written communication with Mr.Saso Matovsci, executive chairman of Bela Vista

## Lessons learned in Interviews

- Missing collusion between the Agency for Promotion and Support of Tourism and environmental experts lead to misleading information<sup>46</sup> about natural touristic attractions in the past -> Lack of cooperation among tourism and environmental related actors
- People in the Shar region in Macedonia have been subject to many awareness raising projects and local surveys, which established a solid knowledge basis about natural values
- Several hiking trails in place, partly established by the Mountain Associations, by projects funded by several international donors (BHA), the Agency for Promotion and Support of Tourism or the local NGO's (FoS, MES). It is evident: Future ecotourism development is not about marking more trails; it is about **enhancing the capacities and human resources for promoting and maintaining the existent ones**

## 3.2 Comparative analysis

### 3.2.1 On-topic

This chapter provides an illustrative presentation of topics chosen as to their specific relevance for future tourism development. The following topics show the discrepancies among the three countries/regions of interest: EU integration process and progress, Status of Protected Areas, Infrastructure, Tax-Systems, Gender Equality, and Cross-border Cooperation.

### EU Integration Process

The three SEE countries Albania, Kosovo and Macedonia **share the common goal of transposing their legislative framework according to the EU standards.**

There are two EU directives directly concerned with nature protection and forming the cornerstone of Europe's nature conservation policy. The **Habitats Directive is a EU** directive adopted in 1992, which aims to protect some 220 habitats approximately, 1000 animal and plant species listed in the directives annexes and are protected in various ways (EU 1992). The second directive in relation to wildlife and nature conservation is the **Birds Directive**, adopted in 2009 (EU 2009). It aims to protect all European Wild Birds naturally occurring in the European Union, in particular through the designation of Special Protected Areas.

**Natura2000** is an ecological network of protected areas in the territory of the European Union related to the Habitat Directive to ensure the long-term survival of Europe's most valuable and threatened species and habitats, listed under the mentioned directives above (European Commission 2017).

Apart from those environmental standards, there are various fields relevant for EU integration. The table below shows the most important topics for the research carried out. In contrast to the mutual announced effort to adopt those standards, reality and data show that there is still a long way to go. The graphic below illustrates the different stages of progress in the EU accession process. Apart from agriculture and rural development, where Albania lags behind,

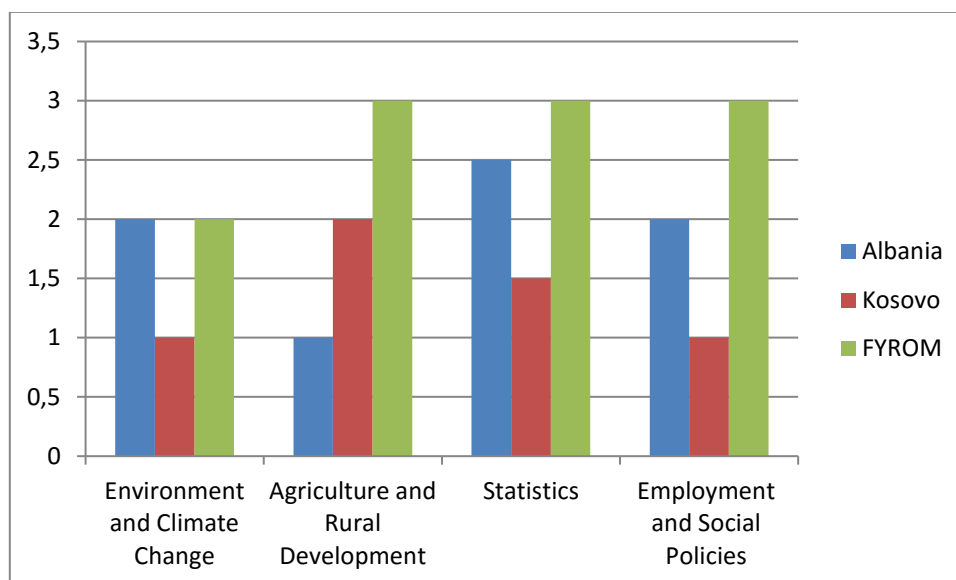
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<sup>46</sup> The promotion brochure on "Sight. Nature and Adventure" promotes the Dojran Lake for untouched nature, its endemic algae and curative affects but biologist's research revealed an alarming amount of toxic ingredients due to pollution and unsustainable agriculture (Bojovic et al. 2016)



Kosovo is in the earliest stage of EU integration generally and particularly in tourism-related topics. The comparative advantage of Macedonia matches the impressions during the field visits. It becomes obvious, that **environment and climate change falls behind the other topics** due to lack of political prioritisation, awareness and lobbying. The research revealed significant problems related to access to reliable data.

The table shows different stages of development, but the reality demonstrated that there is a lack of reliable data for tourism in all of the three countries. Either the data is outdated or non-existent. Quality of data about biodiversity and natural assets differs depending on the status and relevance of the protected area. As of now, the Kosovo Sharr NP has the best environmental description, the data on biodiversity for Korab-Koritnik is outdated and incomplete and the Sharr Planina region is currently under assessment which will probably lead to the most comprehensive pool of data within the next years. Updating and monitoring of existent data belongs to the greatest challenges to all PAs and is highly interrelated with successful implementation of ecotourism to ensure its long-lasting positive contribution.



**11 (Own illustration based on statements in Progress Reports European Association Albania, Kosovo, FYROM 2016)**

**Legend:** 1=early stage, 2=some progress, 3=some level of preparation/moderately prepared, 4=prepared

### Protected Areas

Sharr Planina is due to the still missing proclamation as a protected area disadvantaged compared to Mavrovo, Korab-Koritnik and Sharr Mountains regarding a non-existent regulatory framework ensuring natural conservation by law. Thanks to the efforts made by 'Friends of Sar', the process of proclamation has been accompanied with a bottom-up approach, which ensured awareness raising projects of the local population. As a consequence, the acceptance and willingness towards the declaration of the Sharr Planina among local population has changed over the years (MES 2017), which probably avoids future issues concerning the use of natural resources of the Park. In this sense, Sharr Planina has a comparative advantage for the future as the other Parks partly lack the backing and appreciation by the local population (Jupolli 2010).

