
**DEVELOPMENT OF THE TOURIST PRODUCTS IN
THE KORAB-KORITNIK AND ALBANIAN ALPS NATURAL PARKS
IN COOPERATION WITH LOCAL ACTORS AND NATIONAL TOUR OPERA-
TORS**

CONSULTANCY REPORT



Project:
**Sustainable use of natural resources for transboundary socioeconomic
development of protected areas in North Macedonia and
Albania (Korab-Sharra and Albanian Alps)**



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November 2024*

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1. Report summary

No	Interventions/Activities	Activities	Deliverables	Reference documents/ annexes
1	Initial Planning and Coordination:	Define project goals and objectives for the assignment to link tourism offer with market demand, engage stakeholders, conduct stakeholder mapping to identify key local stakeholders.	Comprehensive project plan with defined goals, objectives, and identified key stakeholders.	Report
2	Review Research and Analysis:	-Review and Analyze the situation product market trends and demand to align proposed products with current tourism interests -communicating online and meeting stakeholders during field trips - interview of TO national and international in Albania)	Product and Market analysis report detailing trends, demands, and alignment with proposed products	Report
3	Development of Tourist Products: Promotional channels/ Material Creation:	-communicating online and meeting stakeholders during field trips Brainstorm and generate ideas for new tourist products with thematic working groups. Develop guidelines and best practices for sustainability. Review and propose marketing strategy and brand identity steps and measures	Tourist product development plan including sustainability guidelines. Marketing and promotional strategy / proposals for steps and measures	Report
4	Capacity Building and Sustainability	Conduct training sessions (coaching during field trip and fam tours) for local stakeholders on product management and marketing in cooperation with CNVP advisors Presentation in workshop in Tirana and regional conference in Mavrovo	Training and workshop summaries focusing on product management and sustainable practices (combined with CNVP trainings).	Report Workshop agenda and Ppt presentations in annexes
5	Familiarization Planning Trip and Execution feedback	Plan and execute trips, including itineraries, logistics coordination, and stakeholder engagement. Conduct briefings and facilitate interactions for feedback.	Detailed itineraries, logistics arrangements, execution report, and participant feedback compilation.	Report Fam trip agenda and reports in annex
6	Recommendations and Evaluation	Monitor the implementation of products, prepare progress reports, and establish KPIs. Propose continuous improvement methodologies and present findings at a national event	Final recommendations report, established KPIs, and continuous improvement plan.	Final report

2. Initial Planning and Coordination: Define project goals and objectives for the assignment and the methodology

2.1 Sustainable tourism development priorities of the destination with relevance to product development, marketing and destination management

Based on core literature and best practices on tourism sustainable development criteria, including tourism in protected areas the following dimensions were the focus to define the priorities for developing tourism products in the project areas: planning, use of know-how, balanced objectives, prioritization of target groups, education and awareness of both tourists and tourism service suppliers, visitor management.

To fulfil these criteria the consultant work priorities at both analytical and the design of the plan included the following dimensions:

1. Condensed analysis based on solid know-how on sustainability and market trends, reviewing of all planning, analytical documents on the sustainable forms of tourism in Albania, the related territory, product development situation and destination management
2. establishment of the mechanisms and capacities for cooperation among actors for destination management,
3. evaluation of the needs and prioritisation of those products and target groups that contribute to competitiveness and sustainability
4. Prioritisation of capacity-building measures that will reflect and ensure education and awareness of both tourists and tourism service suppliers for sustainable tourism.

Thus, the consultant expertise delivery was delivered as a combination of the following elements

- Analysis
- Planning
- Networking
- Capacity building
- Organisational development

The 1st and 2nd steps were the preparation for planning, capacity building, networking, the 3rd step is organisation development, capacity building, networking, further planning, the 4th step is jointly practising of product development, marketing, networking, capacity-building and destination management.

2.2 Strategic considerations for sustainable tourism products for the Korab-Koritnik and Alps protected areas

To develop sustainable and nature-based tourism product in protected mountainous areas, the following principles and approaches were followed:

- focusing on the nature- based tourism activities aligned with sustainable tourism development principles and aligned with protected area tourism priority and permitted activities
- focusing on the tourism products that the project can add values in short and medium-term
- Considering that the tourism product development should take place within strategic tourism destination planning and stakeholder involvement
- Considering the market trends and demands for those products
- aligning the tourism product development with marketing and market communication

The tourism destination both at protected areas Korab-Koritnik and Alps as well at regional and local level destinations such as Diber and Kukes do not have any current tourism development plan with clear product development priorities. The Albanian Alps have a National Tourism Sectorial Plan, PKST Alpe developed by Albanian Development Fund.

Therefore, several documents such as the PKST Alpe, other studies for the respective territories, the management plans of the protected areas, national level strategic evaluations, own consultant research on the topics of nature and rural tourism for the mountainous areas the tourism offer communicated by the websites and brochures of the tourism offices in Dibra, Kukes, Shkoder were analysed and then fact-checked through interviews with tour operators and stakeholders in the area.

Hiking and adventure tourism are the core tourism activities along the protected areas with Peaks of Balkan cross border trails in Albanian Alps and High Scardus Trail along Diber-Kukes cross border area. Also, Theth and Valbona are getting more domestic tourists, the services are commercialized, and the food supply is more and more coming from the urban areas.

The core services along the above-mentioned trails are the guest houses offering accommodation and food, hiking guides and transport (mules, off-road cars etc).

The characteristic of this product is that the tourist activities are following the trails and those service points or villages along the trails. The food consumption is limited to direct food consumption by the tourists and not so much selling and other supply-chain integration of the community. The interpretation and the demonstration of nature and rural heritage is limited, although there is an interest of tourists the activities are ad-hock, spontaneous and they not clearly visible in the tourism offer.

After a strategic evaluation of the Diber-Kukes areas tourism destination, we can conclude nature and rural tourism products are more promising for the future.

While there is a market need and regional destination management need to expand the flows of hiking and adventure form Alps to Korab-Koritnik, there is another opportunity to market and differentiate the national tourism market new entrants' destinations of Diber and Kukes for nature and rural tourism, where especially rural tourism can add values and make destination differentiation.

Diber as well Shishtavec are renowned for own supply of rural agriculture products at the national level while there are also cultural and historical traditions referred to those areas. Also, the core selling proposition of Albanian tourism offer for the international market and the most demanded features of the Albanian tourism offer by the international visitors are the diversity of nature and culture offer and its authenticity, hospitality and traditions.

From the sustainable principles when selecting the products, the assignment focused on the core elements such as a planning approach that considers:

- *an up-to -date tourism knowledge and assessment of the situation,*
- *community benefits and its integration in tourism related activities and into the tourism supply chain,*
- *conservation of nature resources through awareness and education of both visitors and community*
- *management of the destinations, visitors flow,*
- *evaluation of market demands and trends for the nature tourism products.*

Nature and rural tourism activities which activates the interaction of the tourists with the rural community and their activities, raise their awareness and the education for the nature and rural values of the area, increase the opportunities for selling at the farmgate of agriculture products (especially to the domestic tourism market) thus integrate also those farmers that are tourism service providers into the tourism value chains, are fulfilling the sustainable development objectives.

The nature and culture tourists' segments starting from soft towards dedicated tourists' segments are the target market that fits to the criteria. Further contributions and interests in buying of the agriculture products from more mass oriented tourism segments are also to be considered.

The nature and rural activities are expressed as a core interest along the hiking and adventure in both set of surveys organised by CNVP and PKST Alpe with tourists in the respective Korab-Koritnik and Alps areas.

Also, from the tourism market intermediary demand point of view, the tour operators offering hiking trails stressed the needs for quality offer of accommodation, food transport expanding accommodation along the trails they are offering, especially in those areas/stations with limited accommodation and food supply (Caje, Grama, Rabdisht).

The special activity and niche tour operators focusing on a mix of nature and culture tourism offer addressed the needs for authentic experiences and activities, including more rural, culture and nature tourism product development that can demonstrate and interact with the local values and communities with tourists.

The tour operators offering culture national-wide tours considered that more appealing tourism offer is needed from the Diber -Kukes areas to market and sell to their target market. They consider that the attractiveness can be increased if the offer has more elements such as cross-border with Macedonia or Kosovo, cross-regional tours (i.e Diber-Kukes), more compelling authentic experiences. Here it is clear that re-packaging of the tourism offers, integration of more elements, differentiation with own authentic local tourism resources are needed.

As summary,

- *the tourism product development activities of nature and rural tourism that are focused into the demonstration and interactions of the tourists with the local values and communities are those activities that can add values and that CNVP can undertake in short and medium-term.*
- *They can fit to the sustainable development criteria, involvement of communities into tourism offers benefits, which are in line with tourism product strategic positioning of the area and can attract the relevant target group both international and domestic market.*
- *Especially, the rural tourism activities are those activities that the project can start to support in the short-term and this consultancy assignment was focused to identify villages and farmers that can develop such product in line with the regional and local tourism development offer and market positioning.*

3. Tourism situation analysis in Korab-Koritnik –destination tourism offers and products, key destinations, key actors of the tourism value-chain

Protected areas, with their generally high biodiversity (large number of special habitats and species) and their characteristic landscapes, as well their quite high cultural heritage relevance, are bound to help the development of eco-tourism and a sustainable local development (Alpine Convention, 2013).

3.1 Sustainable development of tourism in mountainous areas ¹

Tourism is an economic activity that fosters job creation and local development: it is based on promoting and valorising natural, historical, cultural and social resources. For many areas, it is one of the platforms, sometimes the only available one, allowing people to “live and work in one’s own region”.

Consequently, the sustainable development of this sector is a major challenge in terms of achieving durability without the risk of modifying underlying resources. Mobility and its impact on climate change, the conservation of natural resources (water, land, fragile environments etc.), minimising pollution and waste, achieving well balanced spatiotemporal movements and respect for social and cultural traditions are only few of the challenges that need to be met, regardless of the location (developed countries or developing countries) or the type of tourism (mass or niche) and taking into consideration indicators such as carrying capacity and corresponding thresholds of irreversibility.

The challenges affect all stakeholders (tour operators, carriers, tourism developers and hospitality operators, restaurant owners, shopkeepers, tour managers, planners, providers and managers of tourism products, regional players and elected representatives, and obviously tourists too) and territories as well as their practices: hospitality, lodging, transport. their sectors are also affected, particularly spatial planning, transport, energy, agriculture, environment, the employment market and consumer lifestyles.

The development of sustainable tourism therefore encompasses the whole range of tourist activities and stakeholders, from the offer of tourism-products by tourism “service providers” to tourism demand by “consumers”. The interesting thing about this approach is that it allocates responsibility to all the actors and activities of a given territory. Even though States and regions make serious efforts to improve the sustainability of Alpine tourism offers, consumer behaviour is often an additional key element to reduce the tourism related negative impacts on the Alps. This is not to be understood as a specific challenge for Alpine tourism, since the adoption of more sustainable lifestyles and consumer patterns is an issue for the whole European society.

Consumers have a significant responsibility; through their demand they can influence the success and ongoing adaptation of what is supplied to them.

Different forms of sustainable tourism

It is important to underline that sustainable development of tourism in general is not to be confused with related forms of tourism. Some approaches are mentioned below.

- **“Agro-tourism”** Agricultural tourism (Agritourism, more often known as farm tourism, is a segment of rural tourism) is a type of tourism closely connected to agriculture, farms and countryside. It brings tourists closer to nature and involves them in the activities connected with nature conservation and landscape management. Tourists participate in the activities and lifestyles of local people and can get acquainted with animals, plants cultivation and food production. Tourists bring direct income to farmers and allow them to diversify their economic activities. Another

¹ Alpine Convention, 2013

positive effect is that farm tourism builds on existing tourism infrastructures and helps to distribute tourism more evenly in rural areas.

- **“Eco-tourism” or “green tourism”** is tourism in a natural environment, and includes environmental and resource conservation elements, education elements and local socio-economic benefits (used mainly in the context of tourism in the developing countries).

The term “rural tourism” is used for tourism in a rural setting, agrotourism for instance, and it is occasionally assimilated with green tourism, without however necessarily having the same sustainability objectives.

- **“Ethical tourism” or “responsible tourism”** is more a moral objective that can be applied to all the forms of tourism listed above, rather than being a specific form of tourism. Its purpose is to apply the objectives of the “Global code of ethics for tourism”, adopted by the UNWT in 1999: tolerance, human rights and freedoms, respect for diversity in ethnic backgrounds, customs and religion, education and training. It applies the Cape Town Declaration on Responsible Tourism of 2002 too.

- **“Fair tourism”**, like the label “fair trade”, provides a redistribution of part of the tourism revenues to the local communities – it is mainly “green tourism”, but it can also be rural or urban. It attempts to reconcile tourism interests with respect for the local population (their cultures and lifestyles). This form of tourism is frequently adopted in less advanced countries, generally in southern regions.

- **“Geotourism”**, like eco-tourism, promotes environmental and resource conservation based on geological specificities, but it also comprises a whole concept of space, like history, culture, landscape, cuisine, arts, local flora and fauna, all characteristics that contribute to a “sense of place”.

- **“Social tourism”** is a form of tourism targeting customers with specific needs: families, young people, pensioners, people with handicaps, and it normally takes place in specific centres for groups (holiday centres, outdoor camps, holiday villages etc.), not to be confused with outdoor or camping hospitality facilities. Its objectives are the right to holidays and the provision of accessible tourism for all.

- **“Solidarity tourism”** is directly related to local socioeconomic projects. Tourists and tour operators can participate, either directly or indirectly, to development initiatives or projects: reclamation workshops, development of facilities or equipment, well digging, social or cultural project, and so on. Youth work-camps usually come under this heading.

Referring to the European Alps, The Alpine convention report on tourism (Alpine Convention, 2013) described the geographical characteristics of the mountain areas: “the height of the mountains and the thereby linked typography and climate of an area lead to very different options for tourism development. There are immense valleys in the high mountains surrounded by chains of summits and great altitude; the great diversity offers countless tourist options especially in the field of winter sports, hiking and climbing as well as for all kind of activities linked to mountain experiences. In the contrary, many Alpine areas are at the foothills of the higher mountains with an open cultural landscape and a less extreme climate. Many lakes and Alpine rivers offer options for water-based leisure activities. Larger villages and Alpine cities are often located in the valley bottoms of rivers or along lakes at the foothills.”

“Foothill summer destinations, Health destinations, Nature experience oriented destinations, Alpine cities and villages, all-season inner mountain destinations, Ski resorts, All season tourism in the mountains at the edge of the Alps are basic types describing core elements of typical Alpine tourism destinations... The core reason for the success of the Alps as one of the leading destinations in the world tourism market... is the enormous diversity of regional resources and thereby also the cultural heritage of the Alpine region”.

3.2 Sustainable tourism in Albanian Mountains

Albanian Alps area possess a variety of landscape and biodiversity with several typologies catering to the needs of different tourism segments, offering possibilities for the development of rural tourism, ecotourism and nature base activities (climbing, hiking, study tours, river rafting, mountain biking, fishing, trekking, etc.) The tourism villages have different profiles, and their promotion and development can be focused based on different strengths related to landscape, nature or rural offer. Integration of agrotourism, gastronomic tourism, experiential tourism and direct marketing of local products can maximize the benefit for community (selling and promotion) and also the quality of tourism experience.²

The Vision for tourism development in Albanian Alps defined in PKST Alps 2017³, address the sustainable tourism priorities and recognised the Alps diversity of resources including the hierarchy of community localities (from the hubs, cities at the entry gate to Alps, to intermediary centers within Alps, nucleus localities (which combine high environmental values with traditional architectural features that should be preserved (i.e Theth, Lëpushe)). These sites are located in the heart of protected natural areas that will target specific segments to accommodate a limited volume of tourists to preserve and support the balance between the environment and traditional settlements), up to the 4th category, the natural locations (includes those localities with a completely natural character, where the aim is to promote this type of tourism, preserve natural features and have zero or minimal impact on infrastructure. These localities are mainly located in areas of high natural value, where tourist access will be limited and controlled):

"In 2031, the Albanian Alps will be a region that manifests the balance between man and nature, that preserves environmental values and promotes identity, cultural and historical heritage, by developing a sustainable tourism that responds to the market and socio-economic needs, based on the hierarchy of specialized centres that function as an organic network".

The nature tourism offer is part of the regional tourism destination. Therefore, when studying for tourism product development in the protected areas of Alps or Korab-Koritnik, we have to take into consideration that the tourism product and destination tourism management is taking place within the protected areas as well as in nearby regions/destinations, and the flux of tourists and tourism activities related with a specific destination or village are interlinked within the wider area tourism destination.

Therefore, in this study we have focused at both the protected area and nearby destinations where the protected areas are located and the tourism product, activities and marketing are followed along this continuum.

Based on the alternatives provided in Tors for selection of 3 locations, the main focus was given to Dibër- Kukes destinations and the related tourism product development along Korab-Koritnik and in addition the opportunities for diversification of nature tourism in Theth.

² An integrated approach for conservation and sustainable use of agrobiodiversity- A case study from CABRA GIZ project in Albania (L.Dervishej, 2018)

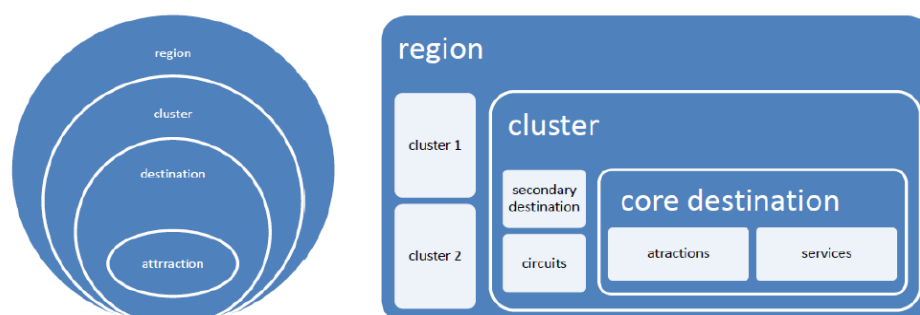
³ FSHZH (2017) Plani Kombëtar Sektorial i Turizmit Rajoni i Alpeve. Strategjia Sektoriale, miratuar me vendim të KKT nr.1 date 09.12.2017

3.3 Tourism development- destinations and products in Korab-Koritnik and Albanian Alps-Theth



The map with the boundaries of the Korab-Koritnik Protected Area

Graphic 4: Graphical presentation of relationships among attractions, destinations and regions



The hierarchy of tourism destinations ⁴

Identified and contacted community members

	Location	Persons/tourism actors
1	Dibra	Zyra e turizmit
2		Kulla Hupi, Bujqize
3		bujtina Sabriu, Rabdisht
4		Labinot Murrja, guide lokale dhe camping
5		Buterfly
6		Vladimir Marku, guide lokale
7		Kamping Erebara stone, Erebare
8		Bletari Fitim Feta, Zagrad
9		Stani i Xhavitit, Zagrad
10		Grama lake camping, Korab
11		Hotel restorant Radomire
12		Guest house Korabi, Radomire
13		Kamping Shumbat
13		Hamit Salkurti, CNVP
14	Kukesi	Besmir Halilaj, zyra e turizmit
15		Rifat Demaliaj, guide lokale
16		Zgara Bushtrice, restorant e guest house
17		Jelen Hoxha, fermer ne Shishtavec
18	Shkoder	Roza Rupa, Nord Albania agjensi turistike lokale
19		Ded Nika, agroturizem
20		Vila Gjecaj, agroturizem
21		Aleksander Plepi, Shale, blegtor, stan
22		Zyra e turizmit, Bashkia Shkoder

⁴

https://www.researchgate.net/publication/338396897_Draft_national_tourism_strategy_for_Albania_2014-2020

Dibra tourism offer

- Tourism end-markets for Dibra are: Thermal spa health tourists, Nature international tourists.
- Nature tourism is dominated by hiking tourists, following the High Scardus Trails.
- Some donor projects during the last years such as GIZ through SRD and cross-border projects and USAID through ALCF have supported the development of nature and hiking tourism in Dibra, including establishing the tourism information office, developing, marking and marketing the hiking trails with high Scardus Trail as cross-border product, awarded with a prize by The British Travel Guild in 2022, training local guides, supporting the guest houses, supporting the promotion of the destination with promotion materials and websites⁵ (<https://visitdiber.com/>, <https://www.high-scardus-trail.com/en/>)
- The villages Rabdisht, Stanet e hinokës, Grame, Radomirë are actually playing the role of active nature tourism destinations with few guest houses or shepherd huts.

Hiking trails segments established and promoted via high Scardus trail :

1. Upper Kërçishti – Velivari Mountain with a length of 16,028 km
 2. Melan-Ilincë-Hinokë with a length of 11,332 km
 3. Rabdisht – Skertec with a length of 2,645 km
 4. Radomirë- Korab with a length of 9,940 km
 5. Sohodoll- Grame with a length of 17,552 km
 6. Sllatine Grame with a length of 8,357 km
 7. Shumbat- Grame with a length of 8,139 km
 8. Kastriot – Grame with a length of 13,985 km
 9. Peshkopi Rabdisht – Zagrad with a length of 13,049 km
 10. Poçest – Ujëvara with a length of 4,642 km
- There are few tour operators that are offering the hiking tours and are contracting the accommodation and other services in Korab-Koritnik such as Zbulo Albania, Zemra e Ballkanit.
 - Culture tourism demand is not yet developed. Due to the traditional bad road conditions connecting Dibra with the capital, Tirana the tour operators did not include Dibra region in their national tours.
 - There is potential for the National market after the road improvement access to Tirana with focus on - nature, culture, weekend Dibra destination offer.
 - There is group of hotels and guesthouses supplying thermal water health tourists at Llixha area. There are around 10-12 hotels with a capacity around 1000 beds and guest houses mainly concentrated in Peshkopia supplying accommodation to general tourists.
 - Further guest houses and accommodation at shepherd huts entered in the market when the High Scardus trail and hiking in Korabi mountain were promoted. There are few restaurants in Peshkopia and around, along the Drini River serving to the local market and tourists. Some new campsite and rafting activities are added in the tourism service offer of Dibra while around 10 local guides are operative in offering guiding services to tourists.
 - An information office and visit Dibra website and social media channels were supported via projects for information and promotion of the tourism offer in the area. No destination management function is built at the local level.
 - Main attractions - natural parks, cultural heritage, rural, gastronomy. Rich cultural heritage but not integrated into the tourist offer: historical related to Skanderbeg, crafts - construction, lifestyle and traditions - allegory of Dibra, agricultural traditions, livestock traditions, gastronomy - cooking traditions of the Shishtavec and Dibra area
 - Activities - nature walks and relevant guides dominates.
 - Services - limited offer of food, accommodation, guides, transport, local agencies

⁵. Source: <https://visitdiber.com/>, <https://www.high-scardus-trail.com/en/>

- Nature, rural, agro and culture tourism products need to be developed and then promoted in Dibra
- The experience and infrastructure of tourism supply in Dibra is relatively new and therefore it needs strong and coordinated support when considering new tourism product development.

Kukes tourism offer

Kukes tourism offer is based on:

- Culture tourism based in Kukes city with few offers for visits such as the underground city with tunnels build during the communist time, visits into carpet handicrafts units, visit to the museum.
- Nature tourism activities are dominated by the hiking tours and excursions organised around Shishtavec- Novoseje and Shtegu I Ngjyrave trail.
- Shishtavec, Novoseje, Zgara e Bushtrices restaurant, Caje are the key actual destinations. There are few guest houses and restaurants in those villages.
- There are few guides operating on hiking tours as well as a couple of them providing culture tours in the city.
- Shtegu I Shkalles se Keqe Trail with a length of about 12 km that starts in the village of Mustafe and passes through Bicaj, Tershene and Turaj e ends in Brekinë with a difference in altitude of 1100 m in the ascent and 550 m in the descent .
- The Path of Colors in Kukës starts from Shishtavec towards the village of Gryke Çaj is the newest tourist destination in the northeast of the country that is gathering hundreds of nature enthusiasts on weekends. This trail is part of the High Scardus Trail, a trail that runs along the border of three countries, Kosovo, Albania and Macedonia, with a length of 495km. It is frequented during spring-summer.
- Recent tourism product development are Shtegu I Staneve , shtegu I Shpellave, developed by NGOs-in cooperation with the municipality. These developments are promising for integration of interpretation of nature, culture, traditions into the nature tourism offer of the area.
- As a village with rural traditions of potato cultivation but also with other artisanal and food traditions, Shishtavec has the potential to develop a combined offer of nature and rural tourism, with activities of visits to the village, of artisanal traditions, visits to the stables, visits to the surrounding nature, organizing activities of potato gathering, forest fruits and other rural aspects.
- There is a tourism office operating in the municipality of Kukes, but the tourism info center is build but not yet operated. There is a website <https://visitkukes.com/> build by the projects but not transferred under the management of the tourism office.
- The tourism office is active in developing nature tourism products such as the culture tourism itinerary and offers in the city and the nature tourism offers such as the latest Cave Trail and Transhumance Trails.

The situation of the tourist trails in Dibër, Kukës: in general, they are marked by the work and investments of international associations and projects such as ALCDF, USAID, SEVERIGE. Also, in some villages, the creation of new guesthouses or the conversion of campsites into guesthouses has begun. In villages and protected areas, there are no special activities organized to attract tourists, mainly lacking entertainment activities related to nature tourism and sports tourism. There is a lack of infrastructure and road signage to guide the movement of tourists on some tourist trails.

Thethi -Albanian Alps tourism offer

In the Theth area, in relation to mountain tourism, the main activities that take place there are nature tourism, where international and local tourists frequent these tourist trails:

1. Theth- Maja e Zorgjit – Qafë Thore – Rranza – Gjecaj – Theth (circular tour)
2. Theth- Rrethi Vizhnës – Crossroads of the road to Nikc – Stanet e Pejës – Qafë Pejë – Theth
3. Theth – Shtegu I Dhenëve – Qafë Thore – Rranza – Theth
4. Theth – Quku I Nenshteku – Shtegu I Dhenëve – Gropa Portës – Fushë Okol Bogë
5. Theth Qendër – Ulaj – Gumnarë – Fusha e Denellit – Gumnare – Gure të Dudevë – Theth Qendër
6. Theth Qendër – Ulaj- Gynarë – Fusha e Denellit – Qafa Boshit Curraj Eperm
7. Theth (church) – Ulaj – Nënrrreth – Gjellaj – Qendër
8. Theth Okol – Pejës Pass – Pejës Pass – Prozhni Pass – Kropishtë Pass – James Pass – Lepushe
9. Theth Okol – Vizhne District – Praçe Pass – Ali Pasha Spring – Nikç (connection to Vermosh)
10. Theth – Bubës Coast – Valbonës Pass – Valbonës
11. Theth (Church) – Kulla e j Ngujimit – Waterfall – Grunas Canyon – return to Qendër
12. Theth Qendër – Grunas – Canyon – Nërlysa – Kaprrë (Blue Eye) – Thore Pass
13. Theth (Okol) – Pejës Pass – Pejës Pass – Runica Plain – Vuthaj, Montenegro

The “Peaks of the Balkans” trail includes a 192 km long trail that crosses the Alps and three Albania-Montenegro-Kosovo countries.

The influx of domestic tourism in Theth is dominated by a massive tourist profile seeking just leisure and entertainment in the mountainous nature landscape, with few short excursions around, are increasing demand for higher quality accommodation services, higher volumes of food consumption, impacting in dominated commercialized service and food offer which is not enough supplied by local resources. The organisation of nature, culture, rural tourism activities is very limited and there is potential to future focus on the diversification of tourism product there.

Tourist Profile⁶

In recent years, tourists who have visited the Theth area have been 72% foreign/28% domestic, with a total number of 100,000 tourists in 2022. The asphaltting of the Thores Pass road and the situation after the COVID 19 pandemic have brought about a change in tourist preferences, requiring better quality conditions (rooms with separate bathrooms), posing a challenge for guesthouses to meet their requirements. The ages that most frequent Theth are 20-55 years old, with the age group of 45-55 years old seeking more personalized tourist packages and safe group trips in the company of local guides. The country of origin of foreign tourists is Germany, Sweden, Austria, the Czech Republic, but in recent years tourists from Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Spain have increased. Domestic tourists come mainly from Shkodra, Tirana, Durrës and Vlora. According to the study conducted with 1405 visitors as part of PKST-Alpe during 2016⁷, visitors who frequent the Albanian Alps are mainly foreigners, representing about 67% of the total number of visitors.

Although domestic visitors represent only 33% of visitors to the Albanian Alps, the fact that 44% of them have returned to the area is an important indicator of positive impressions and trends. In this context, it is estimated that the number of domestic visitors is expected to increase in the future.

The reasons for the visit, activities and desires of visitors to visit the Albanian Alps resulted in: “rest and relaxation”, “free time”, “entertainment”, “sports” and “consumption of local products”.

⁶ Analytical study for the Korab-Koritnik and Albanian Alps Protected Areas, as a strategic planning tool for the tourist development of the regions and the use of natural resources while preserving the environment (Troshani-CNPV, 2023)

⁷ FSHZH (2017) Plani Kombëtar Sektorial i Turizmit Rajoni i Alpeve. Strategjia Sektoriale, miratuar me vendim të KKT nr.1 date 09.12.2017

Meanwhile, the main aspects that motivated their visit are: “hikes and natural beauties”, “landscape and environment”, “hospitality”, “lifestyle”, “adventure and sports”.

Foreign visitors showed a high interest in culture and literature, as the latter are some of the main reasons for choosing the Albanian Alps as a tourist destination.

Among the activities that these visitors have carried out in the area, the survey mentions: walks and hikes in nature, photography and picnicking. Meanwhile, among the activities they would like to carry out can be mentioned: speleology, visits to protected areas, visits to local communities, walks and hikes in nature, winter sports, mountaineering, horseback riding, rafting, visits to cultural monuments, cultural events, etc.

The characteristics of the services are accommodation in guesthouses, hotels, local guides, local transport by minibus or mule, for nature walks, while the main infrastructure for activities in these areas are marked trails.

The park administration has a visitor center where information is provided.

3.4 Tourism value-chain key actors in Diber-Kukes area

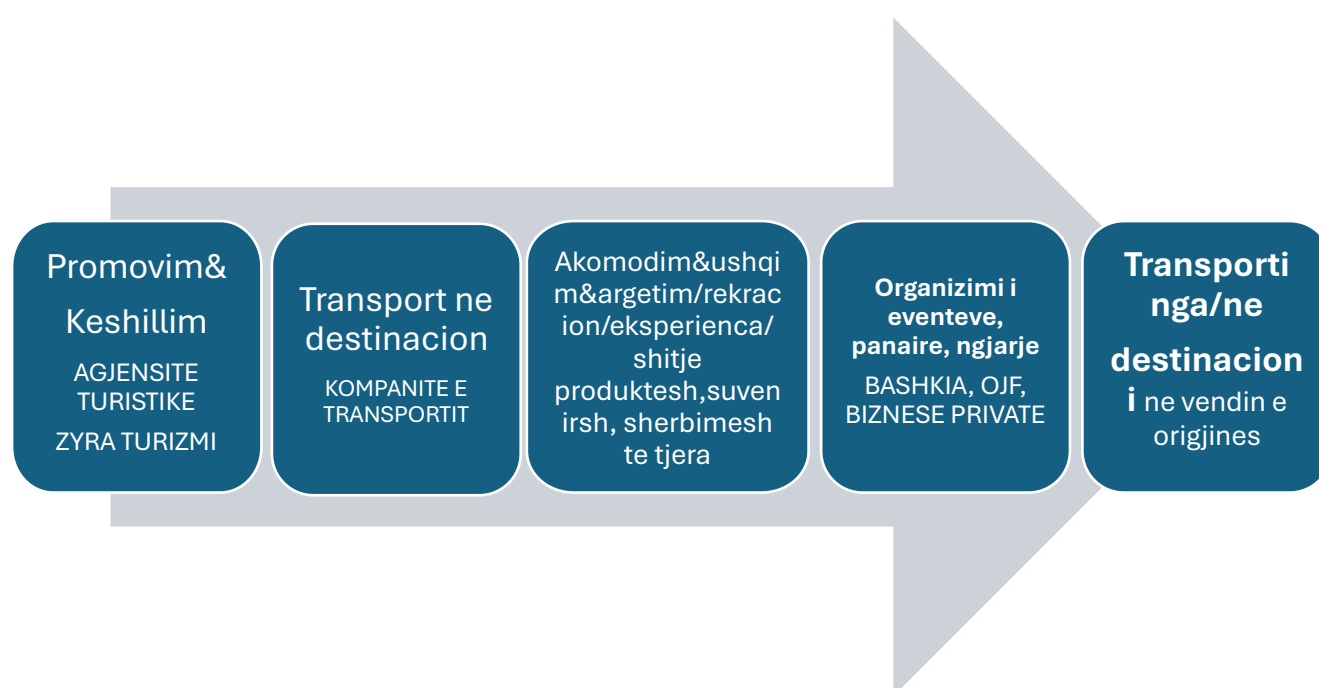


Figure 4. Tourism supply chain in the tourist destination ⁸

⁸ Analytical study for the Korab-Koritnik and Albanian Alps Protected Areas, as a strategic planning tool for the tourist development of the regions and the use of natural resources while preserving the environment (Troshani-CNVP, 2023)

Tourism businesses identified in Korab-Koritnik villages during CNVP surveys**Kukes-Korab-Koritnik villages****11 business units**

Brekije	1 potential guest house
Bushtrice	4 business units in tourism , 2 farms with tourism potentials
Çaje	1 Guest house
Fshat	1 Guest house
Novosej	2 hotels with restaurant (1 operating seasonally)
Shishtavec	3 guest houses
Topojan	1 potential guest houses

Diber- Korab-Koritnik villages - 14 business units

Illice	1 guest house, 1 camping/mountain hut
Erebare	1 camping/ food offer on demand, agrotourism profile
Pocest	1 food processing unit
Tomin	1 hotel/guest house
Grame	2 guest house, 1 camping
Rabdisht	2 guest houses, 1 offering food
Shumbat	1 camping/bar and restaurant
Radomire .Tejze-Sterdok	2 hotels with restaurant, 1 guest house
Ujemire	1 restaurant

There is group of hotels and guesthouses supplying thermal water for health tourists at Llixha area.

There are around 10-12 hotels with a capacity around 1000 beds and guest houses mainly concentrated in Peshkopia supplying accommodation to general tourists.

As well, around 10 hotels and guest houses are located in Kukes city with less overall capacity comparing to Peshkopi.

Theth-Albanian Alps – there are 52 tourism business units, concentrated mainly in Theth whereas Nderlyse and Shala Walley can offer more rural tourism experience in the future.

There are also a few local tourism agencies in Theth as well as the provision of local transport, local guides. The organisation of nature, culture, rural tourism activities is very limited and there is potential to future focus on the diversification of tourism product there.

The tourism value -chain in Korab-Koritnik is represented mainly by the accommodation and food offer, concentrated in the main cities Peshkopi and Kukes, with a dispersion 1-2 guest houses in the key villages along the routes of high Scardus Trails.

Few national tour operators specialised in hiking tours are providing package tours in along the trails in the area.

There is clear evidence of lacking the local travel organisers, few tour guides and the organisation of the tourism activities besides the hiking or biking tours such as locally guided excursions, farm visits, guided or facilitated activities that involve community interactions with tourist are in scarcity and not developed.

We can witness that the outreach of the tourism value chain is very limited in the protected areas communities.

- National tour operators – few operators, mainly hiking, information and promotion insufficient
- Tourism office in destination – need support
- Local tourist transport – few services
- Local tourist agencies – few
- Local guides – mainly for active nature outdoor, there are obvious needs
- Accommodation, food services – limited offer
- Hospitality and activities in nature, villages and farms – limited offer
- Supply of local products – needs coordination
- Sale of local products and handicrafts – needs coordination, packaging, labelling, sales points
- Support of actors for product and infrastructure development from projects and NGOs – uncoordinated and insufficient

Some conclusions with relevance to the product development needs and priorities

- The tourism value chain engagement of the local communities is very limited and there is a potential for integration of community in direct and indirect tourism services and supply chain.
- The core need for tourism product development are the local organisation and the provision of tourism activities and experiences: guided interpretation of nature, rural and cultural values, organising of local tours, integration of farms, communities with their lifestyle and cultural traditions into the value chain, integration of the selling of locally made products in the villages, tourism destinations or tourism service providers.
- Therefore, capacity-building for providing those missing services in the tourism value chain, supported by small scale relevant grant support for local businesses and the related supply chain infrastructure, supporting joint developing of the local tourism clusters and value chain interactions can be first priorities within the product development support activities.
- Tourism at destination level needs destination management to be led by the respective structure build at the municipality.
- This requires planning processes with stakeholders, itineraries to be developed, interpretation programmes, capacity building for existing and new operators, accommodation, food, guiding, transport, trail infrastructure development support.
- So far, international donor projects and local NGOs played the key supportive role in tourism covering product development, destination marketing, capacity-building, support with finance for setting -up guest houses, supporting the organisation of tourism related businesses etc. The municipality has been cooperative in providing the tourism information infrastructure and staff.

3.5 Tourism marketing in the project area

The tourism product offer is organised and marketed in relation with the destinations, with the products and according to the target market.

The tourism marketing of local and regional destinations is related with destination management.