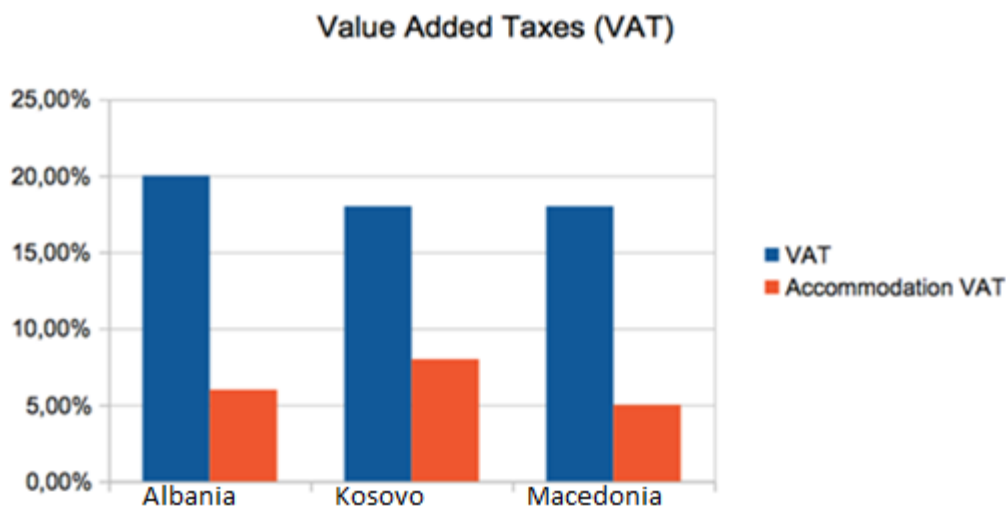
Sharr Mountains NP has the most comprehensive and good practice Management Plan developed and respective institutions for management purposes in place. However, the respective institutions are faced with limited capacities and therefore struggle to stick to comply with ambitious implementation goals in the management plans. Korab-Koritnik Natural Park in contrary has no management unit. The Regional Protected Area Agency (RAPA) is the responsible administrative unit but does not have the capacity and role as a dedicated park Office.

### Road Infrastructure

Comparing the three TEM areas of interest, **Albania has the least developed road infrastructure.** Although the road from Tirana to Kukes has been newly built, the road from Peskopi to Tirana, an important connection to the Korab-Koritnik Nature Park, is in a bad or even dangerous condition. Kosovo and Macedonia have a well-built road network when it comes to the connection to the respective capital cities Pristina and Skopje. Within the protected areas of concern, the road networks are more advanced in Kosovo and Macedonia, whereas Albania lags behind with foremost unpaved roads.

All the three countries have infrastructure projects for the respective areas planned and the cross-border highways are of particular importance to the governance (Government Albania 2017).

### Relevant Taxes



12 Own illustration of Value Added Taxes based on the respective Ministries of Finance

As the example of Croatia proves, the Value Added Tax (VAT) strongly affects the tourism competitiveness of a country and can have significant influence on encouraging tourism development (Dombrovski 2010: 131). **The accommodation VAT in Albania changed this year from 20% to 6%**<sup>47</sup>. The Albanian Tourism Association (ATA) advocated several years to the objective of tax reduction. Now, after the successful passage of the bill, they expect tourism investments to considerably increase. In Kosovo the accommodation VAT is about to **decrease from 18% to 8%** as the bill is supposed to be adopted by the government in December 2017

<sup>47</sup> see [http://www.advantageaustria.org/al/oesterreich-in-albania/news/local/Aktuell/Government\\_cuts\\_VAT\\_on\\_hotels\\_from\\_20\\_\\_to\\_6\\_.en.html](http://www.advantageaustria.org/al/oesterreich-in-albania/news/local/Aktuell/Government_cuts_VAT_on_hotels_from_20__to_6_.en.html)

according to the Kosovo Alternative Tourism Association (KATA). In 2010, Macedonia **established the accommodation VAT of 5%**<sup>48</sup>. In addition, they charge a tourist tax of 40 DEN per overnight stay. Through the reduced Accommodation VATs in the three countries, they anticipate increased investments in tourism, which might provide them a comparative advantage over regional competitors.

## Gender Equality

Gender Inequality is a general problem in the cross-border region of Albania, Kosovo and Macedonia. We noticed, that woman in those remote regions play a minor role in tourism and nature conservation compared to the rest of the respective countries. The reasons originate different causes. Partly the cultural and traditional heritage and partly the disadvantaged economic situation are to be blamed.

In the tourism service (gastronomy, guides...) sector there are almost exclusively men working. This is due to the cultural heritage and family structures. The lack of gender equality in Albania's municipality of Kukes and in the remote areas of Sharr Mountains has become particularly apparent. It seems that no woman ever participated in any ranger or tour guide trainings in the Korab-Koritnik region and at the stakeholder meeting in Kukes not a single woman was present. In the Sharr National Park Office team there are only men employed, which is rather a matter of missing female human resources than of unwillingness. But once one leaves Prizren and enters the mountain villages, the predominance of men outside the house becomes striking. There are already projects that specifically target women empowerment in those regions, such as CDI<sup>49</sup> in Macedonia, SoRi in Albania<sup>50</sup> and FINCH in Kosovo<sup>51</sup>. The NGO's FINCH and MES cooperate transnational establishing a specific women section to empower women in opening businesses.

All in all, the TEM region **shares the issue of gender inequality**, what indicates at women as a target group for tourism development. In addition, women possess valuable knowledge about TEK and are usually closely tied to the natural resources for cooking, healing and household items (Pieroni 2016, 2017) and therefore provide great potential for participatory ecotourism development. Closer cooperation with universities and their faculties of tourism, as well as proactive involvement of rural women can be steps towards more equality.

## Cross-Border Cooperation

The table 12 in the annex gives an overview about existing cooperative projects among tourism and environmental stakeholder in the cross-border region.

An important issue to be tackled in future is the enhancement of intra-regional cooperation. In Albania the cooperation between the municipalities of Kukes and Diber lacks an institutional framework and a commonly shared vision for the Korab-Koritnik Natural Park. For cross-border cooperation, all respective municipalities in the three countries should be connected to allow a coherent collaboration in the field of trans-boundary ecotourism development.

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<sup>48</sup> see <https://seenews.com/news/macedonian-govt-cuts-vat-on-tourism-to-5-from-18-190768>

<sup>49</sup> see <http://irz.org.mk/gender/>

<sup>50</sup> see <https://www.giz.de/en/worldwide/37117.html>

<sup>51</sup> see <https://www.facebook.com/Ngoojq-finch-Womens-Section-Seksioni-i-Grave-1511077542542277/>

However, there is currently no network between tourist information offices and no joint promotion of destinations within the TEM area between Albania, Kosovo and Macedonia<sup>52</sup>.

As the Feasibility Study conducted with support from UNEP in 2010 made clear (UNEP 2010), the simple existence of border points is not a hindrance for cooperation: "[T]he presence of the state border does not result in explicit legal obstacles limiting civilian access to the border areas on either side of the state border, which could e.g. prevent the implementation of the common research or conservation projects in habitats crossed by the state border. It is also not a factor which could hamper the development of trans-boundary cooperation" (UNEP 2010:108). The obstacle that was encountered during the field visit associated with the border crossing was simply related to access. The curvy and unpaved roads require **appropriate vehicles** especially in the winter season and the transport from one to the other country **needs additional time and money**.

Existing exchanges and networks among the countries are mainly based upon personal contacts and not at formalized yet at an institutional level. Tour operators and NGOs from Kosovo, Macedonia and Albania are aware about current projects and activities and share information informally and not regularly.