According to the national tourism strategy draft 2024-2030 findings “*there is a Non-functional Destination Management System: Ineffective destination management due to limited resources and unclear roles hinders sustainable tourism growth. Strengthening Destination Management Organizations (DMOs) and ensuring financial independence are of vital importance*”.

The draft strategy foresees an organisation of DMO-s at national, regional and local level.

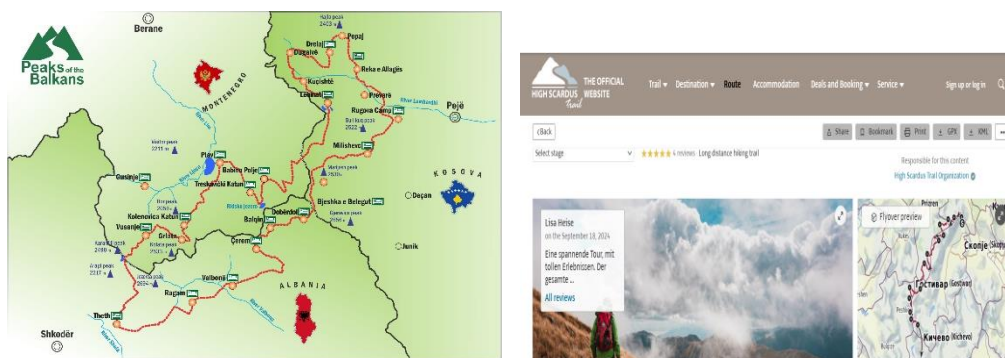
The primary focus of tourism clustering involved identifying larger geographical areas that are sharing certain features (experiential, geo-morphological, etc.) where a set of comparable and similar tourism products, activities, experiences, attractions and infrastructure related to tourism are concentrated or should be developed in the coming period. Following the above, six tourism clusters were identified: 1. Adriatic Coast Cluster 2. Inland North Cluster 3. Tirana City Cluster 4. Central Cluster 5. Ionian Coast Cluster 6. Inland South Cluster

The nature tourism offer is related to both nature related territories, mainly protected areas which can be marketed and branded at national, regional, local or protected areas level and even sub-branded at specific location, village or village cluster level.

An example effort was done during CABRA project with Albanian Alps, where Albanian Alps was considered by the project as whole destination and was supported to be branded as such (Developing Albanian Alps brand), however composed by sub-destination at the nature or national park destination level (Thethi and Valbona national parks, Shkrel and Nikaj- Mertur municipal nature parks). Nature and rural tourism products and marketing were developed for thematic (i.e hiking trails, chestnut hiking trails, nature or gastronomic tours) and across the region tours or destination and attraction-based specific offer. The lack of project continuity, the lack of tourism destination management at regional level along lacking dedicated tourism related structures at national parks level or nature tourism dedicated functions at local level, are some reasons why such initiatives discontinued.

The main tourism marketing platforms for Albanian alps and Korab- Koritnik reaching mainly international market are the regional platforms Peaks of Balkan <https://peaksofthebalkans.info/> and High Scardus trail <https://www.high-scardus-trail.com/en/>. There are also projects marketing the Dinaric Arcs routes, where those destinations are integrated.

Those platforms first created a brand (including logo, title, narratives) for the regional, cross-border destination under some internationally recognized presentation of geographical identities: Peaks of Balkan and Scardus Mountain.



Second, the branding and the packaging of the offer is under a specific active nature activity and themed: hiking tours.

The packaging and selling are a cross-border trail where the information is referred to booking via affiliated, certified and attached to specific country tour operators.

There is an interaction of the information across the network of the providers regarding the situation on the ground for the trails, services etc.

The platforms are established from the cooperation process and the cross-border stakeholders but with clear support and moderation of international organisations which were active in each country, enabling passing of many barriers for cooperation. One is managed in a form of NGO-

the Scardus Trail and Peaks of Balkan as cooperative and networking among some local government institutions such as Peja Municipality, Prokletije National Park Montenegro, Regional Council of Shkodra where there can be evidenced discontinuity in some stakeholder engagement.

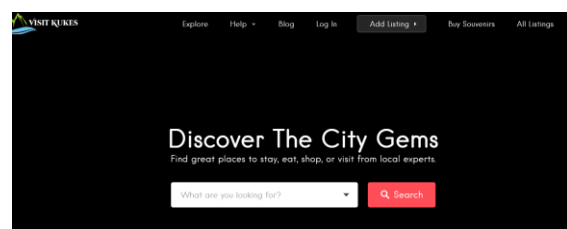
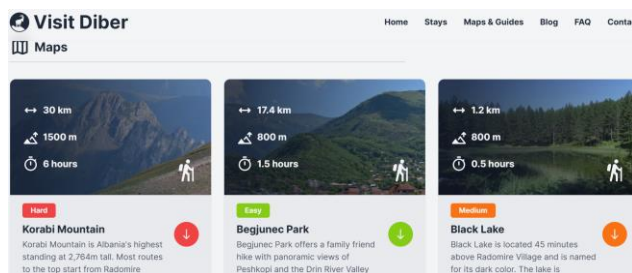
There is room for further integration of local government and protected areas in such platform for a continuous organised tourism marketing.

However, such platforms build on specific branded thematic activities are not covering the rest of the Alps and Korab-Koritnik tourism destination marketing.

At the local government level there are build respective tourism websites but there are not manageable by the tourism offices. The tourism offices maintains also facebook pages for tourism which have actual limited outreach.

<https://visitdiber.com/>

<https://visitkukes.com/>

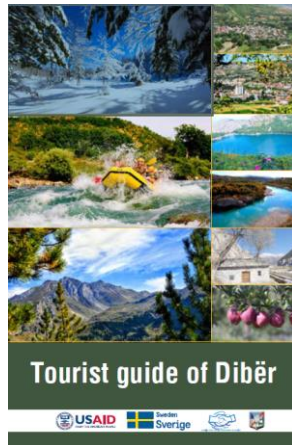
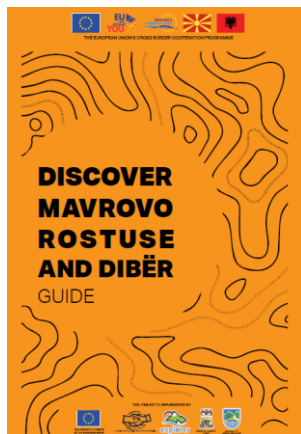


<https://www.facebook.com/ticdiber/>



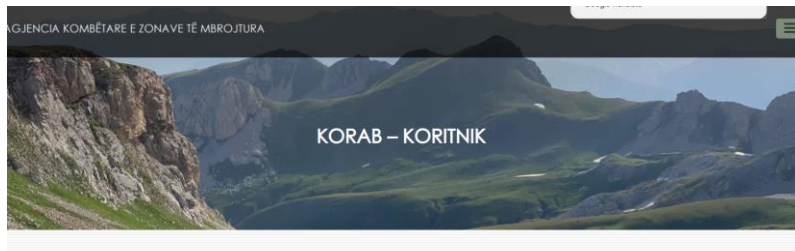
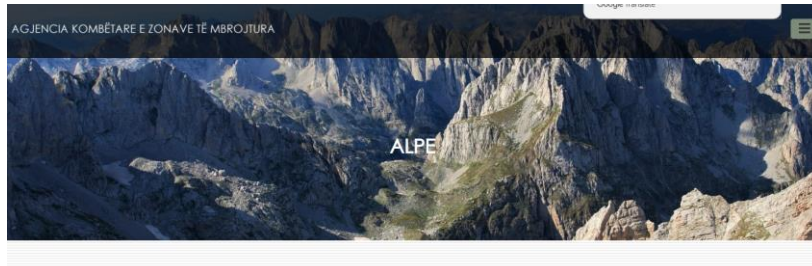
The tourism information office in Diber is operational, in Kukes is expected in 2025

- The tourism websites are partially functional
- Tourist offers, brochures and information are still unorganized according to target groups and products
- Only hiking itineraries have more complete information in the tourism offer
- There is not a documented marketing and branding strategy although the build of the tourism office and the respective marketing materials followed a marketing and branding logic and plan
- Planned marketing campaigns for target markets and stakeholders are lacking
- There are annual event plans. There are no marketing plans for the events to outreach specific target markets and audiences.
- Dibra needs to develop a marketing and branding strategy and approach to promote the destination, products and address the market. Alongside, organizing of local fairs in Dibra and Dibra fairs in Tirana for tourism and agriculture products are suitable for Dibra tourism destination promotion.

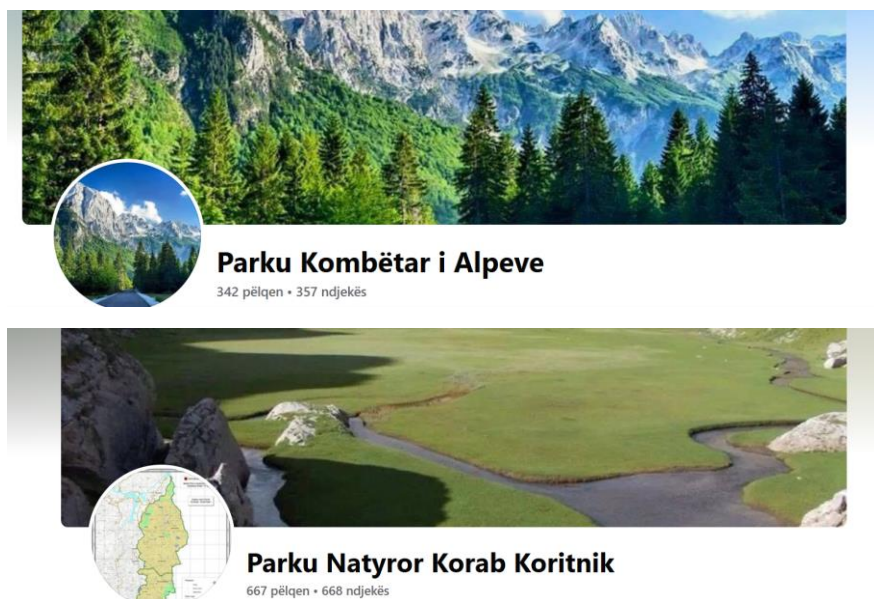


At the protected areas destinations there are not dedicated tourism websites, but only information on the protected at the National Agency and facebook pages form the respective Regional Agencies.

<https://akzm.gov.al/parku-kombetar-i-alpeve/>



https://www.facebook.com/p/Parku-Komb%C3%ABtar-i-Alpeve-100024476328902/?locale=sq_AL



https://www.facebook.com/Korabkoretnik/?locale=sq_AL

Some conclusion and recommendations:

- A Tourism marketing platform/concept/strategy/ for the Korab-Koritnik or Alps area is needed.
- But tourism marketing platform should follow the tourism product strategy where key products and key target markets are prioritised.

This platform needs to include 3 layers of product packaging and branding, which should be coherent, aligned as well as differentiated based on unique products, offers, strengths of the sub-layer :

- The wider cross- border areas as e regional destination which is appealing and more relevant to international markets for nature tourism, for the cross—border tours.
- The Peaks of Balkan and High Scardus are of relevance to be followed. For these the respective local stakeholders such as local tourism offices, local protected areas agencies, National Tourism Agency and National protected areas Agency should coordinate to maintain a branding of the cross- border regions.
- The Protected Areas of Alps and Korab-Koritnik should have their own branding and marketing of the Protected Areas destinations. Here the missing dedicated tourism specialists, structures within Regional protected areas Agencies that can back- up the tourism marketing are the core bottleneck to overcome. While for Albanian Alps branding efforts with logo and other guidelines were prepared and applied for some time before some years with the support of GIZ projects (CABRA) and needs to be revived , there is a need to elaborate one for Korab-Koritnik protected area.
- The marketing and branding of the regional tourism destination such as Dibra and Kukes have to be elaborated.
- Integrating core priority products aiming to target group priorities is the basis for developing marketing and branding strategy.
- The marketing and branding strategy may have also sub-layers based on the target groups: international, domestic, culture or nature etc.
- As Korab-Koritnik is a major tourism resource, the branding and the marketing of the destination should incorporate the branding of the protected areas and the nature tourism activities.
- Dibra is appealing with some key strengths to the market such as rural agriculture products, masonry traditions, Skenderbeg history plus both protected nature areas of Lure and Korab- Koritnik.
- The promotional materials should be organised in packages, addressing different tourism products and target groups.
- A sub-branding can go also a level lower to local villages or cluster villages organised into tourism offer based on unique strengths i.e traditional architecture, rural tradition, pasture and shepherds' environment etc.
- The branding of the tourism destination can align also the branding of local products in the local tourism destination, based on a hierarchy of branding: mountainous products, locality, villages.
- Promotional materials should be designed on attracting to the appeal motivation of the tourist, providing information on the experiences, activities and enjoyment expectations and more important they have to be updated and based on marketable and sellable packages, offers and services.
- The promotional materials are useful when they are used to materialise the booking, receiving of the information and services from tourists to service providers.
- The marketing plan should include the distribution points of such promotional materials in electronic and printed format along the value chain: form the websites, to tour operators, tourism information offices, at the premises of the tourism service providers.

3.6 Summary of the tourism product development and marketing situation in Alps-Theth and Korab-Koritnik nature areas

	Alps-Theth	Korab- Diber	Kukes
Tourism destinations	Theth	Korab, Lure Illice Peshkopi Radomire Rabdisht Grame High scardus trail	Shishtavec, Novoseje, Gryke Caje Shtegu I ngjyrave Bushtrice
Protected areas	Alps national park	Korab-Koritnik park, Lura-Deja park	Luma region : Korab- Koritnik, Gjallica Shtegu I ngjyrave
Tourism offers	Peaks of Balkan trail Albanian Alps Theth Hiking and adventure tourism Theth as flagship village destination	High Scardus Trail Dinaric Alps Dibra Korab Hiking trails, biking tourism Rafting activities	Shtegu I ngjyrave Kukesi Hiking tourism
Marketing and branding	Peaks of Balkan trail Albanian Alps Theth No dedicated marketing strategy and plan	High Scardus Trail Korab No dedicated marketing strategy and plan	Shtegu I ngjyrave Shishtavec No dedicated marketing strategy and plan
Nature tourism resources	Mountainous, pasture, village landscape, Hiking trails, caves, Waterfalls, Shala river	Mountain pastures, mountain landscape, village landscape,waterfalls, caves,	Mountain pastures, mountain landscape, village landscape,waterfalls, caves, Novosej lake
Active Nature tourism offer/market	Hiking Theth-Valbona trail Hiking at nearby nature attractions	Hiking Biking Cross-border trails	Hiking
Active nature tourism tour providers	National and local guides National and local tour operators Self-guided groups	National and local guides Self-guided groups Few National tour operators	National and local guides Self-guided groups Few National tour operators
Nature tourism offer /market	Excursions, landscape	Visit villages, short hiking walks in Radomire, Rabdisht	Short hiking to Novoseje lake, excursion Shishtavec- Novosej
Nature tourism activity tour providers	Few local or national guides Self-guided	Very few local or national guides	Very few local or national guides
Rural tourism resources (traditional rural practices: breeding, cultivations, processing	Corn,fish, sheep,beans at Shala valley,dairy and meat products, Farms and traditional houses, shepherd	Cultivation of fruits and agriculture, maps, meat, dairy processing, fruit processing, traditional	Potatoes, dairy, meat, traditional gastronomy Shishtavec, wool carpet processing,

<i>etc, agrobiodiversity, traditions, handicrafts, food,)</i>	huts, orchards, traditional village architecture	gastronomy, farms, shepherd huts, orchards, traditional village architecture: Rabdisht, Radomire, Zagrad, Erebare etc	farms, shepherd huts, orchards traditional village architecture: Shishtavec, Novosje, Topojan, Brekie
Rural tourism offer /market	Theth, Nderlysa visits in few houses and farms	Rabdisht, Radomire visits in few houses	
Rural tourism tour providers	Few guides or local hosts that organise themselves the tours and interactions with community	Occasionally few cases where guides or local hosts that organise themselves the tours and interactions with community	
History, traditions and culture tourism resources	Kanun, epic songs, hospitality traditions Traditional lifestyle, kulla buildings, ethnography and folklore, local fests and celebrations	Pastoral, masonry, stories, Skenderbeg, Traditional lifestyle and customs, kulla buildings, ethnography and folklore, local fests and celebrations	Traditional lifestyle, legends, ethnography and folklore, Gorani lifestyle and traditions, local fests and celebrations
Culture tourism offer	Visits at some limited attractions: kulla e Ngujimit Some local events	Very few excursions or visits in historical places Local events	Local events
Culture tourism tour providers	National and local guides	Few national and local guides	Few national and local guides

Hiking and adventure tourism are the main tourist activities along the protected areas with the Peaks of the Balkans in the Albanian Alps, the High Scardus Trail along the Dibër-Kukës cross-border area and more recently the Colourful Trail: Shishtavec-Çaje

Key villages along the trails are: Theth, Valbone, Çerem, Doberdol, Hinoske, Zagrad, Çaje, Gramë, Radomirë, Shishtavec, Novoseje

First Theth, then the cross-border nature hiking itineraries in the Peaks of the Balkans area, now the combination of visits to two areas connected to the Alps, such as the protected areas of Lake Skadar and the Buna River, and most recently the expansion and extension of the hiking routes in the High Scardus Trail area of Korab-Sharri have received major media and international visitor attention regarding nature tourism in Albania, including receiving international awards from the WTTTC and the Guild of British Travel Writers

The Albanian Alps area is seen as the main destination of nature tourism for international visitors, who can be included in the "Nature Tourist", "Sports/Adventure Tourist" and to some extent in the ecotourism category, while the activity of hiking in nature seems to dominate.

From the observations made on the activities that visitors have carried out in these areas, the following are mentioned: hiking and nature walks, photography and picnicking. Meanwhile, among the activities that they would like to carry out, the following can be mentioned: speleology, visits to protected areas, visits to local communities, hiking and nature walks, winter sports,

mountaineering, horse riding, rafting, visits to cultural monuments, cultural events, etc. The characteristics of the services are accommodation in guesthouses, hotels, local guides, local transport by minibus or mule, for nature walks, while the main infrastructure for activities in these areas are marked trails.

A characteristic of nature walking tourism is that tourist activities are following trails and those service points or villages along the trails.

Interpretation and demonstration of nature and rural heritage is limited, although there is an interest of tourists, the activities are ad-hoc, spontaneous and not clearly distinguished in the tourist offer.

It is clear (the Gray coloured boxes in the table highlight the bottlenecks) that nature, culture and rural tourism products and their marketing are underdeveloped although the areas have a wealth of nature, rural and culture resources and landscapes.