The benefits of cross-border cooperation for future tourism development are evident to stakeholders. The Peaks of Balkan hike demonstrates how cooperation including among tourism offices can generate results and lead to a common vision, strategy and promotion of a specific tourism product.

### 3.2.2 In short: Common Opportunities and Challenges

#### Opportunities

- Increasing international touristic demand for pristine nature experiences particularly closed to Western and Central Europe
- Natural requirements for diversification of ecotourism products in place
- Authenticity and hospitality are present
- Potentially one of the largest coherent cross-border areas in Europe, geostrategic location for ecotourism
- Existing best practice examples (story-telling approach)
- Existing networking at personal/NGO level
- TEM-Region branding, ethnic diversity as unique selling point
- Women and their TEK as promising actor and beneficiary
- Valuing culture/tradition and nature conservation in tourism approaches will benefit environmental awareness and protection by local people
- Unemployment as a major local issue could potentially be the driver for investments and generate positive multiplier effects<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> The cross-border region of Montenegro, Albania and Kosovo (Peaks of Balkan area) serves as a good example for enhanced mutual benefits due to networking among the three respective tourism information offices.

<sup>53</sup> see chapter 2.1.2 economic benefits

## Challenges

- Compliance with and enforcement of legal framework (unauthorized and unplanned construction, waste deposit, illegal resource extraction, governance etc.)
- Political instability and frequent changes of decision-makers hinders strategic long-term planning and results in loss of consultation results
- Funding and maintenance of tourism investments, products and projects, long-term thinking missing
- Meeting standards and expectations of EU- ecotourists, image and reputation setting
- Lack of political and local understanding of ecotourism as one development option
- Drain of generated tourism income money to foreign countries/capital cities
- General lack of knowledge about ecotourism at all levels

## 4. Recommendations

Based on the findings mentioned above, precise recommendations for each TEM region, related stakeholders including development partners have been derived, which are presented below. Albania, Kosovo and Macedonia are at different stages in this TEM region and the EU accession process and accordingly require partly different approaches. Following the country-specific recommendations, the chapter ends with concluding guidance.

### 4.1. Albania

In the Korab-Koritnik region, dedicated stakeholders interested in the topic of nature conservation and ecotourism need to be identified to be in charge of coordination and organization of a suitable ecotourism approach. These actors should be able to network between stakeholders including NGOs and private sector in order to identify and achieve common goals and interests. A network between the few existing tourism actors should be established to support a focused information flow. Through versatile information sharing regarding leisure activities and accommodation for tourists, long-term economic success of the stakeholders could be enhanced.

Especially Kukës and Diber are some kind of “forgotten” and left behind in Albanian tourism development and development. Small-scale investments and support of social businesses can lay foundations for better socio-economic conditions for ecotourism development. Capacities for enhanced monitoring, managing and maintaining of the Natural Park are in need of support, as well.

Active involvement of women and the younger generation is needed to encourage building and strengthening future human resources for the tourism sector. Existing tour guides would benefit from additional trainings with a particular focus on knowledge on biodiversity and the special demands of ecotourists.

The new Tourist Information Centre in Diber is in need of quality promotional material and particularly of biodiversity assets related information. In Kukës, a tourist information centre should be established, which then could closely cooperate with Diber. The Tourist Information Centre in Shishtavec/Kukës should be equipped with promotional and information material and not reduced to its current use as a café. A Natural Park Office should be set up in order to take care about nature conservation and manage the benefits from ecotourism revenues as well as to

provide for monitoring and surveillance. Here for, the involvement of LAGs, mountain clubs and local stakeholders will be needed and reducing burden on a structure.

There are ambitious NGOs<sup>54</sup> with future plans for the region and cross-border cooperation. In addition, there are a few guides and hosts in Korabi region and in Arras, near Lura National Park with ideas on how to improve touristic services and offers in Diber and Albania. More local champions could be possibly found.

## 4.2 Kosovo

The gap between quality of legal frameworks and their implementation needs to be closed through a stronger capacity-building effort and increased financial and human support for management and law enforcement of the Directorate for Sharri National Park. Training of staff on community-based collaboration and working with locals will enhance a better understanding and appreciation of natural values and respective regulations.

Prizren should serve as the gateway to the NP and promote a wider tourism product beyond the city boundaries. The touristic offer needs to be diversified and better be promoted. Tourism providers should identify, develop and promote diversified nature-based activities besides hiking to increase attraction and enlarge income basis for various types of tourists. Development of a “recycling-village”<sup>55</sup> in Sharri region could be used as an entry point for Sharri National Park and serve as an information point for tourists and locals. In addition, it could improve economic situation of an increasingly abandoned village and possibly reduce further migration.

The commitment of Sharri regions’ municipalities concerning the public funding of tourism information centres would need to be increased considerably in order to allow for a minimum of development and standards. Further, raising awareness among politicians and locals about the benefits but also investments and framework conditions of well-designed ecotourism would be needed. This could limit future rather uncontrolled developments in the NP jeopardizing conservation objectives of the NP by exceeding tourism numbers without sustainable business plan for tourism (Prevalle/Brezovica).

Some ambitious private actors in the Sharri region have already a lot of useful future plans and ideas for developing ecotourism. All of them are well networked with other stakeholders in Albania and Macedonia.

## 4.3 Macedonia

Improved cooperation between the various actors in the Sharr Planina region will consolidate and harmonize information on its status and future<sup>56</sup>. Particular important is the cooperation with the National Tourism Agency, which has a considerable budget and needs further education about benefits and importance of ecotourism.

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<sup>54</sup> PPNEA and Ride Albania for instance

<sup>55</sup> the idea comes from a project proposal of the tourism office staff in Peja. Abandoned villages may be revitalized by recycling products, educating visitors and selling the recycled products.

<sup>56</sup> see Chapter on tourism in Macedonia

Small financial investments, such as an off-road vehicle for the mountaineering clubs, could improve rapidly cross-border networking as obstacles often relate to financial and temporal efforts needed to reach the respective regions.

Once the legal framework for the proposed PA will be clarified (possibly in 2018), new actors for park management and monitoring need to be involved in ecotourism planning from the very beginning. The high level of appreciation and acceptance towards the PA could be regarded as a starting point for promising community-based ecotourism development.

Touristic infrastructure including tourism information centres, public transport from Skopje to the Park, access to maps, trained guides and the management of waste, water and energy would then need to be established.

## 4.5 For development partners

### Quality before Quantity and Long-term thinking essential

The success and quality assessment of so-called “ecotourism” projects cannot be pitted against the quantity of **brochures produced or trails marked**. What makes an ecotourism project or investment ultimately successful by definition is the long-term impact on the return to and benefit for conservation and sustainable use of nature and protected landscapes. It should be evident that any engagement in ecotourism activities requires a proper impact assessment beforehand despite deficiencies with reliable data on the state of biodiversity. Reactivating and encouraging the LAGs in ecotourism is considered essential for sustainable results.