4. Market analysis report detailing trends, demands and alignment with proposed products

4.1 Nature tourism in Albania

Albania possesses an extremely diverse range of ecosystems and habitats, landscape and geomorphology. Exactly this diversity is one of the 4-5 key factors of the uniqueness of the image and attraction of tourist Albania in the market of international tourists, alongside other factors such as the different layers of cultural heritage, hospitality, gastronomy and tourism resources of coastal tourism. These ecosystems and habitats are part of the international corridors of continuity and movement of the plant and animal world towards and have national and international values, as a result their protection comes not only as a need and interest at the national level, but also as an obligation related to the commitments of various international conventions for the protection of biodiversity.

Nature tourism in Albania is related to the products and areas of wetlands and lakes (on the coast and inland), in the cross-border areas of the lakes of Ohrid, Prespa, Shkodra and the mountainous cross-border areas of the Alps and Korab-Koritnik, while in the natural areas near coastal destinations it is related to nature tourism offered in relation to coastal tourism in the Mediterranean area. This overview helps us understand that the nature tourism market and its development depend on the development of cross-border products, including cooperation, standards and marketing, but also on initiatives and projects regional and cross-border.

The main flow reported for visits to protected areas consists of local visitors accompanied by ethnic Albanians and the diaspora, who mainly visit coastal tourism areas and restaurants located in protected areas (such as Divjakë, Llogara, Lake Shkodra, Lake Pogradec, etc.).

We can include this category of mass tourism on some cases and only a part of it in the best variant of "Casual Nature Tourist". Likewise, foreign visitors who extensively explore Albania, its culture and nature on tours throughout Albania, and especially those who visit for the first time, can mostly be included in the "casual nature tourists" and "Soft Adventures".

The area of the Albanian Alps is seen to remain the main natural tourism destination for international visitors, who can be included in "Tourist interested in nature", "Sport/adventurer tourist" and to some extent in the ecotourism category, while the activity of walking in nature seems to dominate.

First Thethi, then the cross-border hiking itineraries in the area of "Bjeshka e Namura", such as the Balkan Peaks, now the combination of visits to the two areas connected to the Alps, such as the protected areas of Lake Shkodra and the Buna River, and more recently the extension and

expansion of hiking trails in the area of the Scardus Korab-Sharrit high trail, have received major attention from the media and international visitors regarding nature tourism in Albania, including receiving international awards from the WTTC and the Guild of British Travel Writers.

From the surveys (PKST Alpe, 2017) carried out for the activities that visitors carry out in these areas, the following are mentioned: walks and hikes in nature, photography and picnics. In the meantime, among the activities they would like to do can be mentioned: speleology, visits to protected areas, visits to local communities, walks and hikes in nature, winter sports, mountaineering, horseback riding, rafting, visits to cultural monuments, cultural events, etc. The characteristics of the services are accommodation in guesthouses, hotels, local guides, local transport by minibus or mules, for walks in nature, while the main infrastructure for activities in these areas are the marked trails.

Meanwhile, in terms of activities of interest to visitors interested in learning about nature in the Shkodra lake area, according to local nature tourism operators, they are photography, bird watching, boating and canoeing in the lake and rivers followed by bike tours and nature walks. Taking into account the small number of tours organized by specialized nature guides, while such a guide is not yet recognized in the sub-legal framework for the regulation of this profession, while the experience of the interpretive infrastructure and dedicated service in the fields of the areas protected is at minimal levels, it can be estimated that ecotourism is currently the smallest number in relation to all the main categories and subcategories of tourism in general and natural tourism in particular, being estimated around 1-20% of the total number of tourists who activities in natural areas.

On the other hand, the development of natural tourism has been dominated by the services of guides, the organization of packages and offers for natural tourism activities, followed by the development of the modest infrastructure of marking paths and placing itineraries on maps, including digital products, and have continuous growth and expansion in the territory as well as visitor centers in the parks and these are the main infrastructural investment in this direction.

But the lack of significant demand and equally the lack of experience and specialized services of guides and interpretation of the natural and cultural-rural heritage, have made the activities of nature tourism, which includes ecotourism, which focuses on the interest in knowing these values, to be at the minimum levels of development.

In the same line, the relevant infrastructure of interpretation and signage of attractions in protected areas, although experiences have already been created, is still at low levels.

The protected areas lack the range of tourism planning methodologies and instruments and visitor management at the regulatory level and practical implementation, another important prerequisite and evaluation criterion for the management of tourism in the protected areas, including ecotourism.

There are no certification schemes for businesses, parks, destinations that apply schemes, methods, instruments and standards of sustainable tourism management, including ecotourism. This dimension is an important indicator for the involvement of businesses in practices and awareness of sustainable tourism management.

The development of the nature tourism product has come mainly from the help of international projects and from the demand of the international exploratory and passionate market for the movements in nature.

Regarding the dynamics and sustainability of the development of services and infrastructure in those protected areas where natural tourism has taken off, there are critical problems of spontaneous development, difficulties in waste management and constructions outside the local character, architecture and environmental sustainability (e.g maintaining the traditional roof model would require an incentive scheme).

Especially the experience created by the local communities in providing accommodation in guesthouses and sometimes also in shepherd's huts, providing traditional food, transport and local guides against the commercial and standard service provision of other tourist destinations is an important dimension of the interaction of the host community and tourists and still constitutes a special value of authenticity and USP of natural tourism in Albania that makes it more attractive for the ecotourism market but also a model and a better example of how the local community benefits from nature and rural tourism and should be a reference for the dimension of economic benefit in the development of ecotourism.

4.2 Ecotourism in Albania - The need for sustainable tourism

It is recognized that tourism must preserve and protect the environment and natural attractions in order for people to continue to travel and must set limits of use for places to be truly sustainable. The problem is how to do this. Concepts such as ecotourism, nature tourism, sustainable development, carrying capacity and alternative tourism have been proposed.

Ecotourism is a form of tourism that is required in UN resolutions and in the EU strategy to pay more attention to the contribution it brings to sustainability, where the first priority is access to the environment, contribution to the economy of local communities and rural, environmental awareness of all parties involved in its management activities: tourists, community, public sector and operators, and therefore has value in expanding the impact of wider awareness in tourism.

Ecotourism is responsible travel (in the environmental and social dimension) to fragile, untouched and usually protected areas with the main motivation of tourists being the observation and appreciation of nature as well as traditional cultures.

The ecotourism market, although it covers a small part of nature tourism, is a growing trend in the demand of tourist consumers for greater appreciation and responsibility towards nature, and the presence of this market in tourist destinations gives a positive image and is an indicator of sustainable tourism management. But on the other hand, the problem is the fulfilment of the promises of the definitions and the realization of ecotourism. Otherwise, ecotourism turns into a paradox, bringing visitors to fragile environments and destroying them instead of preserving them. Furthermore, the commercialization and misuse of the sale of the image of ecotourism by the type of the operators and destinations of the "green washing" to attract more tourists takes place in those destinations and situations where there is no management and regulation of tourist activity.

Even in Albania, in addition to the mis-interpretation that have passed from the public discourse to the practices of concrete massive constructions and more residential investments in natural environments and in the "prime land" on the beaches, or to beneficiaries of funds for investments labelled as "tourist villages", "tourist residences" and even "agrotourism", it is the turn of the discourse to come to the distortion of the concept of ecotourism by implying investments in "ecotourism friendly concrete constructions", when the intervention in the landscape is the first and irreparable damage done to the environment and that the operating model or the target market has nothing to do with at all with the real ecotourism market.

It is the characteristics of responsibility and contribution to the development of tourism sustainability that make ecotourism part of the public interest and tourism development policies.

Ecotourism seeks territories in untouched nature and away from urban areas. These territories must have the quality, the authenticity, the level of attendance such that the experience is as close to nature as possible and different from urban life. It requires services and infrastructure that enable the recognition of nature and cultural heritage.

Today, ecotourism occupies a small part of the tourist product in Albanian tourism, although the potential is greater. We must emphasize that it is not the additional numbers of tourists that should be prioritized, but the increase in the numbers or the percentage of responsible tourists who contribute to sustainable development. The operationalization of the principles of

sustainable development in the first place through the planning of tourism in natural areas, taking into account the selection of tourist activities and therefore the target market groups that can interact in a conscious way with the natural environment, can contribute to the local economy and in the following, the planning of the most direct tourist infrastructure that enables the access and interpretation of natural resources, the infrastructure of services that realizes the most positive environmental balance, the management framework that enables the real-time harmonization of services, infrastructure, protection and control of flows and interactions of visitors and their impact on the environment and community as well as the use of instruments for awareness and application of sustainable behavior by all actors.

Ecotourism depends on the degree of development of tourism in Albania and then on the degree of its sustainable management. We can conclude that the low level of management of tourist destinations is a main factor in the level of development of ecotourism in Albania and at the same time a prerequisite for its development.

The market potential for ecotourism is greater in these areas:

- Increasing soft ecotourism activities in protected areas near the main destinations as a necessity for increasing the sustainability of tourism in these areas.
- As a necessity, opportunity and important contribution in mountainous and rural areas for the benefit of the local economy
- As a necessity for sustainability and conservation in RAMSAR protected areas

Providing the institutional infrastructure for the management of tourism and ecotourism is a prerequisite for supporting its development.

4.3 Profile of tourists and their demands for Korab-Koritnik⁹

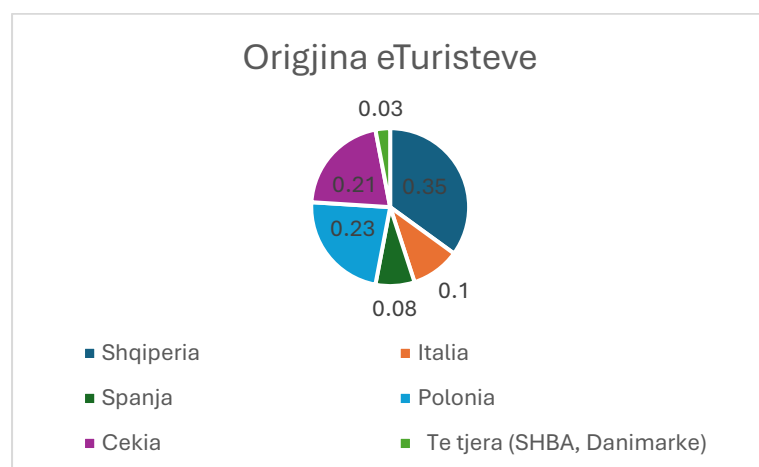


Chart 31. Origin of tourists

We see from the chart that the origin of tourists is 35% from Albania (this is also related to the time when the survey was conducted) and as for foreign tourists, most of them come from Poland, Germany, Italy, the Czech Republic, etc.

⁹ Troshani-CNVP (2023) Analytical study for the Korab-Koritnik and Albanian Alps Protected Areas, as a strategic planning tool for the tourist development of the regions and the use of natural resources while preserving the environment

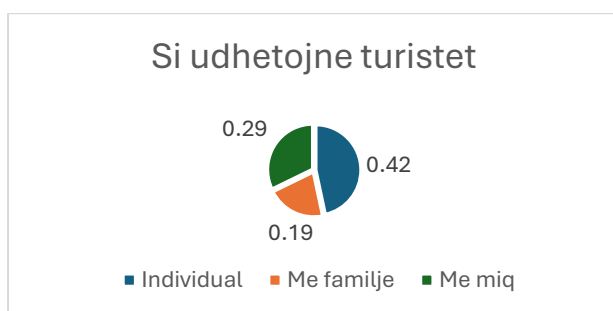
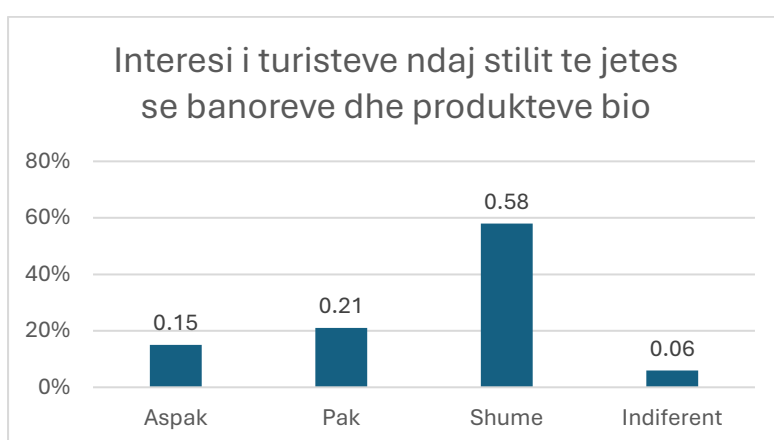


Chart 32. How tourists travel

We see from the chart that tourists travel 42% individually, 29% with friends, and 19% with family, constituting a key indicator for tourism product providers on how they can tailor their products to visitors.



Graph 33 Tourists' interest in the lifestyle of the residents

From graph 33 we see that the greatest interest of tourists at 58% is in organic products, indicating the great importance that the development of agricultural and livestock products in the areas of Dibra and Kukës should have in the function of tourism.

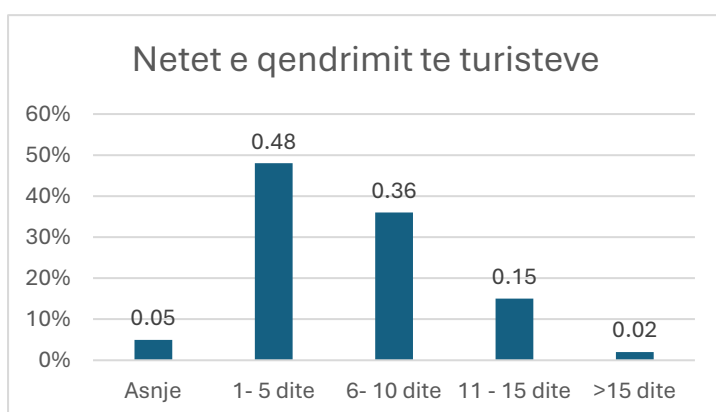


Chart 44. Tourist nights

We see that tourist nights are mainly 48% in a period of 1-5 days and 36% in 6-10 days, concluding the necessity of increasing the period of stay through the diversification of the tourist offer with entertainment activities, nature tourism and sports.

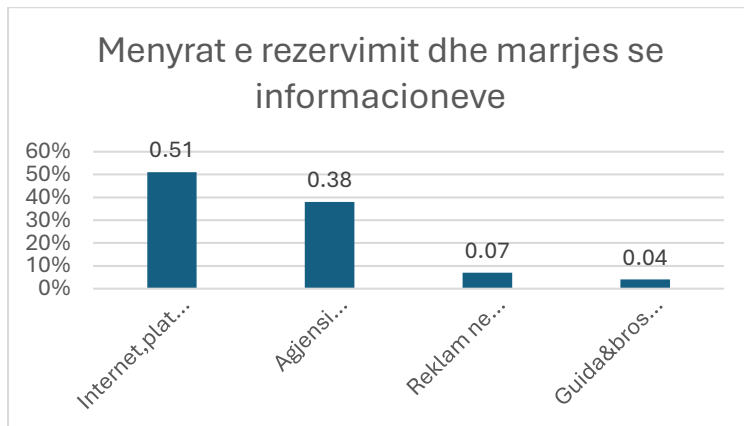


Chart 45. Way of obtaining information

We see from the chart that the way tourists obtain information is 51% through the internet and digital platforms and 38% from tourist agencies which in the Dibra and Kukës areas have also been closed due to the COVID 19 situation.

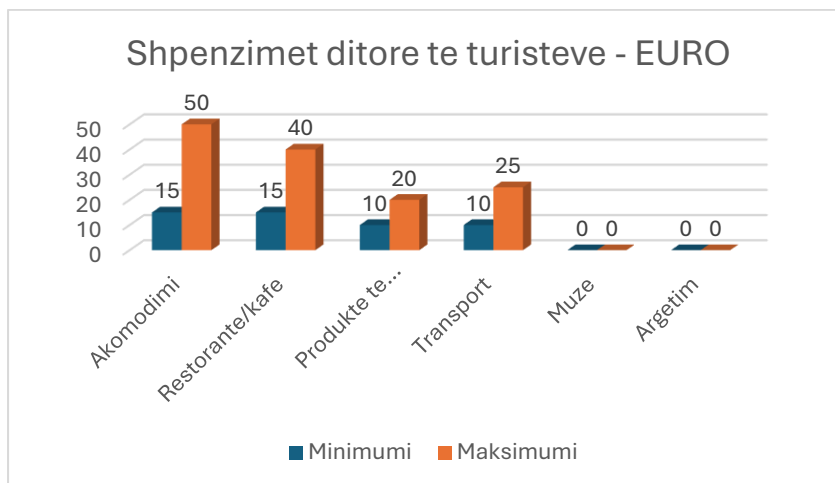


Chart 46. Daily expenses of tourists

We see from the graph that tourists' expenses consist mainly of accommodation, food, and transportation, not spending on entertainment activities due to their total lack.

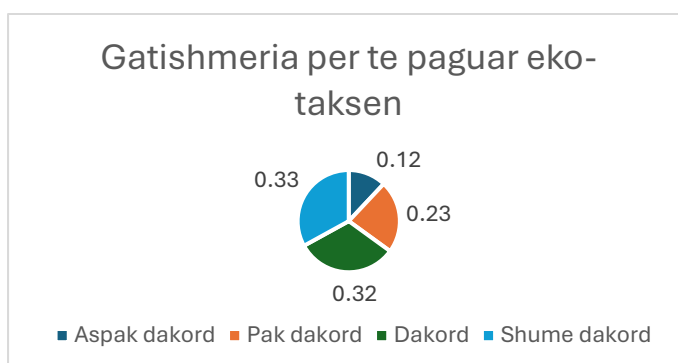


Chart 47. Willingness to pay Eco-tax

An important part of this questionnaire was the idea of establishing an eco-tax as part of the development perspective of nature-related tourist areas and applied in developed countries, and it appears from the chart that the idea is well received by tourists.

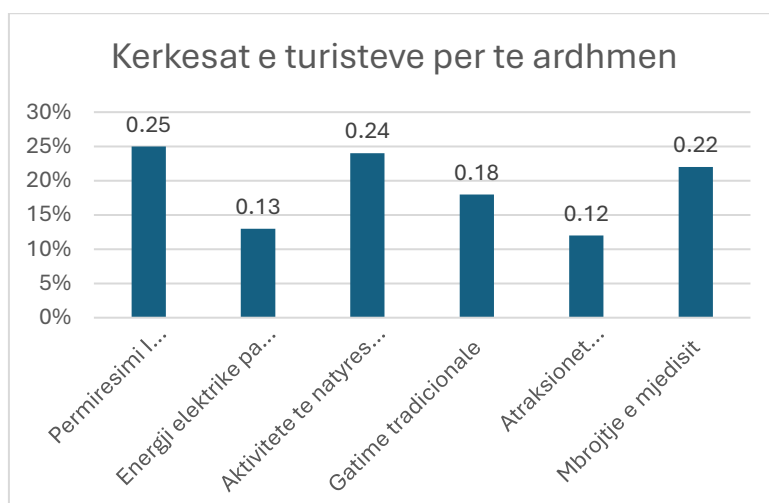


Chart 48. Tourists' demands for the future

As can be seen from chart 48, among the main problems of tourists are those related to infrastructure (specifically, some of their demands are related to the completion of the Arbri Road or the entrance to the city of Peshkopia, the improvement of the signage of tourist trails) and then there are the increase in nature and sports activities as well as aspects related to environmental protection such as the issue of waste management.