**The success story of the broader region is the “Peaks of the Balkan”**. It benefitted considerably from the focus on hiking tourism and performs generally still well at the moment despite the webpage being closed. It is suggested, that the TEM-region should use this model as a starting point and lesson learned but not as an approach to be simply copied. A clear distinction to other ecotourism areas would be required (“branding”) as there are a number of regional and international competitors in the field of adventure-based “eco” tourism. A focus on the uniqueness of ethnic and natural diversity of the TEM area needs to be developed and promoted and this is not possible in a very short period of time and requires joint consultations and thinking.

During the research and field visit, some ideas were articulated. All of them have the potential to produce mutual benefits for the well-being of people, natural conservation and the experience of ecotourists. Touristic products related to ethnobiology, like Slow Food or participative farm stays for instance (Pieroni 2013/2014/2017) are of manifold benefit: the personal ties of the local population to their natural environment and culture can be encouraged, while visitors can satisfy their desire for authentic education. Photography could serve as an instrument to value and illustrate beauty/asset of natural environment. In this field, workshops could bring locals and tourists together and contribute to a better monitoring of nature parks. PPNEA has already good experience with similar approaches. A combination of agriculture and tourism (agro tourism or touristic farms) could bridge between local society and biodiversity.

### **Inclusive approach working with stakeholders at all levels, particularly in project development phase**

Be transparent about expectations, objectives and budget, so that people feel included and appreciated. Former top-down projects are part of the reason, why engagement and knowledge got lost. In order to ensure long-term sustainable impacts, stakeholders must be integrated even in the idea finding phase. Ecotourism requires proactiveness and innovative people.

### **Make use of existent (human) capacities and information**

The existing limited information material for the TEM-region<sup>57</sup> should be expanded, improved and inclusive of information on locally available biodiversity features. This material needs to be professionally produced, technically verified and interestingly presented before disseminated in tourism centres and in the internet, as well as among suppliers of touristic offers.

Infrastructure including mobility offers has to be further developed in the TEM region as a basic requirement for any future touristic development.

### **Promote best practice examples**

The new concept of ecotourism requires training, background information and the promotion of locally available examples and success stories. Sharing experiences and good practices from individuals serving as pioneers and role models for ecotourism need to be promoted in order to encourage other people to get involved, become more proactive, adopt such concepts and develop other innovative ideas.

### **Focus on vulnerable target groups**

Focus on **younger generations, women and ethnical minorities** as they belong to the most vulnerable groups in terms of unemployment or migration. Appreciating their knowledge and interest related to values and traditions and the use of natural resources, could provide great potential for further ecotourism development. Ensuring the **participation of women** in consultations on agricultural development alternatives, promotion and development of local businesses based on local products (handicrafts, food processing etc.). Typical products of the region are usually very attractive to ecotourists and should be developed and adequately promoted trans-regionally.

### **Broaden horizon about complex spheres of ecotourism**

The complexity of ecotourism requires a certain standard of knowledge about the different spheres effected by ecotourism (society, ecology, economy) and the many-sided possibilities for product development. All stakeholder involved need to be put at the same level of information and understand the concept of ecotourism, particularly the locals. The organization of local trainings and workshops with a focus on the value of biodiversity assets, needs for adequate conservation and sustainable use as well as the costs and benefits of ecotourism would create a win-win situation. In the TEM region workshops were supported on the following topics: Tourist Information Centre Training, Tour Guide Training, Ranger Training, and Tourism

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<sup>57</sup> There is no material, which covers the TEM-region as a whole, the SWG RDD information material Sharr region, but lacks information about Korab-Koritnik



Service/Accommodation Training. It is recommended to tailor and make accessible those workshops for vulnerable target groups and identify tangible benefits for them. A special need will be to encourage the municipalities to develop a strategy and plan to invest in nature protection and touristic infrastructure.

### **Social entrepreneurship and small-scale investments**

Development partners should support on small-scale investments and projects and support people to people actions including access to micro-financing. Social entrepreneurship ensures direct socio-economical contributions and fosters multiplying effects. In the end, this is essential to ensure that ecotourism revenues benefit the local population and nature.

## **4.6 For other stakeholders**

### **Cooperate for better efficiency and impact**

Involve the government at all stages as they are crucial for political support and spatial planning as well as framework condition including financing and monitoring and surveillance.

### **Ensure products and findings to be shared on all levels**

Expertise often stays at isolated or national levels and does not come back to local level or provides direct benefit to local processes and consultations. Therefore, communication channels have to be established, which ensure that locals have access to major information needs, participate in decision-making processes to the extent possible and are enabled to understand issues and challenges. The approach of interpretation can make complex coherences easy to understand.

### **Establish a (innovative) trans-boundary common vision**

Focus on regional unique selling points, avoid replications from similar regions (Albanian Alps or Peja). Make use of available experience in marketing and promotion but try to create and enforce an individual vision for the cross-border region.

### **Networks**

A more formalized cross-border network of local stakeholders would be beneficial needed. But requires time and financial resources for transportation and over-night stays. Finding ways to facilitate regular meetings, which include all necessary stakeholders with a special focus on women participation, is seen as essential. In order to strengthen a “common vision” for the future, marketing and branding strategies for rural products and regional tourism offers in the TEM-Area including local schools and younger generation should be developed. The TEM-Region could serve as a unique destination brand in the future. Therefore, a Unique Selling Point and a common vision for the TEM region in all three countries need to be defined in a participatory bottom-up approach involving all involved sectors and interest groups and tourism experts.

### **Cooperation with respective universities**

Mandatory internships or compulsory project work could create win-win situations. Students could gain hands-on experience and stakeholders could benefit from additional human resources, modern expertise and idea development.

### **Ecotourism workshops**

Considering the different stages of development, start to tackle the **common weaknesses: Gender and environmental awareness**. By actively addressing women and their environmental knowledge for future work in tourism services both issues can be addressed through empowerment workshops. A focus should be on target group definition to increase the awareness of local actors regarding motives and behavioural traits. In doing so one should represent the special needs of an ecotourist, e.g. to avoid construction projects (design, material) that do not meet the expectations of ecotourists.

### **Mutual learning and education**

Inclusive ecotourist offers can have beneficial, educating effects for locals, nature and visitors. Bird-watching or photography trails can contribute to better park monitoring; farm stays can help small farmers to improve revenues through short-chains and organic farming and **empowering women** in traditional handicrafts could make them economically more independent. On the other hand, ecotourists satisfy their desire for authentic and educative activities.

### **Diversify ecotourist products and offer**

Selling organic food, offer slow food cafes and handmade products in villages or touristic hotspots could be another diversification but farmers and producers would then need to be taught more including in ecotourism-friendly packaging and quality. Put product development and promotional material as a second priority; **rather enforce product diversification for respective target groups** (for families, Diaspora, elderly).

### **Establishment, support and networking of Tourism Information Centres**

Encourage municipalities to set-up and run small information centres and coach the employees or students/young locals for ecotourism expertise, social media and internet promotion. Cooperation between tourism faculties and tourism schools with tourism providers and promoters should be strengthened as it generates benefits for the promotion for each region. There should be a close cooperation between at least three tourism centres, one for each region, but in the best case this network grows with private tours operators and tourism businesses.

## 5. Conclusion

The recommendations provided shall neither depreciate the efforts done in the region but clearly urges to be **sensitive about ecotourism projects**. As stated in the theoretical part, ecotourism is a complex and interrelated field whose proper implementation requires an **extreme professional management**. The information provided in this paper shall serve as a first entry point and quick assessment of the status-quo aiming to facilitate targeting of specific issues. The thin line between beneficial and harmful touristic interaction in nature requires attention.

With regard to the initial research question on the potential of ecotourism development for the TEM region, this paper made clear: Due to the **great natural and cultural potential and biodiversity assets**, tourism in the TEM area will develop further but the question is in **which direction, how fast and at what price?** The second question regarding the different stages of development has been analysed in the third chapter.

The detailed findings on ecology, economy and tourism in the TEM cross-border area of Albania, Macedonia and Kosovo, revealed the importance of considering regional differences in any future project. The ethical, cultural and natural manifoldness of the study area is seen as an opportunity and challenge at the same time.

The last question raised in the beginning was: "Could ecotourism contribute in the short or long term to biodiversity conservation targets of the protected areas and to the well-being of the people living there?" A final answer to this question is beyond the capabilities of this paper. It remains to be seen, if the foundations for a successful development of ecotourism will be established and if it becomes **more than a temporary priority** to the respective politicians and stakeholders. To that end, **long-term thinking** on all levels of development planning is crucial if you take the idea of ecotourism seriously.

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<http://www.envsec.org/publications/Feasibility%20study%20on%20establishing%20a%20trans-boundary%20protected%20area.%20Sharr-Sar%20Planina-Korab-Desat-Deshat.pdf>.

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## Annex

### 1) Schedule Meetings Albania

Time	Meet with	Project	Position
06.09.17	Mr. Ismail Beka	SFF Tourism	National Coordinator
06.09.17	Mrs. Shpresa Smajli	CABRA	Project Coordinator
12.09.17	Mrs. Alkida Prodani	CSBL	National Coordinator
12.09.17	Mr. Luan Dervishej	CABRA	Senior Expert
13.09.17	Mrs. Valbona Koci and Dhurata Gazulli	Coastal Management	National Coordinator
21.09.17	Mr. Elton Orozi	Ministry of Tourism	
26.09.17	Mr. Eduard Cani	REC	Project Manager
26.09.17	Mr. Aleksander Trajce, Bledar Hoxha	PPNEA (NGO)	
26.09.17	Mr. Abdulla Diku	Diava Consulting	
26.09.17	Mrs. Arianna Briganti	CHwB (NGO)	Program Manager
27.09.17	Mr. Roland Cela	SARED	
27.09.17	MRs Matilda Naço	ATA	Director Executive
29.09.17	Mrs. Artenisa Peçulaj	NaturaAL/2000	
29.09.17	Mrs. Eltjana Shkreli	Go2Albania (NGO)	Executive director
02.10.17	Mr. Sadetin Limani, Mr. Jetnor Haxhij	Regional Development Agency 2 (RDA 2)	Director
02.10.17	Mr. Ralf Peveling	CABRA/ CSBL	Team leader
02.10.17	Mr. Erald Qordja	ProSEED Programme + SORI	Social Development Expert
09.10.17	Mr. Goran Gugic	INCA	

## 2) Meetings in Kukes and Diber

Ministry of Economic Development, Tourism, Trade and Entrepreneurship	Blerta Rrumbullaku
NTO National Tourism Organisation	Olta Lame
Regional Protected Area Kukes	Besnik Hallaci
Regional Protected Area Diber	Bekim Qose
Municipality of Kukes	Dilaman Nela
Municipality of Peshkopi	Zamira Gjeleshi
SARED Kukes	Dritan Tahiraj
SARED Diber	Dali Horeshka
<b>Mountains tourism Associations - actors</b>	
Ride Albania MB	Tobi Gessler
Tour Guide	Grehans Uka
Guesthouse	Vladimir Marku
Hotel	Haxhi Hima Radomir

### 3) Schedule Meetings Kosovo

Time	Meeting with	Project	Position
16.10.17	Baki Hoti	Tourism Association "KATA"	Head of association
16.10.17	Lumturije Geci, Hysen Sogojeva	Ministry of Trade and Industry	Tourism division
17.10.17	Mustafe Kastrati	COSIRA	Project Coordinator
19.10.17	Nail Kryeziu, Bekim Bytyqi	National Park Sharri	
19.10.17	Flaka Bytyqi	Tourist Information Prizren	
19.10.17	Bekim Bytyqi	Sharri Eco Tour	
24.10.17	Nexhmedin Ramadani	NGO "Finch"	Director
24.10.17	Nderim Bytyki	NGO Regional Development Agency	Director
01.11.17	Dr. Fatos Ukaj	Faculty of Business	Professor
01.11.17	Prof. Ass. Dr. Adem Dreshaj	Faculty of Tourism	Decan
01.11.17	Virtyt Morina	Tourist Information Center Peje	Director
01.11.17	Burim M. Lleshi	DMO West Kosovo	Director
07.11.17	Daniel Bogner	SIDA	Expert
16.11.17	Haxhi Seferqai	Tourism and sustainable Development	Director
16.11.17	Medisa Sagdati	Tourism Association Region South	

#### 4) Schedule Meetings Macedonia

Time	Meet with	Project	Position
28.09.17	Mrs. Anica Palazzo	LEIWW	Country Adviser
09.11.17	Zoran Nikolovski	Agency for Promotion and support of tourism	Head of Department
09.11.17	Frosina Pandurska - Dramikjanin	Macedonian Ecological Society	Project Coordinator
10.11.17	Sreten Koceski	Capacity Development Agency (Member of Friends of Sharri)	
10.11.17	Jovan Bozinoski	Ljuboten Mountain Club	