4.4 Tourism Target markets for Albanian Alps ¹⁰

1. International Market

a) Active Explorers

Active foreign explorers come mainly from Central European countries, Israel and the USA.

These visitors are aged 40-65, highly educated and in good financial standing.

This segment will visit the Alps in small groups, staying from 5 to 10 days, and will prefer to be accompanied by a tour guide to get to know the area better.

The main attractive activities for this segment are nature walks, various cultural experiences, clean and comfortable traditional accommodation, quality food products and rich gastronomy. Active foreign explorers seek complete information and orientation on the natural and cultural values of the area.

b) Urban Explorers

Foreign urban explorers come mainly from Central European countries and the USA. These visitors are relatively young, 25-35 years old, with secondary and higher education and modest financial status, who will visit the Alps in self-organized groups. These tourists will stay from 5 to 10 days and will hike in nature, visit easily accessible cultural monuments and choose simple accommodation.

c) Short-term visitors from Kosovo

¹⁰ PKST Alpe, 2017

Short-term visitors from Kosovo are aged 25-65, with secondary and higher education, in an average and good financial status, who will visit the Alps with their family or with groups of friends.

These visitors will be oriented towards local gastronomy, visit cultural monuments and choose to stay in clean and comfortable accommodation.

c) Urban explorers from Kosovo

Urban explorers from Kosovo come mainly from Gjakova, Peja and Prizren. These visitors are aged 25-45, with secondary and higher education and in a modest financial situation.

This segment of tourists will visit the Alps with organized or self-organized groups who will stay for 1 to 3 nights. In addition to them, this segment also includes visitors who will frequent the area with organized tours who will stay relatively longer, from 2 to 7 nights.

These tourists will hike in the most interesting natural areas and visit cultural monuments. This segment shows a high interest in cultural activities and local gastronomy, and

prefers staying in clean and comfortable accommodation.

2. Albanian market

d) Family

Family visitors come mainly from the big cities of Albania, where parents are around 35-55 years old, with secondary and higher education with a comfortable financial situation, who will stay from 2 to 7 nights. These tourists will go hiking and visit natural monuments, staying in clean and comfortable accommodations and enjoying local products and gastronomy. This segment shows a high interest in educational and entertaining activities for children.

dh) Young urban explorers

i. Active explorers

Young active urban explorers come mainly from large cities in Albania and are between 18-35 years old, with secondary and higher education, with modest incomes, who will visit with large self-organized groups and will stay in the area from 4 to 7 days.

These visitors will go hiking and will choose simple accommodation.

ii. Relaxation consumers

Relaxation consumers come mainly from large cities in Albania, are between 25-35 years old, with secondary and higher education and high incomes.

These visitors will visit the Alps individually or in self-organized groups of friends, staying from 1 to 2 nights, and showing a high interest in the quality of accommodation and food, cultural activities and nightlife entertainment.

4.5 Tourism market demands from tour operator interviews

Contacted tour operators

	Tourism product	Tour operators/guides
1	Culture tourism	Albanian Holidays, Kliton Gerxhani
2		Shkodra travel e tours, Sokol Hoxha
3		
4	Nature adventure tourism	High scardus trail, Zbulo Albania Endri Shima
5		Fisnik Muca, hiking guide for the Alps and Korab
6	Niche, specialised tour nature, culture, rural	Albanian Trip, Elton Caushi
7		Sondor travel, Dorien Malaj
8		Edmond Zhupani, tourism guide for international tour operators
9		Ervin Lani, tourism guide for nature and culture tourism
10	Local travel agencies	Nord travel, Shkoder
11		Black Drini, Diber
12		Buterfly camping, Diber
13	Specialized travel media	Revista travel, Flora Xhemani

Hiking tour operators highlighted the need for quality accommodation, food transport and expanding accommodation along the trails they offer, especially in those areas/stations with limited accommodation and food supply (Caje, Grama, Rabdisht).

Special experience tour operators, focused on the need for a mix of nature and culture tourism offer, addressed the need for authentic experiences and activities, including more development of rural, cultural and natural tourism products that can demonstrate and interact with local values and communities with tourists.

Tour operators offering cultural tours throughout the country considered that a more attractive tourism offer from the Dibër-Kukës areas is needed to market and sell to their target market.

They consider that attractiveness could be increased if the offer has more elements such as cross-border with Macedonia or Kosovo, interregional tours (i.e. Dibër-Kukës), or more compelling authentic experiences.

Target markets and segments that fit the priorities of sustainable tourism products

International tourists are a segment of those visiting protected areas and are interested in more information and interpretation.

Here the interpretation offer for nature and rural tourism is important and local guide capacities need to be built before addressing them through tour operators or other promotional and distribution channels mentioned above.

Domestic tourists attracted by culture, agritourism, rural tourism are also important for their potential to activate short sales chains of domestic products: while international tourists can consume in-situ but cannot take food products,

domestic tourists are an important buyer for in-situ purchases whether at the farm gate, shops and local markets and are therefore contributing to the rural economy of the area

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Domestic tourists attracted by culture, agritourism, rural tourism are also important for their potential to activate short sales chains of domestic products: while international tourists can consume in-situ but cannot purchase food products, domestic tourists are an important buyer for in-situ purchases whether at the farm gate, shops and local markets and are therefore contributing to the rural economy of the area.

5. Nature tourism Product development for Korab-Koritnik as part of of Diber-Kukes region and Albanian Alps (Theth)

5.1 Review of planning documents and other studies related to nature tourism in the project area

Considering that the tourism product development should take place within strategic tourism destination planning and stakeholder involvement a review was done of all planning documents directly or indirectly related with the respective areas.

The tourism destination both at protected areas Korab-Koritnik and Alps as well at regional and local level destinations such as Diber and Kukes do not have any current tourism development plan with clear product development priorities. The Albanian Alps have a National Tourism Sectorial Plan, PKST Alpe developed by Albanian Development Fund.

Therefore, several documents such as the PKST Alpe, other studies for the respective territories, the management plans of the protected areas, national level strategic evaluations, own consultant research on the topics of nature and rural tourism for the mountainous areas the tourism offer communicated by the websites and brochures of the tourism offices in Dibra, Kukes, Shkoder were analysed and then fact-checked through interviews with tour operators and stakeholders in the area. Below are excerpts with interest to be considered as evaluations during the planning process.

Analytical study for the Korab-Koritnik and Albanian Alps Protected Areas, as a strategic planning tool for the tourist development of the regions and the use of natural resources while preserving the environment, Troshani, 2023

Recommendations:

At the conclusion of this study, we can say that the potential of the Korab Koritnik and Alps National Natural Parks areas presents great potential for the development of nature tourism, where in the short term it is suggested to regulate and maintain tourist trails in terms of signage and waste management, as well as financial support for guesthouses that provide accommodation for tourists in terms of improving the quality of service and tourist offer in general. While in the medium term it is necessary to take the following measures:

1. Extending the stay of tourists from 1-5 days to 7-10 days and extending the tourist season from May - September to a higher intensity in January - March and October - December by diversifying the tourist offer with sports, cultural and entertainment tourist attractions that respect nature and the legal framework for the management of national parks.
2. Improving the tourist offer through strengthening the value chain where accommodation structures should cooperate with farmers to provide local organic products and other typical handicraft products, bringing about the simultaneous development of tourism and agriculture, livestock and handicrafts with great potential in both regions (Diber, Shkoder). (ecotax and certification of organic products)
3. Designing and developing a marketing program for the creation of the destination brand and Destination Management Organizations that will strengthen the appeal to tourists and the stronger promotion of the park areas and the typical local tourist products they offer.
4. Diversification of target tourist markets where from the individual groups and those of young age (up to 45 years old) that currently frequent and are related to adventure and nature tourism, larger groups of tourists can be attracted by focusing on families or ages 10-18 and 45-55 years old through the construction of tourist attractions related to sports tourism, agrotourism or eco-tourism.

In conclusion, we can say that tourism planning in national park areas requires coordination between all interest groups, joint decision-making and support from local and central government to ensure the sustainability of standards and to enable long-term investments with local and foreign capital.

Planning the development of sustainable tourism in park areas should also be based on the best models of international experiences that we find in the Western Balkans Region but also beyond.

This study can be further expanded in the future by being supplemented with details from the opinions of other experts and from other fields (specialists in sports attractions and mountain tourism tourist structures) as well as by including larger numbers of tourists that are reflected in tourist demand or even if it were carried out during the peak tourist season for the two national parks, which are the months of May - September, the analysis of tourist demand and supply would be even closer to reality and supplemented with additional detailed information. Despite the limitations of this work, the first steps have been taken towards proposing the closest tourist products to be developed and the most possible project ideas to be implemented as well as a 3-year Action Plan that can be enriched with other ideas and developed further.

PKST Alpe 2017 ¹¹

Principles for tourism development in Albanian Alps

Based on national and sectoral directives, some of the basic planning principles for the development of sustainable tourism in the Albanian Alps region have been drafted. These principles are as follows:

- Protection of natural wealth and biodiversity, considering it as an invaluable heritage for future generations and as a key factor for the development of responsible tourism.
- Respect for the social values and customs of the communities of the area, promoting historical heritage and traditions and harmonizing a more tolerant and intercultural relationship between the tourist and the host.
- Development of sustainable tourism in balance between environmental protection and economic benefit.
- Preservation of the rural-alpine character, ensuring the continuity of the material and intangible heritage with which this region is identified.
- Introducing domestic and foreign tourists to the amazing nature, customs, mythology, traditions and way of life, giving them unforgettable experiences and the desire to return.
- Guaranteeing a sustainable and long-term development of tourism activities and services, ensuring equal conditions of competition, which will provide long-term benefits to tourism operators and will help reduce poverty through the employment of residents.
- Creating several entry gates, enabling a distribution of flows in the territory, while improving the quality of life in communities.
- Increasing the quality of the tourist offer and the diversity of activities through internationally recognized practices, aiming for year-round tourism.
- A tourist destination that will attract the attention of the international tourism market, reflecting the positive image of our country.

¹¹ FSHZH (2017) Plani Kombetar Sektorial i Turizmit Rajoni i Alpeve. Strategjia Sektoriale, miratuar me vendim te KKT nr.1 date 09.12.2017

Vision for tourism development in Albanian Alps

In 2031, the Albanian Alps will be a region that manifests the balance between man and nature, that preserves environmental values and promotes identity, cultural and historical heritage, by developing a sustainable tourism that responds to the market and socio-economic needs, based on the hierarchy of specialized centres that function as an organic network.

Thus, “Bjeshkët e Nemuna” will be the region where experience seekers, travelers, visitors and residents of the area will ensure that the mountains are the place from which we see how the world was without us and how it will be in the future.

Main tourism segments

The quality of the natural landscape, hospitality, lifestyle, the opportunity to meet the local population, gastronomy, hiking in nature and in the mountains are the main competitive advantages identified by visitors to the Albanian Alps. The protection, development, improvement and promotion of competitive advantages support the tourism industry, and consequently promote the economic and social development of the territory. It is precisely the competitive advantages and their protection that guarantee the sustainability of the economic development of the Albanian Alps, thanks to the combination of environmental and economic interests.

Based on the characteristics of tourists visiting the Albanian Alps, it is estimated that visitors are oriented towards adventure tourism and hiking and mountain climbing activities. Adventure tourists are characterized by the fact that they seek to discover new, still undeveloped and unknown destinations, showing a high interest in the local culture and the way of life of the local population. Travel and walking tourists (hiking / trekking) show interest in the beauty of the landscape, nature, culture, traditions and authentic cuisine of the local population.

Natural and mountain experience

The diversity of flora and fauna, the high number of caves, waterfalls, water sources, mountain landscapes, canyons, glacial lakes, rock monuments, forests, observation points with high landscape interest, trails, etc., are the main elements that enable the experience of mountain nature in the Albanian Alps.

These territorial values enable the further development of activities such as:

- Nature tourism, i.e. tourism with short walks, photography, observation of flora and fauna and natural landscapes.
- Rest and relaxation tourism, i.e. tourism aimed at rest, regeneration of the body, energy expenditure, walks, etc.
- Sports tourism, based on sports activities such as hiking, mountaineering, etc.
- Health tourism, based on the visitor's health and curative treatments, with activities such as: SPA (Santa per Acqua), rheumatology, cardiology, orthopedics services, etc.
- Entertainment/recreational tourism, where the main objective is adventure and adrenaline, with various activities such as: "zip-line", "canopy tour", "via-ferrata", adventure trip in the forest, bungee jumping, parachuting, etc.
- Sustainable tourism and ecotourism, oriented towards ecology, awareness, pedagogy for environmental issues, based on activities such as: visits to natural parks, natural reserves, areas of interest for fauna and flora, biodiversity, etc.
- Scientific tourism, oriented towards science, pedagogy and research in various fields of science, based on activities such as: observation of fauna and flora, stargazing, etc.

The development of various tourist activities enables the expansion of the range of tourists and makes the Albanian Alps more competitive in the world market.

Cultural experience

The cultural experience in the territory is based on characteristic architecture (typical northern towers, mills, etc.), cultural monuments (museums, archaeological and historical sites with national and international impact, castles, fortresses, fortifications, Illyrian cemeteries, religious monuments, etc.), activities and the intact heritage of the area (traditional festivals and ceremonies, religious festivals, legends, myths, local tales and stories, folk music, characteristic musical instruments, dances, games, ceremonies, folk rituals, rules and traditions in the organization of social life, traditional costumes, traditional cuisine, etc.).

These cultural values enable the further development of the following activities:

- Cultural tourism, oriented towards the culture of the local community, lifestyle, heritage monuments, traditional architecture, legends, folklore, crafts, local festivals, etc.
- Gastronomic tourism, based on local gastronomic specialties such as alcohol, wine, cheese, jams, sweets, dairy products, etc.
- Artisan and commercial tourism, based on local handicraft products such as: clothing, musical instruments, local culinary specialties (sweets, jams, alcohol).
- Religious tourism, oriented towards visits or pilgrimages to holy places such as churches, mosques, etc.
- Event tourism, based on events organized in the territory, such as sports, cultural, environmental, artistic, cinematographic manifestations, music and folklore festivals, concerts, etc.
- Industrial tourism, based on the industrial culture of the area, such as visits to hydroelectric power plants, mills, etc.
- Creative tourism, organized around creative activities such as: painting, drawing, sculpture, cinema, electronic games, sports, pottery, cooking, etc.
- Business or professional tourism, oriented mainly towards activities related to professional training or company culture, based on activities.

Mountains Natural Ecosystem “Korab - Koritnik Natural Park” Management Plan, 2014¹²

The vision for the Mountains Natural Ecosystem “Korab - Koritnik Natural Park” for the future is formulated in the form of the following statement:

“Conservation, protection, restoration and sustainable management of natural and cultural heritage of Mountains Natural Ecosystem “Korab - Koritnik Natural Park”, in cross-border corporation with the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Kosovo, ensuring the coexistence and harmony of man and nature, and keeping the area as a place of living, prosperity, education and recreation for today's and future generations.”

3.1.1 Long-term management objectives

The long term objectives form the basis for the management of the Mountains Natural Ecosystem “Korab - Koritnik Natural Park” as described in this Plan.

Strengthen the protected area management system

Ensure that the protected area is managed in a correct way, involving the local stakeholders in a sustainable participatory process to contribute to the sustainable management of the area's resources maintaining a compatible equilibrium between nature conservation and human activities development.

Increase habitats and biodiversity protection and conservation

Maintain the diverse habitats of the protected area, maintain the variety of flora and fauna and the combination of aquatic and terrestrial ecosystems, ensure clear water in rivers and streams and preserve the unique natural and biological processes and life support systems.

¹² https://www.researchgate.net/publication/269573299_Korab_Koritnik_Natural_Park_Management_Plan

Develop the recreational and touristic uses

Provide for and manage recreational and cultural uses of the area, ensuring the coexistence of nature protection objectives and the development of various types of touristic activities.

Develop sustainable agriculture and socio-economic activities

Ensure environmental health, economic profitability, and social and economic equity with the nature reserve area.

Promote scientific research and education

Promote education, nature appreciation and scientific research on the biological, geophysical and cultural values of the protected areas.

Management actions	Responsible Institutions	Period/ Duration	Management zone	Indicators
Provide for the operation of low impact tourism activities which add to the recreational and educational experience of protected area users				
Identification and analysis of actual touristic visits trend in Kallabaku Lake, Vjvodja spring (Kukes) and Ilince, Serjan, Zagrad, Sllatine areas (Dibra); management of touristic visits in a correct way.	DFS and MC Tourism agencies	2014-2015/permanent	Traditional Sustainable	Tourism managed and developed in a sustainable way
Preparation of the Inter Local Plan of territorial planning and tourism development in the park area.	DFS and MC	2014-2015/12 months	All zones	Inter Local Plan prepared, and approved
Prepare a feasibility study on the possibilities for guided tours in the area. Training of internal staff in ecotourism guiding.	Tourism agencies	2014-2015/10 days (2-3)	All zones	Increased number of visitors
Ensure that tourist operations do not negatively impact on the ecological and cultural heritage values of the protected area				
Identify and record preferred places (e.g. Hoxha stable - Novosej, Bjeshka e Pobreget - Terthore, Red spring - Shtiqen - Letne Lake - Cajë); Establishment of trails, maps, guidelines printed, orientation tables and signs demarcated in the entire park area	PA staff, DFS, Communes	2014-2015/1 year	Traditional use	Preferred places, rails trail crossings inventoried, recorded in the guide maps, timetables and index field
Record the potentials of natural resources use without affecting their ecological status (e.g. natural and cultural monuments within and close to the park area.	DFS, touristic agencies	Permanent/ Permanent	all zones	Mountain tourism developed sustainably
Harmonization of cultural tourism, and eco tourism in a sound manner	DFS, touristic agencies	Permanent/ Permanent	all zones	Touristic activities harmonised
Development and promotion of mountain tourism in a sustainable way, mainly in Bjeshka e Ilince, Bjeshka e Grames, Kallabaku Lake, Vjvodja Spring,	DFS, Communes, MC	2014/Permanent During korabi claiming, ski seasons spa visitors	Traditional use	Mountain tourism developed and promoted regularly
Definition of specific camping areas in Bjeshka e Ilince, Bjeshka e Grames.	DFS, communes, MC	Permanent/ During the touristic season	Traditional use	specific camping areas defined
Provide information related recreation PA values and touristic potentials to the existing touristic information centers in Kukes and Shishtavec; Establish and provide updated information on park values for touristic information centres in Peshkopia, Radomira and Maqellara.	MRDT, DFS	Permanent/ Permanent	N.A.	Shared park information; Increased number of visitors;
Maintenance of the trails to Koritnik, Gjalica, Korabi, Korabi Field, Perroi i Lushit, Bjeshka e Grames, Rabdishti, Ilince, Poces, Kercin.	DFS, communes	Permanent/ Permanent	All zones	Trails opened permanently; increase of visitors
Establishment and maintenance of trails connecting the villages of the entire PA as Terthore Kortinik, Shtiqen Gjalice, Shishtavec Camping, Kallabaku Lake, the boundary	MoE, touristic agencies, DFS, PA	2014-2015/ Permanent	All zones	Trails established and opened; Increased cooperation/marketing among villages and

entrance Shishtavec Dragash Kosove, Valey of Luma, the alps of Shishtavec Caj, Perroi i Lushit, Korabi Field, Panairi, the water sources of Korabi and Grama lake, Gryka e Grame, Red Stone, Pelbenik, Grama Mountain, Kulla e Zyberit, Kulla e Sorokolit (The spring of King), Radomira Lake, Cerjan mountains Illica lake, Kercini Church Cross border Routes Korab Sharr (Kosovo) Korab Mavorovo NP Macedonia Routes from Peshkopia Spa (Albania) Diber - Benisht - Kosovrast Spa (Macedonia)				districts; Increased number of visitors
Identify financial supports for the touristic development of the natural ski field in the park area under Kuksi District.	DFS	2014 – 2015/permanent	N. A	Financial support potentials identified
Provide trainings to DFS, Commune staff related preparation of touristic guides, eco guides.	MoE, MoUDT, MoC, National Tourism Agency	2014 – 2015/ one year	N. A.	Number of trained persons; increase of visitors number
Preparation work for parking places construction within the protected area, especially close to touristic sites.	DFS	2014-2015/12 months	Sustainable	Improved parking and services to park visitors
Ensure that tourism is carried out in an ecologically sustainable manner				
Production and installation of information and park interpretation panels	DSF	2014-2015/12 months	All zones	Interpretation panels produced; Increased number of visitors
Establishment of signs and tables within the park area; preparation specific leaflets about the park	DFS, Communes, MC	2014 – 2015/12 month	All zones	Orientation of tourists within the park; Visitors informed about the park area
Preparation of nature guides/eco-guides suitable for different interest-groups and age-groups	DFS and Tourism agencies; Municipalities	2014-2015/12 months	N. A.	Different type of eco guides produced and distributed Increased number of visitors
Provide full inventory of natural and cultural monuments in all the territory of PA and share maps catalogues with locations and access ways.	PA staff DFS and communes	2014/1 year	All zones	Promotion material prepared and distributed

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. (GIZ, 2017) ¹³

TEM Transboundary Ecosystem Management (ORF BD Sub-project)

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 Kukes 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 Kukes, a tourist information centre should be established, which then could closely cooperate with Diber. The Tourist Information Centre in Shishtavec/Kukes 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 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.

¹³ Rau,V, Weihrauch, L (2017) 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. Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH.

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 ecotourist. 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-region⁵⁷ 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.

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.

Assessment of challenges and opportunities related to sustainable tourism in the Wider Prespa Area (CNVP,2019)¹⁴

"Tourism provides a crucial and unique way of fostering visitors' connection with protected area values, making it a potentially positive force for conservation. Visitor experiences can be transformative for an individual's personal growth and well-being, while instilling an increased sense of stewardship and support for protected area values." (Leung et al., 2018, p.xi). Therefore, tourism in PAs not only needs to be sustainable, but it also needs to be supporting nature protection. That is why ecotourism should be the recommended form of sustainable tourism in the PAs.

The principles of sustainable tourism are applicable to all forms of tourism in all types of destinations, from mass tourism to small niche markets, while ecotourism is often used to refer to smaller-scale businesses and operations (Sweeting, 2012, p.9). Ecotourism is a form of tourism that in the process also involves the local people and provides opportunity for them to achieve an income, therefore it would largely contribute to the benefit of local people. That is why ecotourism should be the recommended form of sustainable tourism also in the villages of the WPA, in or around the PAs.

The process of supporting and developing sustainable tourism in the WPA in Albania and North Macedonia should follow complementary steps to be taken in consultation with established local

¹⁴ Rantasa.B, Stavrevska-Panajotova.A, Cule.A (2019) Assessment of challenges and opportunities related to sustainable tourism in the Wider Prespa Area. CNVP- Connecting Natural Values and People Foundation.

or international travel agencies and adventure tourism guides that can transfer their experience and know-how, as well as with environmental experts and the PAs authorities.

It should follow these basic steps:

- *rising the overall, local, human capacities for tourism;*
- *creating a tourism offer; matching the offer with markets;*
- *improving the quality of infrastructure and facilities;*
- *finding new markets and matching it with new products;*
- *organizing the stakeholders to work together and prepare for each new season together.*

This would be a continuous process, where one step would gain more focus as the demand for it grows.

This should be spearheaded by few, quality, local tourism products or services that will be leaders and serve as models of sustainable tourism in the WPA; they should be gradually supported by organizations for organizing the tourism sector and the management of the destination.

Aiming to support sustainable tourism measures of existing local and WPA based strategies would contribute and complement to the development process, such as the PAs management plans, municipal tourism development strategy.

- Many of the local and adjacent residents use the PAs for recreation and they are not necessarily tourists and should be included in the vision of the sustainable tourism development. They are seen as potential drivers for the development of basic sustainable tourism activities, since they have the necessity and convenience of being in nature in the PAs of the WPA at a weekly or even daily basis.

- Development of quality, sustainable tourism offer in form of products, routes, activities, facilities and services is a basic prerequisite for sustainable tourism development of the area.

The aim would be to develop sustainable tourism offer sufficient to fulfil a minimum of three full days of stay in the WPA, across as many possible topics of interests and types of tourism, in example: adventure, gourmet, biodiversity, hiking, cycling, crafts, farming, etc.

The sustainable tourism offer should be, at best, following the tourist demand for: local and intrinsic to the WPA culture and people, quality, taken care about the safety and with cross-border nature.

- Diversification of the income of farmers and shepherders/cattle herders and helping them to start providing tourism services will lead to an increased tourism offer in the WPA.
- This is a practice that is used in the region by sustainably oriented tour operators with great success, where farmers provide food and even accommodation in their rudimentary facilities. Most traditional farming (cattle) practices are in the process of being lost, due to the labour and time dedication that it involves, making it unpopular to the younger people.
- However, these practices are of particular interest for experiential tourism activities and have the potential to bring good income.
- Though, arguably research proposes that tourism will only compensate the loss of income not made during the time of engagement with tourism (Mettepenningen et al., 2011). However, the greatest benefit of the engagement of the farmers and shepherders with tourists, is that quality of life of farmers may increase and keep them to continue the farming practices (Mettepenningen et al., 2011).
- The added benefit of this type of tourism would be the maintenance of cultural landscapes in the PAs that support reach and important biodiversity.
- Potential for such intervention exists in the lower areas of the mountains of the WPA and it should be tapped in line with the goals set out in the PAs Management Plans.

- Support to small scale, family run hospitalities in achieving eco requirements in accordance to national standards for North Macedonia (Official Gazette of the Republic of North Macedonia, 2009a) or the EU Ecolabel (EC, n.d.) in Albania.
- The needs are primarily in achieving energy efficiency, water consumption, wastewater treatment, decrease of waste and education. Many of these facilities already have practices that are close to the requirements, due to the simple fact that these practices save costs.
- Additional support is mainly needed in achieving the requirements that are otherwise not available in the place, such as: waste selection, wastewater treatment, etc.

Matching the tourism offer to markets should follow the process of the development of the offer in the WPA. This matching of markets can be focused on three steps:

- The first should be on direct marketing since it will bring local travellers and intrepid international travellers, appropriate for the early development stage that the tourism offer would be at. Direct marketing would depend on the promotion and the internet presence of each tourism provider, and their reviews on tourism platforms.
- Second, but not less important, would be to work with travel agencies that are already present in the region, such as in the Ohrid area, to attract them to Prespa. To achieve this, direct contact with the travel agencies can be made, offering sustainable tourism packages appropriate to the travellers that they have.
- Third would be the incoming travel agencies that organize multi day tours to include part, if not the whole trip, with a stop in the WPA. They would require the best possible quality of the tourism products, however it would take the longest period of time to see results sometimes years, because of the nature of the procedure preparing, packaging, marketing and selling the tours. To achieve this, package trips can be made yearly in the WPA to match travel agencies to tourism activity providers.

MSD Analysis for the Economic Development of Rural Diber¹⁵

Tourism, cross and short value chains, diversification of rural economy are new opportunity for MSD in Dibra rural economy.

- The undiscovered Dibra although neighbouring of Tirana capital, the emerging cross-border tourism with promotion of the High Scardus Trail makes tourism a new promising market for Dibra tourism and rural economy.
- Tourism and interlinkage with agriculture can be considered as an improved market access opportunity. As consequence, diversification of rural economy and short value chains will play an important dimension in the future.
- How markets can be located when agriculture can be supplier to tourism service providers and clusters an important dimension to be considered on MSD including new forms of cooperation

Sustainable rural tourism

Rural areas have a high potential for nature tourism (i.e. agritourism, mountain tourism, ecotourism, protected area tourism, outdoor activities, study tours, tourism culinary) but also for the exchange of cultures through cultural activities, conferences, and exhibitions (MICE), but which has not yet been sufficiently evaluated.

Good examples of some (cross-border) mountain tourism areas (i.e. "Balkan Peaks", "Scardus High Trail") are good practices. Demand for rural tourism products is expected to increase for some long-distance, cross-border hiking trails (e.g. "Balkan Peaks", "Scardus High Trail") in the northern and western regions and for some outdoor activities (i.e skydiving, canoeing, rafting) in the central and southern region where they have great development opportunities.

In terms of the general socio-economic infrastructure, the rural tourism infrastructure in the country should be improved in accordance with the local traditions and culture, as well as with the care for the landscape and the environment to strengthen the originality as the main point of promotion for rural tourism. Information points, museums, local markets, festivals and other tourist attractions in rural areas should be further developed, in line with the development of more diversified rural tourism products.

Strengthening rural tourism and, in particular, the agritourism value chain, also includes the demand side, such as: improving marketing at the level of individual operators/networks/communities/destinations (including digital opportunities), coordination and cooperation between operators agritourism, including branding and exploring opportunities for "Western Balkans Agritourism" as tourism promoters, topic networking and geographic clustering, including cross-border cooperation around tourist attractions, involvement of community-based organizations or promotion of tourism concepts regional of the Western Balkans.

Capacity building for rural tourism operators, according to their business types, should be strengthened to meet the growing expectations of visitors for health, safety and intact natural landscape, to support the implementation of quality and safe travel standards based on best practice guidelines applied internationally.

Support diversification of rural economy with tourism: Nature, rural, agri and culture tourism products need to be developed and then promoted in Dibra.

Priorities for the tourism support elaborated in the specific section include a range of coordinated support intervention including developing rural tourism product, developing nature tourism

¹⁵ Presentation December 2023 in Diber, L.Dervishej & I.Rembeci, MSD Analysis for the Economic Development of Rural Diber- New Perspectives Program (NP project is funded by the UK Government and implemented by Swisscontact, in consortium with TAG International)

product, providing capacity- building for all actors for understanding tourism, facilitate the connection in tourism cluster, provide training for standards, hospitality, promote local products.

Tourism at destination level needs destination management with respective structure build at the municipality.

This require planning processes with stakeholders, itineraries to be developed, interpretation programmes, capacity building for existing and new operators, accommodation, food, guiding, transport, trail infrastructure development support.

- Prioritization: developing products based on key clusters

Tourism marketing and product development should be timely aligned to adequately promote what is developed and what flux can be reasonably absorbed.

An integrated approach for conservation and sustainable use of agrobiodiversity- A case study from CABRA GIZ project in Albania (Dervishej, 2018) ¹⁶

The conservation and sustainable use of natural and agricultural biodiversity in the mountain regions of Albania is a problem that was identified by experts, institutions and has drawn the attention of international development projects and research expertise such as the Conservation of Agrobiodiversity in Rural Albania CABRA (targeting the area in the mountain regions bordering with Montenegro and Kosovo, i.e. the Albanian Alps communities (Kelmend, Shkrel, Shala, Lekbibaj and Margegaj)...

The mountainous areas have characteristics of biological and agrobiodiversity rich and possess landscape and scenery potential for tourism...Agrobiodiversity products can attract potential buyers who are interested in cultural diversity and values, novelty, health food, and environment. Recent consumer trends such as the increased demand for vegetarian and vegan food or the slow-food movement also offer options for agrobiodiversity products. Producers should focus on the unique qualities of agrobiodiversity products for which consumers might be willing to pay more...

Integration of agrotourism, gastronomic tourism, experiential tourism and direct marketing of local products can maximize the benefit for community (selling and promotion) and also the quality of tourism experience....

There is evidence that local farming systems and short chains do have a higher multiplier effect on local economies than long chains (EC- JRC, 2013). As well tourism is an economy estimated to contribute indirectly with a triple indirect impact on the economy. Furthermore, the **integrated approach of above-mentioned measures, is the best alternative for conservation and profitability** from high value, low volume and diversity products in mountain value chains where there is long distance to the market, fragile environment and marginality in the community (ICIMOD, 2010).

Therefore, even in the remote areas where there are limited agriculture volume production and distance access to traditional markets, in the areas with nature resources, with some key villages or areas that can be exploited for tourism, aligning agriculture, sustainable use of biodiversity and nature with tourism consumption can trigger a bigger economic impact in the whole region.

Albanian Alps area possess a variety of landscape and biodiversity with several typologies catering to the needs of different tourism segments, offering possibilities for the development of rural tourism, ecotourism and nature base activities (climbing, hiking, study tours, river rafting, mountain biking, fishing, trekking, etc.) The tourism villages have different profiles, and their promotion

¹⁶ Journal of Agriculture and Animal Production Science for Rural Development Vol.VIII (2) 2018 December 1, 2018

and development can be focused based on different strengths related to landscape, nature or rural offer.

Based on the above strategic evaluation and the potential of the mountainous areas, CABRA project applied an integrated conservation and use of resources model, integrating agriculture, biodiversity and tourism resources through integrating the food supply with market linkages via short chains.

Albanian Alps was considered by the project as whole destination and supported to be branded as such (Developing Albanian Alps brand), however composed by sub- destination at the nature or national park destination level (Thethi and Valbona national parks, Shkrel and Nikaj- Mertur municipal nature parks). Nature and rural tourism products and marketing were developed for thematic (i.e hiking trails, chestnut hiking trails, nature or gastronomic tours) and across the region tours or destination and attraction-based specific offers.

The results of this project with an evident increase of conservation and use of the agrobiodiversity deriving into economic benefits and the increase marketing and tourist interest for the Alps area can serve as a model for the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity and agrobiodiversity in mountain and rural areas.

Draft National Tourism Strategy for Albania 2024-2030 ¹⁷

Organising the tourism offer and destination management into regional clusters

Northern Cluster



KEY DESTINATIONS		RESOURCES & ATTRACTIONS	
1	Shkoder	- Shkodra Lake - Rozafa Castle - Shkoder Ethnographic Museum - Marubi Photographic Museum - Accursed Mountains - Lepushe Valley - Canyon of Vermosh - Theth National Park - Grunas Canyon	- Grunas Waterfall - Shala River valley - Lake Koman - Drini River - Fierza Lake - Valbona Valley National Park - Lura National Park - Korab Mountain - Gjallica Mountain
2	Tamare		
3	Kukes		
4	Peshkopi		
LEADING EXPERIENCES			
Rural retreats (agrotourism, homestays, eco-villages, organic food, farming activities, relaxation, rich agricultural and pastoral traditions...) Nature adventures & scenic encounters (picturesque landscapes, mountaineering, hiking, wildlife observation, nature walks, fishing, skiing...) Local culture immersion (traditional culinary experiences, traditional stone houses, community-based experiences...)			

¹⁷ <https://konsultimipublik.gov.al/Konsultime/Detaje/785>

PRIMARY TOURISM PRODUCTS:**NATURE**

The Inland North boasts dramatic landscapes, including rugged mountains, pristine rivers, and dense forests, providing numerous opportunities for nature enthusiasts.

Development Footholds:

- The cluster is characterized by a variety of landscapes, from the peaks of the Albanian Alps to serene river valleys and dense forests. This diversity offers visitors a wide range of scenic views and nature experiences;

ACTIVE-OUTDOOR

The diverse terrain offers numerous opportunities for outdoor activities such as mountaineering, mountain biking, camping, winter sports, hiking, and trekking. These activities allow visitors to explore the natural beauty of the area up close, with chances to engage in adventurous activities.

Development Footholds:

- The rugged terrain and natural features of the clusters lend themselves to adventure sports such as mountaineering, rock climbing, and river rafting, especially in areas like the Valbona;
- The Albanian Alps provide ample opportunities for mountaineering and climbing enthusiasts, with peaks like Jezerca Mountain, Harapi Mountain, Radohima Mountain, Gjalica Mountain, Koritniku Mountain and Mount Korab offering challenges for even the most experienced climbers;
- The rivers in the region, such as the Valbona River, offer exciting opportunities for rafting and kayaking, especially during the spring when the snowmelt increases the river flow;
- The varied terrain, from gentle hills to rugged mountain paths, provides numerous trails for mountain biking enthusiasts;
- In winter, certain parts of the cluster, particularly in Valbona, Shistavec in Kukes, and Radomirw-Mount Korab in Diber, transform into destinations for winter sports like skiing and snowboarding.

AGRITOURISM

The region's rural setting is ideal for agritourism and homestays, where visitors can stay in traditional homes or eco-villages, experiencing life in harmony with nature.

Development Footholds:

- The cluster provides the visitors with opportunities for direct engagement with farming activities, as visitors can stay in farmhouses or rural homes where they have the chance to participate in daily farming activities;
- Many agritourism farms focus on organic farming methods, allowing visitors to enjoy fresh, seasonal produce directly from the garden to the table. The famous Mrizi I Zanave agritourism model is located in the cluster, near Fishta area;

- In areas with vineyards and olive groves, visitors can participate in tastings and learn about the production processes of wine and olive oil; Among these, Kantina Arberi in Mirdita stands out not just for its exceptional wine but also for offering tourists an immersive experience that goes beyond mere tasting
- Depending on the time of year, visitors can engage in seasonal activities such as berry picking, mushroom foraging, or snowshoeing in winter, adding to the rural experience.