#### 5) Albania Overview Sources of Information

Region/ Topic	Ecology	Economy	Tourism
<b>Albania</b>	<p><b>Albania's Biodiversity and Protected Areas. An Executive Summary</b> (UNDP, Ministry of Environment 2016)</p> <p><b>Beech Forests Along the Green Belt Albania</b> (EuroNatur, PPNEA: 12f. (best practice small grant projects education)</p> <p><b>Scientific Research on Ethnobiology, Wild Food and Medical Plant Knowledge by Andrea Pieroni et al. 2014-2017</b> (Pieroni 2014.1, 2014.2, 2017)</p>	<p><b>Regional Statistical Yearbook 2012-2016</b> (INSTAT Albania 2017)</p> <p><b>Albania 2016 Report</b> (European Commission 2016.1)</p>	<p><b>Tourism Strategy Albania 2012-2017</b></p> <p><b>A Proposal Building on Albania's Efforts to Create Sustainable Travel and Tourism Industry</b> (UNWTO/Ecole Hoteliere Lausanne 2012)</p> <p><b>Destination and Tour Offers 2017 National Tourism Agency</b>, Tourism Promotion Albania: Albania.al</p> <p><b>Travel &amp; Tourism. Economic Impact 2017</b> (WTTC 2017)</p>
<b>Diber</b>	<p><b>Protected Areas in the district of Dibra and Assessment of their Tourist</b> (Cena 2016:16f.)</p>	<p><b>Regional Statistical Yearbook 2012-2016</b> (INSTAT Albania 2017)</p> <p><b>Profile of Region 2</b> (Tirana, Durrresi, Dibra). ALBANIA (Regional Development Agency RDA 2 2017)</p>	<p><b>Welcome to the Korabi-Deshati Region. Touristic Offer by the Korabi-Deshati Region</b> (Deshati Local Action Group LAG 2013)</p> <p><b>Strategy of Tourism Development in the Deshati Mountain Range Region Diber 2014-2019</b> (Deshati LAG 2014)</p>

			<p><b>Protected Areas in the district of Dibra and Assessment of their Tourist</b> (<i>Cena 2016:19f.</i>)</p> <p><b>Regional Statistical Yearbook 2012-2016</b> (<i>INSTAT Albania 2017</i>)</p>
<b>Kukes</b>	<p><b>Program For Development of the Kukes Functional Area</b> (<i>EuroPartners Development Team/DLDP 2015: 15f.</i>)</p> <p><b>Territorial Development Strategy of Kukes Municipality 2015</b> (<i>Decentralisation and Local Development Programme DLDP 2015: 2,3, 6f.</i>)</p> <p><b>Regional Statistical Yearbook 2012-2016</b> (<i>INSTAT Albania 2017</i>)</p>	<p><b>Kukes Region Tourism and Environment Promotion - KRTEP</b> (<i>UNDP 2008</i>)</p> <p><b>Program For Development of the Kukes Functional Area : In Depth Analysis of the Functional Area's Economy: Tourism Sektor</b> (<i>EuroPartners Development Team/DLDP 2014-2015: 33 ff.</i>)</p> <p><b>Territorial Development Strategy of Kukes Municipality 2015</b> (<i>Decentralisation and Local Development Programme DLDP 2015: 3, 5</i>)</p> <p><b>Regional Statistical Yearbook 2012-2016</b> (<i>INSTAT Albania 2017</i>)</p>	
<b>Korab-Koritnik NP</b>	<b>Korab-Koritnik Management Plan</b> (2014)		<p><b>Part of Management Plan</b></p> <p><b>Four Days in Korab-Koritnik Experience Report by Artenisa Peculaj</b> (<i>NaturAL 2017</i>)</p>

## 6) Kosovo Overview Sources of Information

Region/ Topic	Ecology	Economy	Tourism
<b>Kosovo general</b>	<p><b>Strategy and Action Plan for Biodiversity 2011-2020:</b> <a href="http://mmph-rks.org/repository/docs/SAPB_2011-20_Anglisht_337400.pdf">http://mmph-rks.org/repository/docs/SAPB_2011-20_Anglisht_337400.pdf</a></p> <p><b>National Forest Roads Master-Plan, National Sustainable Wildlife and Hunting Management Strategy 2013-2023, Communication Strategy Guideline, National Plan</b></p>	<p><b>Sharra Region. The undiscovered gem of the Balkans</b> (<i>SWG/RDD 2014</i>)</p> <p><b>Kosovo* 2016 Report</b> (<i>European Commission 2016.2</i>)</p> <p><b>Medium Term Expenditures Framework 2018-2020</b> (<i>Ministry of Finance Kosovo 2017</i>)</p> <p><b>Annual Survey on Labor Force</b> (<i>Kosovo Agency of Statistics 2016</i>)</p>	<p><b>Strategy for Environment Protection 2013-2022: pp. 46 f. tourism:</b> <a href="http://mmph-rks.org/repository/docs/Strategy_for_Environment_Proetection_2013-2022_English_language_62392.pdf">http://mmph-rks.org/repository/docs/Strategy_for_Environment_Proetection_2013-2022_English_language_62392.pdf</a></p> <p><b>Strategy and Action Plan for Biodiversity (2011-2020):</b> <a href="http://mmph-rks.org/repository/docs/SAPB_2011-20_Anglisht_337400.pdf">http://mmph-rks.org/repository/docs/SAPB_2011-20_Anglisht_337400.pdf</a></p>

	<p><b>for the Forest Fires Management in Kosovo</b> (<i>Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Rural Development 2012</i>)</p> <p><b>Strategy for Environment Protection 2013-2022</b> <i>http://mmp-h-rks.org/repository/docs/Strategy_for_Environment_Protection_2013-2022_English_language_62392.pdf</i></p> <p><b>Red Book of Vascular Flora of the Republic of Kosovo</b> (2013)</p> <p><b>Overview of Nature Protection Process in Kosovo</b> (<i>Veselaj/Mustafa 2015</i>)</p> <p><b>Annual Report on the Environment in Kosovo 2017</b> (<i>MESP/KEPA 2017</i>)</p>	<p><b>Kosovo Economic Reform Programme (ERP)</b> (<i>Government of Kosovo 2017 :59</i>)</p>	<p><b>Sharra Region. The undiscovered gem of the Balkans</b> (<i>SWG/RDD 2014</i>)</p> <p><b>Democracy for Development</b> (D4D Kosovo) 2017: <i>http://d4d-ks.org/en/mission-and-vision/</i></p> <p><b>Economic Statistics. Hotel Statistics Q2 -2017</b> (<i>KAS 2017: 10f</i>)</p> <p><b>Development of Tourism Through Effective Policies and Legislations. Identification of potential steps of tourism policy and legislation reform</b> (<i>D4D 2017</i>)</p> <p><b>Tourism Promotion Material Kosovo</b> (<i>Kosovo Investment and Enterprise Support Agency (KIESA)2017</i>)</p> <p><b>Report on promoting the establishment of Tourism Information Offices</b> (<i>Division of Tourism 2017</i>)</p>
<b>National Park "Sharri"</b>	<p><b>Red Book of Vascular Flora of the Republic of Kosovo</b> (2013)</p> <p><b>Management Plan Sharri National Park 2015-2024</b> (<i>UNDP 2015</i>)</p> <p><b>National Park "Sharri"</b> (<i>Directorate for Administration of National Park "Sharri"/ KEPA 2017</i>)</p>	<p><b>Regional Development Strategy for the Economic Region East 2010-2013</b> (<i>RDA East 2010</i>)</p> <p><b>Regional Development Strategy for the Economic Region South 2010-2013</b> (<i>RDA South 2010</i>)</p> <p><b>Sharriregion.com Information on Livestock Farming, Beekeeping, Minor Forest Produce, Culture, Tourism, Women in Business, Accommodation</b> (<i>FINCH 2017</i>)</p>	<p><b>Promotion Material of Sharr Cross Border Region by SWG</b> (GIZ) Kosovo: "Active" Stakeholder network through Sharr Mountain project (fare, meetings etc.): <i>http://seerural.org/sharra-brochure/http://sharra.seerural.org/category/p2p-events/</i></p> <p><b>Report on Promoting the Establishment of Tourism Information Offices. Division for Tourism.</b> (<i>Ministry of Trade and Industry 2017: 14</i>)</p> <p><b>Survey on the Possibilities of Tourism Development Potentials in Prizren and Dragash Territories - South Kosovo</b> (<i>Begolli/ Kastrati 2017</i>)</p>