SECONDARY TOURISM PRODUCTS:

CULTURE



The rich cultural heritage of the region is interwoven with its natural landscape. Ancient castles, churches, and traditional villages dot the area, offering insights into the region's history and traditions.

Development Footholds:

- Combining physical activity with cultural immersion, several trails lead to remote villages where visitors can learn about traditional Albanian life, architecture, and customs;
- Shkoder Ethnographic Museum, located in a traditional Shkodran house, showcases the artisanal handicraft, mastery, and lifestyle of Shkoder through its collection of handicrafts, costumes, and crafts. It offers visitors a glimpse into the rich cultural traditions of the region, highlighting the intricate work of local artisans;
- Rozafa Castle is one of the most iconic historical landmarks in Shkoder. It offers tourists not only the chance to explore the ruins of a castle steeped in legend and history but also to enjoy breathtaking views of the city and Lake Shkodra;
- Marubi National Museum of Photography, houses an extensive collection of photographs by the Marubi dynasty, documenting Albanian history from the independence movement through to the communist era under Enver Hoxha;
- Some rural tourism initiatives offer workshops in traditional crafts such as weaving, embroidery, or wood carving, providing insight into the region's cultural heritage;
- This area of the cluster known for Albanian xhubleta, the traditional handcraft garment characterised by its undulating bell form, which is part of the UNESCO intangible cultural heritage list since 2022;
- By interacting with local communities (community-based experiences), visitors can gain a deeper understanding of rural life, traditional agriculture practices, customs and traditions, oral expressions of legends/myths/stories/tales, hospitality and the challenges faced by rural areas in Albania.

GASTRONOMY



The culinary traditions in the Inland North reflect the area's rich cultural heritage, with an emphasis on local ingredients and traditional cooking methods. Visitors can enjoy authentic dishes that are hard to find elsewhere, offering a unique taste of local life.

Development Footholds:

- The emphasis of the gastronomy in Inland North Cluster is on organic and locally sourced ingredients, reflecting the region's strong agricultural traditions;
- There is a strong potential for creating gastronomy-based activities, such as cooking classes, where visitors can learn to prepare traditional Albanian dishes using local ingredients;
- Many agritourism farms offer farm-to-table dining experiences, where guests can enjoy meals prepared with ingredients freshly harvested from the farm or sourced from local producers;
- Guided visits to local markets allow tourists to explore the vibrant food culture of the region.

5.2 Elaborating proposal for tourism product development and marketing

Some principles for tourism product development ¹⁸

Product development, whether of new products or the renewal of existing products, is the foundation of a successful tourism business.

There are two main aspects to tourism product development:

- a) It is not an isolated activity, but is part of a broader and interconnected process
- b) Market research, product development and marketing represent a continuum.

Failure in any of these key components will result in the destination not realizing its potential.

The diversity and typology of tourism product offerings is what attracts tourists to a destination.

Tourism attractions, activities, facilities and events, first and foremost, must be in line with the needs, desires and trends of the market, while simultaneously enhancing community development and engagement.

Destination operators need to know what the market likes, what potential visitors are looking for and how their preferences are changing, now and in the future. Demand is not static and is subject to a variety of influences.

The product development strategy will depend on the specific nature of the resources available: if there is a main attraction, a “flagship” product approach may be used.

On the other hand, if there is no possibility to highlight ‘focal points of attraction’ in the destination, a clustered product approach may be chosen, bringing together a number of elements to create a product offer and persuade the potential visitor to choose the destination.

To this end, the use of festivals and other events that attract visitors who would not otherwise choose the destination, or reduce seasonal imbalances in visitor movement, may be valuable.

Actors, processes and measures for tourism product development

Tourism product development involves local destination organisations/offices, local tourism services and communities, tourism operators and often the main project support.

The feasibility process for tourism product development should assess the resources needed and seek the commitment of stakeholders.

Measures for the development of the tourist product and its marketing can be divided into

hard measures - infrastructure development, investments, equipment

soft measures - training and coaching of tourism actors for the development of services and activities, development of marketing materials, organization of events, etc.

The development of the nature and rural tourism offer implies the development of interpretation and activities for tourists related to visits to farms, villages, natural areas around villages and the main services are guided tours, reception and activities on farms, food offers and sales, local transport.

¹⁸ Mountain tourism– Towards a more sustainable path, FAO,2021

Options to be considered for tourism product development

Options for Improved products:

- packaging,
- inter-regional packages,
- targeted marketing
- cooperation, networking, information
- improved distribution and promotion

Plan of activities implications

- Check for level of regional packages and offer, the variety of offer,

New products:

- integration of community into value chains,
- enhance interpretation and presentation of values,
- improvement of weak points along the chain,
- capacity building, marketing, cooperation, networking

Plan of activities implications

- check interpretation level, know-how, attractions

Product development: full-fledged product development

Key support

- Networking and cooperation, Capacity development for product development, packaging and marketing

Tourism area/destination key factors evaluation for the improvement of the existing offer

- Target market
- Key actors
- competitiveness
- Sustainability criteria
- bottlenecks
- Priorities (competitiveness, sustainability, feasibility)
- Potentials for Improved offer and interventions
- Potentials for New products-short term
- Potentials for consolidated Product development

Product development priorities and segments fitting the sustainable criteria

Preliminary, based on the consultant know-how and experience on the priority product development fitting to the territories and sustainable objectives are:

- Nature-based tourism which includes mainly adventure, hiking, nature-based excursions, eco-tourism exploring the biodiversity, nature, local culture values
- Rural tourism which can overlap and integrate with nature based-tourism including rural life and traditions, farm-based activities and accommodation, food and locally made products for consumption and sales to tourists
- Cultural tours that are combined with above nature and rural tourism activities

Product development priorities related to specifics of the inclusion of the project territories and cross-border

- Developing itineraries, products that are extending, including Alps territory with Korab Koritnik and Korab-Koritnik with Sharr Mountains and territories in Kosovo and North Macedonia are also a priority to be addressed in the product development.
- This can be developed through starting marketing and distribution mechanisms for the tourism destination promotion and information in each other respective area, enabling information for tourists to pass from one area to the other.
- The hiking trail developed products such as PoB and High Scardus Trails should be enriched with other nature-based offers and eco-tourism offers as well as with culture and rural tourism itineraries.

Target markets and segments fitting to sustainable tourism product priorities

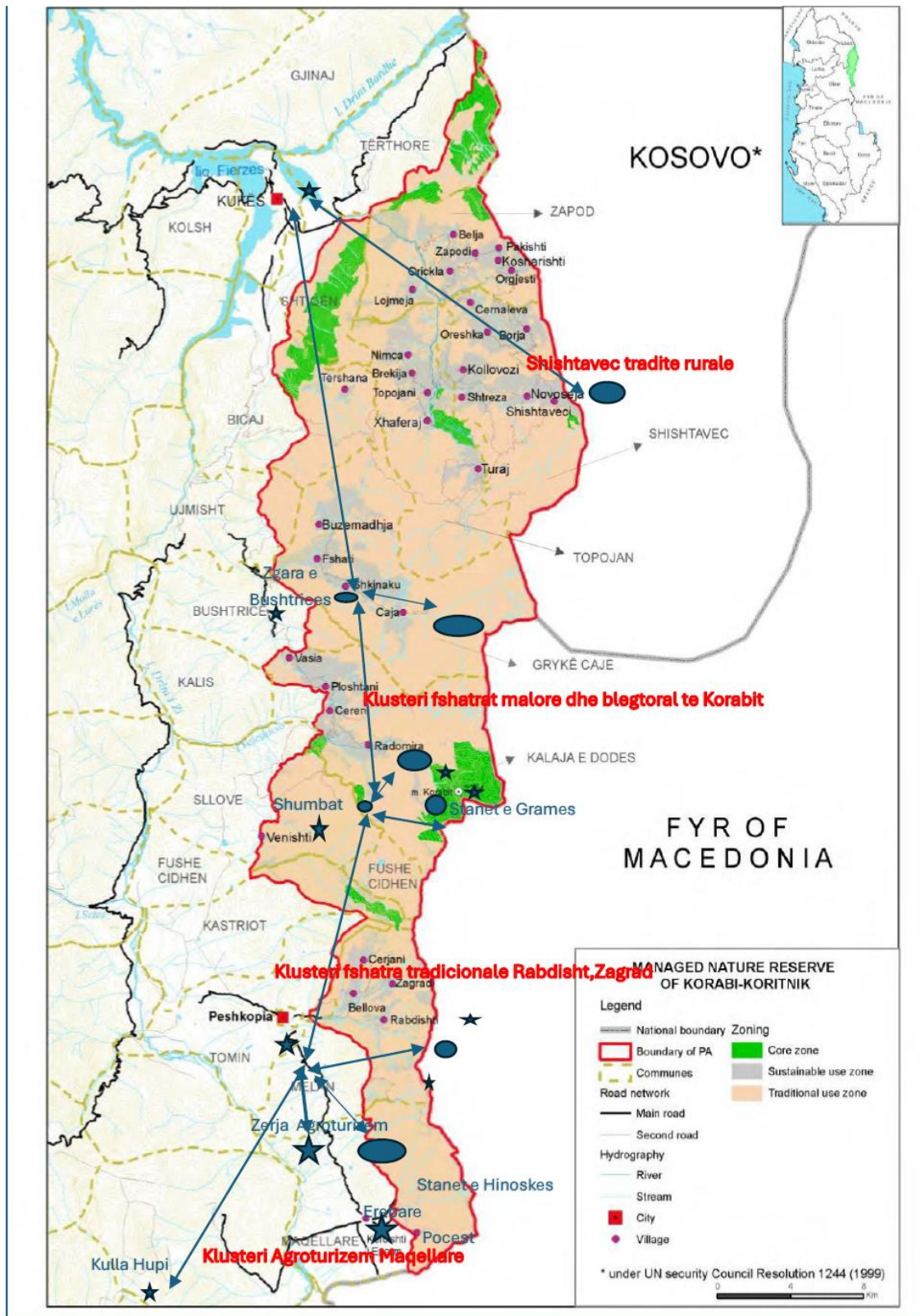
- Active nature activities are attracting more international tourists and some specific groups also in the domestic market. Peaks of Balkan and High Scardus trails are attracting these categories of adventure, hikers, bikers. These target groups need to be addressed via these cooperation platforms, via tour operators in the country and the region but also via consolidating the tourism promotional and information platforms via websites, social - media, tourism offices and the network of the tourism operators in the both regions Alps and Korab-Koritnik.
- soft- nature tourists that take moderate activities and excursions in the nature areas are potential target market at both overall international tourists and domestic tourists that are interested to explore different destinations. Here, local guiding or orientation, product promotion and awareness avoiding attracting massive tourists are important.
- Eco-tourists at both hard and soft categories would be a long-term priority. Starting with soft-ecotourists- those that what to enjoy at a moderate depth the nature and local traditions, which are showing interests and have a certain level of consciousness and responsibility for the environment. The international tourists are a segment from those visiting the protected areas and are interested in more information and interpretation. Here the interpretation offer for nature and rural tourism is important and the local capacities of the guides are to be built before addressing them via both tour operators or the other promotional and distribution channels mentioned above.
- Domestic tourists attracted by culture, agro-tourism, rural tourism are important also for their potentials for activating the short-chains of selling local products: whereas international tourists can consume in-situ but they cannot take-aways food products, the domestic tourists are an important buyer for in-situ buying either at farm gate, local shops and markets and therefore are contributing to the rural economy of the area.

Nature and Rural tourism product development process for the 3 areas: Dibra, Shishtavec-Kukes, Theth-Albanian Alps

After a feasibility evaluation for focusing on tourism product development for the areas of Korab-Koritnik and Albanian Alps, the Dibra villages along Korab-Koritnik, Shishtavec-Kukes, Theth-Albanian Alps were selected for further nature and rural tourism product development.

Priorities for nature and rural tourism product development in Dibra villages along Korab-Koritnik, Shishtavec-Kukes, Theth-Albanian Alps

	Diber	Kukes	Theth
Product development	Enrich the tourism offer of Dibra with packaging nature-culture-rural offer of the municipality	Enrich the tourism offer of Kukes with packaging nature-culture-rural offer of the municipality	Developing Theth rural tourism offer through developing a package of rural, culture and nature interpretation tourism activities around the villages in Theth, Nderlyse, Shale
	Enrich Dibra tourism offer through cross-border packaging with Dibra e Madhe and Rostushe in North Macedonia		Integrate and promote the offers of other protected areas as Korab-Koritnik for adventure and nature tourism to reduce the overtourism flow in Albanian Alps
	Enrich Dibra tourism offer through packaging nature and rural tourism with Bulqize and Kukes	Enrich Kukes tourism offer through packaging nature and rural tourism with Dibra	
	Develop Dibra destination nature and rural tourism offer creating a critical mass of local village destinations offers	Develop Kukes destination rural tourism offer creating a critical mass of local village destinations offers	
	creating a critical mass of local village destinations offers through developing a package of rural and nature tourism activities around a village or clusters of villages	creating a critical mass of local village destinations offers through developing a package of rural and nature tourism activities around a village or clusters of villages	
marketing	Developing a branding of the destinations with sub-branding of local village clusters for nature and rural tourism product offer.		
	Develop the offer packages in electronic and printed leaflets available in tourism offices in the tourism offices and relevant guest houses of the area		
	Through cooperation and the marketing of tourism offices in Diber, Kukes, Theth make available the information on the offers and their promotion to tourists and tour operators in destinations and in the potential entry points to regional destination i.e in Kukes for Dibra and vice versa		
	Establish the cooperation and networking of the local tourism guides, local farms/tourism businesses and the tourism information office for improving referrals for reservation and for information to the guests and tour operators		
	The tourism offices should be assisted to organize targeted periodic information, newsletters and promotions to targeted tour operators		
	Develop and promote a annual calendar of local events suitable for tourist participation accompanied with a calendar of rural activities where tourists can participate according to months/seasons		



Propozim per organizimin e ofertes se turizmit natyror e rural te zones Korab-Koritnik
ne klustera territoriale



Ferma potenciale per turizmin rural



Destinacione lokale per turizmin rural



Propozim për organizmin e ofertës së turizmit rural në Theth-Shalë

The principles and the approach followed for the nature and rural tourism product development in Dibra, Shishtavec-Kukes, Theth-Albanian Alps

- Tourism product includes in its core the tourism offers of an area/destination as a marketable package, accessible and available to tourists of the tourist attractions, tourist activities, tourism related events, tourism services (accommodation, food offer, transport, guiding etc), community hospitality infrastructure for accessing and enjoying the attractions and destinations as well as other support measures.
- The tourism product is packaged, branded and themed according to the main product activity features, differentiated, identifiable, and appealing by the target markets.
- The tourism product is marketable when the information and the offer available for reservation and visits of the tourists is communicated and available to them via tourism offices, tour operators, local travel agencies, tour operators, local guides or local businesses.
- Developing the tourism product means to develop, improve, create new tourism activities, improve accessing of the new attractions and supply with the relevant tourism needed services and infrastructure.
- Seldom, the tourism product development of an area can be achieved targeting the development of one tourism activity alone, one infrastructure intervention or support for a

new business alone, unless the quality of the offer of the business or the role in the tourism product chain (especially when there is a missing link in the chain) is crucial.

- Therefore, developing of the tourism product means developing a package of the measures related to the development and then to the packaging and marketing of the new or improved tourism services and activities in the destination.
- Creating or developing new or improved products in effective and efficient way is to look for the combination of the minimum measures that can achieve a visible improvement in terms of the marketing or appeal to the customers, of the potential for the outreach of new customers, an increase of quality of the offer, or an increase of community integration and benefits from the offer.
- The development of tourism product involves local destination organisations/offices, local tourism services and communities, tour operators and often the key support of the projects.
- The feasibility process for developing the tourism product needs to evaluate the needed resources and seek engagements and commitment of the stakeholders.
- The measures for tourism product development and its marketing can be divided into hard measures- infrastructure development, investment, equipment and soft measures- training and coaching to tourism actors for developing the services and activities, developing marketing materials, organising events etc.

Priorities and activities for developing nature and rural tourism offer of Korab-Koritnik area

- Developing nature and rural tourism offer means developing interpretation and activities for tourists associated with visits in farms, villages, nature areas around villages and key services are guided tours, welcoming and activity in farms, food offer and sales, local transport.
- Designing a themed nature and rural tourism offer identifying cluster villages where tourism activities are already started or with high potential where core new nature and rural activities can be integrated
- A themed nature and rural tourism offer identifying cluster villages in Dibra – Rabdisht, Zagrad, Radomire, Grame, Melan, Erebare, Kukes- Caje, Shishtavec and Alpe- Theth
- Identifying around each cluster villages 2-3 farms, local guides, families that can be integrated with their activities into interpretation, demonstration of the authentic nature, culture and rural values and rural activities
- Identify key actors needed in the product development chain and its marketing: tourism office, local tourism guide, community farms
- Consult, get informed on the situation and needs, exchange, test the ideas, raise awareness and inform the targeted community members for the benefits and requirements for integration into offering welcoming and their local experiences and lifestyles to tourists
- The activities can take a daily package in a village or cluster villages and the accommodation can be offered either in the cluster or in the nearby destinations (i.e daily activities in Zagrad-Rabdisht and then accommodation in Diber).This is important to be highlighted because the product development may not require necessarily accommodation development at the first glance, thus the needs for investments and grants sizes are reduced comparing to typical tourism product development support practiced measures.
- Design the action plan for developing the product
- Identifying key points for a fam tour package and identifying tour operators to be invited in fam tour to show case the tourism offer potential
- Organize a fam tour for tour operators
- Organize a training and agree with the key actors for developing tourism product action plan-principles, steps, roles, needs for cooperation
- Support following up of the actions of the key actors for developing tourism product action plan
- Identify the needs for additional infrastructure or services needed in the supply chain
- Implement grant measures and support small-scale infrastructure or equipment

- In cooperation with local actors develop overall nature, culture, rural interpretation themes and narratives for the targeted area
- In cooperation with local actors develop an annual calendar of local events and an annual calendar of rural life activities (i.e cultivation, harvesting processing etc of specific crops, fruits etc).
- Support local actors to implement and pilot specific events
- Coaching local tourism guides to interpret the nature and rural values of the areas/villages
- Coaching and networking the community members within villages and within the product packages developed for a coordinated offer
- Coaching the local stakeholders for destination management and visitor management in protected areas
- Support the local stakeholders with packaging and marketing of the new tourism offer
- Coaching the community members for developing a welcoming program to their farm, activity, family, developing the narrative, developing a service package and costing
- Identify other community members that can offer additional services such as food offer, farmgate selling of products and identify the needs for selling infrastructure, packaging and labelling
- Developing nature and rural tourism offer requires engaging in more soft measures for training, networking, awareness and minimum infrastructure or equipment investments which can be delivered via small grants, therefore is feasible, suitable and manageable within CNVP short- and medium-term project interventions.

6. Preparing and organising a fam-tour with tour operators in Korab-Koritnik area

The objective of the fam-tour to promote the tourism offer in the Korab-Koritnik areas (21-23 October) was the presentation to national tour operators of the tourism offer in the Korab-Koritnik protected areas, with a focus on promoting the nature-culture-rural experience tourism offer and exploring opportunities for cooperation between tour operators and service providers for the construction of tourist packages.

Fam-tour creates opportunities for tour operators to better explore in the field aspects of attractiveness, quality and logistics organization in visits to attractions and the organization of possible activities for tourists, evaluation of alternatives for organizing and packaging the offer, opportunities to evaluate tourist services in the field (quality, reservations, costs, collaborations) and to communicate directly with service providers.

Also, this activity is valid for discussing with local actors for product and offer improvements from the point of view and needs of tour operators.

6.1 Organization of the fam-tour 21-23 October 2024

The tour participants (about 12 pax) are a group composed of representatives of tour operators that focus on nature tourism, cultural tourism, special experience tourism, representatives of the two tourism offices of Diber and Kukes, local guides of the Diber-Kukes areas, tourism consultant and representatives from the CNVP organization.

The combination of the composition of the tour participant group with the program of visits and contacts with service providers includes in total a representation of the different actors of the tourist offer chain and creates the opportunity for the necessary interactions and collaborations for the construction of future tourist packages for the development and promotion of the tourist offer of the Korab-Koritnik area.

The fam-tour program is built on the organization of an itinerary that includes the regional offer of the Korab-Koritnik protected areas, visiting a series of villages that constitute the main destinations of the Diber area around the destination center of the Peshkopi area and the Diber-Kukes area.

In the visits to the main villages/destinations of the program, the opportunity is created for participants to get to know the potential offer of nature and rural tourism in these villages and to visit and contact service providers. Field visits are combined to explore short nature visits (up to 60 minutes), village visits, farm visits and demonstrations of rural activities of interest for the construction of the tourist offer as well as various accommodation and food services to assess the capacities of the services and possible collaborations.

Participants:

- | | |
|----------------------------|------------------------------|
| 1. Shkodra Travel | - Brian Mlika |
| 2. Inn tours | - Ervin Lani |
| 3. Sondor Travel | - Dorien Malaj |
| 4. Albania My trip | - Eni Koci |
| 5. Zyra e turizmit Kukes | - Besnik Halilaj |
| 6,7. Zyra e turizmit Diber | - Jeta Kaba, Elvira Murrja |
| 8. Guide lokale | - Vadimir Marku |
| 9,10. CNVP | - Hamit Salkurti, Durim Kaba |
| 11. Eksperti I turizmit | - Luan Dervishej |
| 12. Zebi travel | |

The transport was carried out by Zebi Travel, a tourist transport provider in Diber who also, as an actor in the chain of service providers, participated in discussions on the provision of tourist packages in the region.

6.2 Fam tour feedback

The interests of tour operators were confirmed for going ahead with developing offers for the area with focus on :

- Organization of nature walking tours
- Organization of combined nature-rural-culture tours
- Organization of tours and time variation for the Dibra area (from 1-2 to several days)
- Organization of Dibra-Kukes tours
- Interest in organizing cross-border tours

All participants and service providers contacted during the trip confirmed the interest for developing tourism products and shared common understanding of the priorities for product development, expressing the willingness for cooperation.

The consultant confirms that the completion of the tour has achieved the objectives foreseen for addressing the participating tourism actors in the tour and confirms the testing of market interest for the anticipated product developments, marketing and the need for capacity building drafted in the possible development plan for the nature tourism product for the Korab-Koritnik area.

Further information on fam-tour agenda, implementation and feedback is included in the respective annex on the fam-tour report.

7. Capacity-building activities during the consultancy mission

The consultant expertise delivery was delivered as a combination of the following elements

- Analysis
- Planning
- Networking
- Capacity building
- Advice on Organisational development

7.1 Exchange and coaching of the local stakeholders during the field trips

Through individual meetings with around 20 members in 3 communities, during 4 field trips, the consultant was informed on the tourism product situation and needs, exchanged, tested the ideas, raised awareness, informed and coached the targeted community members for the benefits and requirements for integration into tourism offer and product development steps.

The stakeholders shared a common understanding towards the path for tourism product development, and willingness to cooperate for further steps. During the visits, along the established service providers from the community in Peshkopi, Rabdisht, Radomire, Grame, Shumbat, Theth also the community members from Erebara , Zagrad, Shishtavec , Nderlyse and the tourism guides expressed their interest and the willingness to work on the proposed improvement of products and for their integration into the tourism value chains. The representative of the tourism offices from Peshkopi and Kukes were highly interested to pursue the tourism product development ideas and processes discussed during the field trips.

7.2 Coaching and facilitation of the network among tour operators and local stakeholders during the fam-tour

Also, the 3 days organised fam-tour (21-23 October), was developed as a travelling workshop with interaction and exchange on the route of information, experiences and building future collaborations between actors: tour operators with local service providers, tourism offices of

Kukes and Dibra for the promotion of a regional offer, creating a common understanding for improving the tourist offer, the needs for special services, for community integration, for collaborations in the development of nature and rural tourism products, for the integration of Kukes-Diber or cross-border offers, for the importance and opportunities offered by the demonstration of rural activities and the integration of tourists in these activities, the needs for the development of an annual calendar of rural activities of interest to tourists and their timely promotion, the need for a proactive activation of tourism offices in recognizing the situation on the ground and in the development and marketing of new offers, in their cooperation with tour operators, in the development and mediation of other fam-tours with tour operators, in collecting and providing information on local services and guides in the area for both tourists and tour operators.

7.3 Training workshop with stakeholders

A training workshop was held in Tirana with tour operators, tourist information offices and tourism service providers from targeted areas which participated in the fam-tour.

The participants interactively confirmed that the fam-tour was developed in the right path toward tourism product development in the Korab-Koritnik area. They expressed their interest into further cooperation for developing the tourism offer for the area, providing insights into the needs of the stakeholders and the destination tourism development.

"Advancing Sustainable Tourism: Strategic Planning Workshop for Korab-Koritnik and Albanian Alps" November 20, 2024, Venue: CNVP Office, Tirana

CNVP is organizing a workshop following a recent Familiarization Tour in the Korab-Koritnik and Albanian Alps National Parks, where stakeholders explored the region's tourism potential. The workshop will gather tour operators, tourist information offices and tourism service providers from targeted areas, to leverage insights from the tour. Together, participants will review current offerings, share reflections, and draft a roadmap for promoting Korab-Koritnik and the Albanian Alps as attractive, cohesive destinations. This collaborative effort aims to drive sustainable tourism, regional growth, and community benefits.

Time	Session	Presenter/Facilitator
10:00 - 10:15 AM	Registration and Opening Remarks	CNVP Representative
	<i>Welcome participants, introduce workshop goals, and provide a brief overview of CNVP's role in promoting sustainable tourism development.</i>	
10:15 - 11:15 AM	Session 1: Evaluation of the Current Development and Potential of Tourism Products - Reflections from the Familiarization Tour	Tourism Consultant
	<i>Presentation on the current state of tourism products in national parks, challenges, market potential, and areas for sustainable growth.</i>	
	Q&A: Open discussion on the findings, facilitated by CNVP representative	CNVP Advisor
11:15 - 11:30 AM	Coffee Break and Networking	
11:30 AM - 12:30 PM	Session 2: Discussing on the Sustainable Tourism Product Development / Future cooperation	CNVP Advisor and/or Consultant

Time	Session	Presenter/Facilitator
	<i>Focusing on requirements for sustainable tourism development, focusing on product positioning, and partnerships. Reference National Strategy</i>	
12:30 - 13:00	Closing Remarks and Next Steps	CNVP Representative
	Lunch and Networking Opportunity	

The workshop presentation is attached in the respective annex.

7.4 Presentation in Regional Conference on Sustainable Use of Natural Resources in Shara, Korab Koritnik and the Albanian Alps

A presentation on “Nature-Based Tourism – Challenges and Solutions” was prepared and presented in a panel discussion during the Regional Conference on Sustainable Use of Natural Resources in Shara, Korab Koritnik and the Albanian Alps, held 14-15 November 2024 in Mavrovo organised by the CNVP.

Agenda

Regional Conference on Sustainable Use of Natural Resources in Shara, Korab Koritnik and the Albanian Alps

Dates (14 and 15 November) Location: Hotel “Lakeview – Mavrovo”

Project: "Sustainable use of natural resources in Shar, Korab Koritnik and the Albanian Alps"

First day – 14 November, the first day of the conference will be dedicated to nature-based tourism.

Panel discussion No. 114.15pm – 15.45pm

Title: “Nature-Based Tourism – Challenges and Solutions”

Igor Madzhov–Startup Macedonia, North Macedonia

Official Representative from the Ministry of Culture and Tourism, North Macedonia (TBC)

Anna Labor – Rural Woman of Prespa, North Macedonia

Luan Dervishej – consultant for tourism development, Albania

Astrit Metaliaj - ALPIN local NGO in Albanian Alps, Albania

The presentation is attached in the respective annex.

8. Recommendations

8.1 Challenges, opportunities and support measures for sustainable tourism development in the project area

The main challenge for sustainable development in the mountainous and rural areas of Korab-Koritnik and Albanian Alps is the rate of migration and depopulation in the rural and mountainous areas and especially of young people in Korab-Koritnik threatening the sustainable development of the area in all three dimensions: social, economic and environment.

Some key challenges identified are:

- Social - depopulation in rural areas
- Environmental - lack of management and sustainability
- Economic - lack of an integrated and sustainable economy that links agriculture with tourism
- Tourism management- lack of destination management, lack of visitor management, lack of interpretation of natural and rural values

Opportunities: Sustainable tourism development

Integrating the communities and young people into tourism value chains and services is one of few and last opportunities to reduce the depopulation in the mountainous areas and create social and economic attraction to the local population to continue the livelihood in their communities.

Opportunities and potential measures for developing nature tourism products in the areas of Korab-Koritnik and Alps

- Product development and segment attraction in line with sustainable tourism - nature and rural tourism product development
- Nature and rural tourism activities that activate the interaction of tourists with the rural community and their activities, raise their awareness and education about the nature and rural values of the area, increase the opportunities for selling agricultural products at the farm gate (especially for the domestic tourism market) thus integrating those farmers who are providers of tourism services into the tourism value chains.
- Inland rural areas such as the Alps, Korabi, Lura, Prespa are territories where the rural population can benefit more from the nature and rural tourism supply chains and its activities.
- The Draft Albanian Tourism Development Strategy has prioritized these tourist activities for the tourist group of northern Albania which includes both the Alps and the Korab-Koritnik area.
- There is a market need and a need for regional destination management to expand hiking and adventure flows from the Alps to Korab-Koritnik
- There is another opportunity to market and differentiate the tourist market the new entry destinations of Dibra and Kukes for nature and rural tourism where especially rural tourism can add value and differentiate the destination
- Dibra as well as Shishtavec are known for their supply of rural agricultural products at the national level, while there are also cultural and historical traditions referred to in those areas
- Also, the main selling proposition of the Albanian tourist offer for the international market and the most sought-after features of the Albanian tourist offer by international visitors are the diversity of the nature and cultural offer and its originality, hospitality and traditions.

- The nature and rural activities are expressed as a core interest along the hiking and adventure in both sets of surveys organized by CNVP and PKST Alpe with tourists in the respective Korab-Koritnik and Alps areas.
- The nature and culture tourists' segments starting from soft towards dedicated tourists' segments are the target market that fits the criteria. Further contributions and interests in buying agricultural products from more mass oriented tourism segments are also to be considered. Developing the tourism product means to develop, improve, create new tourism activities, improve accessing of the new attractions and supply with the relevant tourism needed services and infrastructure.
- Seldom, the tourism product development of an area can be achieved targeting the development of one tourism activity alone, one infrastructure intervention or support for a new business alone, unless the quality of the offer of the business or the role in the tourism product chain (especially when there is a missing link in the chain) is crucial.
- Therefore, developing of the tourism product means developing a package of the measures related to the development and then to the packaging and marketing of the new or improved tourism services and activities in the destination.
- The development of tourism product involves local destination organisations/offices, local tourism services and communities, tour operators and often the key support of the projects.
- The measures for tourism product development and its marketing can be divided into hard measures- infrastructure development, investment, equipment and soft measures- training and coaching to tourism actors for developing the services and activities, developing marketing materials, organising events etc
- Development of the natural and rural tourism offer of the destination of Dibra, Kukës, Theth needs to start by creating a critical mass of offers through the development of a package of rural and natural tourism activities around a village or group of villages.
- Enrichment of the tourist offer of Dibra should be developed also through cross-border packages with Dibra e Madhe and Rostuša in North Macedonia and regional ones with Kukës.
- Development of the offer for nature and rural tourism means the development of interpretation and experiences for tourists related to visits to farms, villages, natural areas around the villages and the main services are guided tours, reception and activities on farms, food offers and sales, local transport.
- Activities can take the form of a day or 2 days package in a village or cluster of villages and accommodation can be provided either in the cluster or in nearby destinations (i.e. day activities in Zagrad-Rabdisht and then accommodation in Dibër).

The organised Fam-tour confirmed the needs for:

- community integration into tourism value -chains
- cooperation in the development of nature and rural tourism products
- the integration of Kukes-Diber and cross-border tourist itineraries in the tourist offer of the Korab-Koritnik area
- the importance and opportunities offered by the demonstration of rural activities and the integration of tourists in these activities
- the development of the annual calendar of rural activities of interest to tourists and their timely promotion
- the need for proactive activation of tourism offices in recognizing the situation on the ground and in the development and marketing of new offers, in their cooperation with tour operators in the development and mediation of other fam tours with tour operators, in the collection and provision of information on local services and guides in the area for both tourists and tour operators.

Developing the nature and rural tourism offer requires engagement in softer measures for training, networking, awareness raising and minimal investment in infrastructure or equipment which can

be provided through small grants, therefore it is feasible, appropriate and manageable within the short and medium term CNVP project interventions.

The needed support measures for sustainable tourism development on the benefit of communities living in and around protected areas of Korab-Koritnik and Alps-Theth can be structured under the key packages:

- Support for destination management: collaboration, planning, product development, marketing
- Support for the development of short supply chains (farm sales, fairs, in the village, in tourist units, etc.).
- Support for the development and marketing of nature and rural products
- Support with a combination of soft and financial measures – capacity building, grants, interpretation and information infrastructure, etc.

8.2 A draft action plan with key measures developing nature and rural tourism offer in Diber, Kukes and Theth

	The action plan steps	Results until now	Soft measure	Hard measure
0	Develop a strategic analysis and concept for destination product development for the targeted area	a strategic analysis and concept for destination product development for the targeted area completed	expertise	
1	Designing a themed nature and rural tourism offer identifying cluster villages where tourism activities are already started or with high potential where core new nature and rural activities can be integrated	A themed nature and rural tourism offer identifying cluster villages in Dibra – Rabdisht, Zagrad, Radomire, Grame, Melan, Erebare, Kukes- Caje, Shishtavec and Alpe- Theth	Expertise, consultation with stakeholders, awareness and information to the stakeholders	
2	Identifying around each cluster villages 2-3 farms, local guides, families that can be integrated with their activities into interpretation, demonstration of the authentic nature, culture and rural values and rural activities	Identified around each cluster villages 2-3 farms, local guides, families that can be integrated with their activities into interpretation, demonstration of the authentic nature, culture and rural values and rural activities	Current Expertise missions	
3	Identify key actors needed in the product development chain and its marketing: tourism office, local tourism guide, community farms	Identified and contacted key actors needed in the product development chain and its marketing	Current Expertise missions	
4	Consult, get informed on the situation and needs, exchange, test the ideas, raise awareness and inform the targeted community members for the benefits and requirements for integration into offering welcoming and their local experiences and lifestyles to tourists	Through individual meetings with around 20 members in 3 communities, consulted, informed on the situation and needs, exchanged, tested the ideas, raised awareness and inform the targeted community members for the benefits and requirements for integration into tourism offer and product development steps	Current Expertise sessions, exchanged, tested the ideas, raised awareness and inform the targeted community members	
5	Design the action plan for developing the product	Drafted	Current expertise	
6	Identifying key points for a fam tour package and identifying tour operators to be invited in fam tour to show case the tourism offer potential	Drafted	Current Expertise	
7	Organize a fam tour for tour operators	Implemented	Current Expertise	
8	Organize a training and agree with the key actors for developing tourism product action plan- principles, steps, roles, needs for cooperation	Implemented	Current Expertise	
	Support following up of the actions of the key actors for developing tourism product action plan		Required future expertise tasks	
Future required steps to complete product development and marketing				

9	Coaching the community members for developing a welcoming program to their farm, activity, family, developing the narrative, developing a service package and costing		Required future expertise tasks	
10	Identify other community members that can offer additional services such as food offer, farmgate selling of products and identify the needs for selling infrastructure, packaging and labelling		Required future expertise tasks	
11	Identify other youth community members that can be engaged as local village tourism guides		Required future expertise tasks	
12	Identify the needs and coaching the community members for the for welcoming, interpretation, selling products infrastructure and marketing instruments needs– identify potential for grants to individuals and explore synergies with other actors for infrastructure measures		Required future expertise tasks	
13	Identify the needs for additional infrastructure or services needed in the supply chain		Required future expertise tasks	
14	Implement grant measures and support small-scale infrastructure or equipment			Implement grant measures and small-scale infrastructure
15	In cooperation with local actors develop overall nature, culture, rural interpretation themes and narratives for the targeted area		Required future expertise tasks	
16	In cooperation with local actors develop an annual calendar of local events and an annual calendar or rural life activities (i.e cultivation, harvesting processing etc of specific crops, fruits etc).		Required future expertise tasks	
17	Support local actors to implement and pilot specific events			Implement grant measures and small-scale infrastructure
18	Coaching local tourism guides to interpret the nature and rural values of the areas/villages		Required future expertise tasks	
19	Coaching and networking the community members within villages and within the product packages developed for a coordinated offer		Required future expertise tasks	
20	Coaching the local stakeholders for destination management and visitor management in protected areas		Required future expertise tasks	
21	Support the local stakeholders with packaging and marketing of the new tourism offer		Required future expertise tasks	Financial support for activity
22	Organize a fam tour for tour operators and journalists		Required future expertise tasks	Financial support for activity
Additional interrelated activities for supporting rural tourism				
23	Additional package of interrelated activities with rural tourism are those		Expertise	

	related to the packaging, labelling and branding of local agriculture products and artisanal processing			Financing, grants, infrastructure
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- <https://visitdiber.com/>
- <https://visitkukes.com/>