## 7) Macedonia Overview Sources for Information

Region/ Topic	Ecology	Tourism
Macedonia	<p><b>Database for Designated Areas MK -NI008</b> (<i>MoEPP 2017</i>)</p> <p><b>Republic of Macedonia and Nature Protection</b> (<i>NCP 2017</i>)</p>	<p><b>Laws on Tourism: 1) Tourism Development Zones, 2) Manner and Procedure in the Organization of Informative Tours for Foreign tour Operators and Journalists to the Republic of Macedonia</b> (<i>Agency for Promotion and Support of Tourism 2017</i>)</p> <p><b>Tourism Promotion Material</b> (<i>Agency for Promotion and Support of Tourism 2017.1</i>)</p>
Shar Planina	<p><b>Information about Flora and Fauna</b> (<i>Mountaineering Society "Ljuboten" Tetovo 2017</i>)</p> <p><b>Natural Values of Sar Planina Mt.</b> (<i>MES 2010</i>)</p> <p><b>Friends of Shara - Experience and Lessons Learned</b> (<i>Friends of Shara 2017</i>)</p>	<p><b>Mountain Tourism, Tours, App with GPS Trails and information on biodiversity</b> (<i>Mountaineering Society and MES 2015</i>)</p> <p><b>Bela Vista Institute for Rural Regional Development</b> (<i>webpage: <a href="http://belavista.org.mk/">http://belavista.org.mk/</a></i>)</p>

## 8) Comparison of Municipalities in terms of Tourism Office Functioning

City (Municipality)	Functional / Non-functional	Organisation	Structure of working staff	Budget	Public / Private / PPP	Location	Main challenge
Pristina	No	-	-	-	-	-	-
Peja	Yes	Very good	Very good	Very good (Municipal budget)	Public (Municipality of Peja)	Very good	Insufficient working hours for visitors
Junik	Yes	Sufficient	Sufficient	Poor	PPP	Sufficient	Financing
Gjakova	Yes	Good	Sufficient	Sufficient	PPP	Sufficient	Financing
Prizren	Yes	Good	Poor	Poor	PPP	Good	Financing
Rahovec	No (Currently closed, possibility to reopen)	Good	Sufficient	Sufficient	PPP	Good	Financing
Gjilan	No (2 offices some time ago)	Poor	Poor	Poor	PPP	Very good	Financing, Organisation by Municipality
Novo Brdo	No (Closed time ago)	Poor	Poor	Poor	PPP	Good	Financing, Organisation by Municipality
Shterpece	No (Closed 2 years ago)	Poor	Poor	Poor	PPP	Very good	Financing, Organisation by Municipality
Mitrovica	No	-	-	-	-	-	-

Table: Comparison of municipalities in terms of Tourist Information Offices functioning

## 9) Tourism Division 2017

TAB 13. 2: NUMRI I VIZITOREVE DHE NETËT E QËNDRIMIT TË TYRE NË NIVEL REGJIONAL SIPAS VITEVE 2008-2016

ID. Regjionet	2008		2009		2010		2011		2012		2013		2014		2015		2016	
	Vizitor	Netë	Vizitor	Netë	Vizitor	Netë	Vizitor	Netë	Vizitor	Netë	Vizitor	Netë	Vizitor	Netë	Vizitor	Netë	Vizitor	Netë
1 Gjakovë	2 263	2 529	2 240	2 895	2 031	2 324	1 640	2 030	1 597	2 434	1 517	2 072	2 062	3 736	2 269	5 224	4 373	7 486
2 Gjilan	3 152	3 466	3 210	4 181	1 976	2 400	2 251	3 101	1 937	2 731	1 718	2 364	1 552	2 081	1 635	2 142	2 410	3 898
3 Mitrovicë	1 873	1 967	2 471	2 718	2 894	3 289	2 646	2 890	2 875	3 088	2 915	3 147	2 631	2 689	2 247	2 434	2 445	2 626
4 Pejë	4 924	5 423	8 288	10 680	8 337	9 677	6 633	7 170	7 593	11 184	6 630	9 597	11 534	18 751	21 707	33 857	24 110	32 927
5 Prizren	3 632	4 095	4 639	5 792	4 663	9 210	5 434	6 946	6 212	7 962	8 109	10 360	8 615	11 144	16 316	21 396	16 479	21 482
6 Prishtinë	27 076	50 198	57 569	92 245	49 172	83 694	46 636	80 620	68 537	102 846	68 687	102 323	77 167	114 489	89 050	130 269	76 543	120 305
7 Ferizaj	1 374	1 834	10 532	12 407	9 972	10 923	7 153	7 584	10 012	12 731	5 878	8 887	4 229	4 450	6 214	6 719	2 929	5 272
Gjithsej	44 294	69 512	88 949	130 918	79 045	121 517	72 393	110 341	98 763	142 976	95 454	138 750	107 790	157 340	139 438	202 041	129 289	193 996

## 10) Statistics Tourism Information Point Peja 2017

TOTAL NUMBER OF VISITORS													
	Jan	Feb	Mar	April	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	
International visitor	116	217	199	297	480	512	785	1041	849	473	572	149	
Local visitor	303	318	222	162	372	358	295	563	357	258	253	342	
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>419</b>	<b>535</b>	<b>421</b>	<b>459</b>	<b>852</b>	<b>870</b>	<b>1080</b>	<b>1604</b>	<b>1206</b>	<b>731</b>	<b>825</b>	<b>491</b>	
<b>Overall total</b>												<b>9.493</b>	

## 11) Tourist Arrivals, by statistical regions (Statistical Review 2016, Statistical Office Macedonia)

### T-15: Доаѓања на туристи, по статистички региони

#### T-15: Tourist arrivals, by statistical regions

2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	
<b>Вкупно / Total</b>					
647 568	663 633	701 794	735 650	816 067	<b>TOTAL</b>
12 064	15 867	17 196	20 667	24 308	Vardar Region
13 615	18 865	20 747	23 035	25 907	East Region
249 746	251 462	264 826	269 547	298 057	Southwest Region
108 555	106 978	109 982	124 707	133 328	Southeast Region
76 469	72 054	70 312	65 527	62 019	Pelagonia Region
29 153	29 884	30 823	29 143	30 200	Polog Region
3 803	4 446	5 584	6 937	8 125	Northeast Region
154 163	164 077	182 324	196 087	234 123	Skopje Region

## 12) Overview Stakeholder<sup>58</sup>

Albania Korab-Koritnik		Kosovo Sharr Mountain	Macedonia Sar Planina	TEM-Region
INCA		FINCH	MES	PPNEA
REC		<u>RDA South</u>	SWG	Natura2000
Go2ALB		SwissContact	CDI	Euronatur
NaturAL		ERA	Mountain Club Ljuboten	LEIWW (GIZ)
ATA		Associazione Trentino con Balcani	UNEP	
CHwB		<u>KIESA</u>	UNDP	
Ride Albania		Caritas	SFF (GIZ)	
<u>NAPA</u>		ASB	Friends of Sharr	
<u>RAPA</u>		KATA	Bela Vista Institute for Rural Regional Development	
SARED (GIZ)		Sharri EcoTours	<u>Agency for Promotion and Support of Tourism</u>	
Deshati Local Action Group (inactive)				
<b>Kukes</b>	<b>Diber</b>	Balkan Natural Adventures		
Association for Tourism Development	Dibra Touristic Association	COSIRA (GIZ)		
<u>RDA 1</u>	<u>RDA 2</u>	<u>Sharri National Park</u>		
Forestry Association Shishtavec		SIDA		
SoRi (GiZ)		<u>KEPA</u>		
		Tourism Association South		

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Underlined stakeholders belong to governmental institutions

### **13) List of Cooperation among Stakeholder**

SWG - LEIWW

SWG - Friends of Sharr

PPNEA - MES - FINCH

PPNEA - IUCN

Sharri EcoTours - Sharri National Park

Sharri EcoTours - Ride Albania

Sharri EcoTours - Slow Food Kosovo

Sharri EcoTours - Balkan Natural Adventure

Tourist Information Peja - Tourist Information Prizren

Tourist Information Peja - ViaDinarica - Peaks of the Balkan (Best Practice)

SIDA - Sharri National Park

INCA - NAPA - RAPA

INCA - CSBL

REC - INCA

NaturAL - NAPA - RAPA

Diava Consulting - CABRA (Best Practice)

FINCH - LAG

SwissContact - DMO west

Tourist Information Peja - Trentino con I Balcani

Deshati Local Action Group - EPA Cross border (2013)

#### 14) List of Scientific Research in TEM Region

<b>Name</b>	<b>Profession</b>	<b>Science in TEM Region</b>	<b>Contact Details</b>
<b>Pieroni, Andrea</b>	Italian Scientist/ Biologist	Research, publication of: - "Traditional medical plant knowledge among Albanians, Macedonians and Gorani in the Sharr Mountains" 2013, - "Ethnobotany and Biocultural Diversities in the Balkans. Perspectives on Sustainable Rural Development and Reconciliation" 2014, - "Local Knowledge on Plants and Domestic Remedies in the Mountain Villages of Peshkopia (Eastern Albania)" 2014, - "The disappearing wild food and medical plant knowledge in a few mountain villages of North-Eastern Albania" 2016, - "Traditional food uses of wild plants among the Gorani of South Kosovo" 2017	University of Gastronomic Sciences, Piazza Vittorio, Emanuele 9, 12060 Bra/Pollenzo, Italy, e-mail: a.pieroni@unisg.it, Tel.: +39 0172 458575
<b>Cianfagione, Kevin</b>	Italian Scientist/ Bioscientist	Research, Publication of: -"Local Knowledge on Plants and Domestic Remedies in the Mountain Villages of Peshkopia (Eastern Albania)" 2014	School of Biosciences and Veterinary Medicine, University of Camerino, Via Pontoni 5, Camerino (Macerata), I-62032, Italy
<b>Rexhepi, Besnik</b>	Macedonian Scientist/ Biologist	Research, Publication of: "Traditional medical plant knowledge among Albanians, Macedonians and Gorani in the Sharr Mountains" 2013	Department of Biology, State University of Tetovo, Illindenska, Tetovo, Republic of Macedonia
<b>Mustafa, Behxhet</b>	Kosovan Scientist/ Biologist	Research, Publication of: -"Traditional medical plant knowledge among Albanians, Macedonians and Gorani in the Sharr Mountains" 2013, -"Local Knowledge on Plants and Domestic Remedies in the Mountain Villages of Peshkopia (Eastern Albania)" 2014, - "Traditional food uses of wild plants among the Gorani of South Kosovo" 2017	Department of Biology, University of Pristina Mother Teresa, Pristina, Kosovo, e-mail: behxhetm@yahoo.com
<b>Nedelcheva, Anely</b>	Bulgarian Scientist/ Botanist	Research, Publication of: - "Local Knowledge on Plants and Domestic Remedies in the Mountain Villages of Peshkopia (Eastern Albania)" 2014	Department of Botany, University of Sofia, Blv. Dragan Tzankov, Sofia 1164, Bulgaria
<b>Rushidi-Rexhepi, Jehona</b>	Macedonian Scientist/ Biologist	Research in Traditional medical plant knowledge among Albanians, Macedonians and Kosovans	South-East European University, Ilindenska, Tetovo, Republic of Macedonia

<b>Quave, Cassandra L.</b>	USA Scientist on Human Health	Research, Publication of: -"Traditional medical plant knowledge among Albanians, Macedonians and Gorani in the Sharr Mountains" 2013, -"Local Knowledge on Plants and Domestic Remedies in the Mountain Villages of Peshkopia (Eastern Albania)" 2014, - "Ethnobotany and Biocultural Diversities in the Balkans" 2014, - "Traditional food uses of wild plants among the Gorani of South Kosovo" 2017	Center for the Study of Human Health, Emory University, 550 Asbury Circle, Candler Library 107E, Atlanta, GA, USA
<b>Scaltriti, Bruno</b>	Italian Scientist	Research, Publication of: - "Local Knowledge on Plants and Domestic Remedies in the Mountain Villages of Peshkopia (Eastern Albania)" 2014	University of Gastronomic Sciences, Piazza Vittorio, Emanuele 9, 12060 Bra/Pollenzo, Italy
<b>Soukand, Renata</b>	Estonian Scientist	Research, Publication of: -"The disappearing wild food and medical plant knowledge in a few mountain villages of North-Eastern Albania" 2016, - "Traditional food uses of wild plants among the Gorani of South Kosovo" 2017	Estonian Literary Museum, Tartu, Estonia
<b>Rexhepi, Ferat</b>	Kosovan Scientist/ Biologist	Co Author of "The Red Book of vascular Flora of the Republic of Kosovo" (2013)	University of Pristina, Faculty of Natural Sciences and Mathematics, Department Biology, 38000 Pristina, Kosovo
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