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The Importance of Rural Tourism Development in Kosovo and Its Prospects for the Future: Case Study — Jezerc Village

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Abstract

Rural tourism has emerged as a key strategy for sustainable development in underdeveloped regions, offering vital opportunities for economic and social revitalization. This study examines the impact and prospects of rural tourism in Jezerc village, Kosovo, using a mixed-methods approach that integrates both quantitative and qualitative data. Quantitative analysis of survey responses from 120 residents and 72 tourists reveals that 57% of residents believe tourism increases household income, while 62% see it as a means of preserving local traditions. However, only 21% report sufficient institutional support, and 74% call for stronger promotion efforts. The findings also show that tourists are primarily drawn to the natural environment (72%) and to peace and relaxation (61%), but express dissatisfaction with infrastructure, particularly signage and roads. A Chi-square test confirmed significant differences in stakeholder views on tourism development strategies ($p < 0.001$), underscoring the need for inclusive planning. While rural tourism's general benefits, such as job creation, income diversification, and infrastructure improvement, are well known, this study provides new insights by highlighting the disconnect between community potential and institutional support, and by revealing specific demographic and perceptual trends among domestic tourists. The research concludes by advocating for policy frameworks that prioritize local engagement, targeted investment, and strategic promotion to ensure the sustainable and inclusive development of rural tourism in Kosovo.

Keywords: Tourism; Sustainability; Development; Community; Infrastructure; Kosovo

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1. Introduction

Tourism has increasingly become a central pillar of social and economic activity, driven by a growing desire among individuals to escape urban routines and reconnect with nature, culture, and tranquility. Within this broader trend, rural tourism has gained recognition as a sustainable alternative to mass tourism, offering visitors immersive experiences rooted in ecologically preserved environments, traditional lifestyles, and community-based hospitality.

In Kosovo, rural tourism remains underdeveloped despite its significant potential. The village of Jezerc, located in the municipality of Ferizaj, is emblematic of this opportunity. With its mountainous landscapes, traditional cuisine, agricultural terrain, and unexplored natural features such as caves and springs, Jezerc presents a compelling case for rural tourism development^[1]. However, limitations such as inadequate infrastructure, low investment, and limited institutional coordination continue to hinder progress.

This study offers both theoretical and practical contributions. On a scholarly level, it adds to the limited body of empirical research on rural tourism in Kosovo by providing a localized, data-driven case study. Unlike general claims found in existing literature that tourism generates employment and improves infrastructure, this research provides specific insights into how those outcomes are shaped (or restricted) by local institutional dynamics, community readiness, and seasonal variation. Practically, the findings are intended to support local policymakers, tourism planners, and community stakeholders in designing targeted, sustainable strategies.

The objective of this research is to assess the tourism potential of Jezerc and evaluate stakeholder perspectives on the opportunities and challenges involved in developing a sustainable rural tourism model. Specifically, it identifies the strengths of Jezerc's tourism offering, investigates motivations and barriers in family-based tourism, and explores how residents and tourists perceive tourism's current and future role in the region.

Two research questions guide this investigation: (1) Are there significant differences in stakeholder perspectives on how rural tourism should be developed in Kosovo? and (2) Do stakeholders differ in their perceptions of the motivations and direction of rural tourism in Jezerc? These questions are tested through the following hypotheses:

ses:

H1. *Stakeholder perspectives vary regarding how rural tourism should be developed in Kosovo.*

H2. *Stakeholders perceive meaningful differences in the motivations and orientation of rural tourism development in Jezerc.*

By addressing these questions through a mixed-methods approach, this study provides grounded insights into how a high-potential rural destination like Jezerc can transition from untapped potential to sustainable tourism success.

2. Literature Review

Rural tourism, broadly defined as tourism activity occurring in non-urbanized areas and linked to the rural lifestyle, natural landscapes, and agricultural heritage, has deep historical roots, especially in Western Europe. Early forms included seasonal retreats, religious pilgrimages, and visits to thermal baths, all of which reflect the longstanding tradition of seeking renewal in natural settings^[2]. Over time, rural tourism has evolved into a multifaceted sector that caters to modern travelers seeking authenticity, environmental sustainability, and personal enrichment^[2].

Unlike mass tourism, rural tourism attracts visitors motivated by culture, ecology, and wellness, offering benefits such as local job creation, cultural preservation, and environmental stewardship. It is considered a response to urban fatigue and mass-tourism saturation^[3]. The World Tourism Organization (2021) characterizes rural tourism as involving experiences centered around agriculture, landscape, heritage, and traditional livelihoods^[4]. This aligns with recent global trends emphasizing slow tourism, nature-based recreation, and the post-pandemic recovery of remote destinations^[5].

The definition of "rural" varies significantly across countries. Roberts and Hall (2001) argue that cultural, functional, and policy contexts shape the term^[6]. While some define rural areas by population density or land use, others emphasize remoteness and cultural distinctiveness. World Tourism Organization (2021) suggests that the concept of a village, central to rural tourism, is best understood in contrast to the urban: a smaller, less-industrialized space rooted

in local traditions and interpersonal relationships^[7].

Economically, rural tourism is frequently positioned as a development tool, especially in regions facing agricultural decline and youth outmigration. It has been shown to stimulate employment, diversify income, and attract investment^[7,8]. However, it can also lead to seasonal employment, low wages, and an overreliance on tourism, limiting long-term resilience^[9]. Therefore, infrastructure, governance, and education play a vital role in determining its effectiveness^[10].

Environmentally, rural tourism is often linked to conservation efforts. It encourages preservation of biodiversity and traditional land management practices. However, if mismanaged, it may contribute to habitat degradation, overuse of trails, and pollution from increased transportation^[11]. In Kosovo, where mountainous ecosystems and forested landscapes dominate, unregulated tourism development could worsen land degradation and threaten biodiversity^[12].

Socially, rural tourism has the potential to revitalize community pride, protect intangible heritage, and empower marginalized groups, particularly women through small tourism businesses^[13]. However, scholars caution that it can also lead to cultural commodification, rising property prices, and local resentment when benefits are unequally distributed^[9]. Inclusive governance is thus critical.

In Kosovo, rural tourism remains underdeveloped de-

spite its potential. The country offers a diverse landscape, from the Sharr Mountains in the south to the Accursed Mountains in the west, alongside cultural sites and rural traditions. Villages like Jezerc, Brod (in Dragash), and Prevala (in Prizren) all share key features: scenic beauty, historical architecture, and community-based hospitality. However, their trajectories differ. Brod has capitalized on its Gorani identity to attract domestic tourists, while Prevala struggles with unregulated seasonal growth. Jezerc, in contrast, presents untapped potential due to its proximity to Ferizaj and lack of tourist saturation, making it a valuable case study.

Despite these assets, Kosovo lacks a dedicated tourism ministry and national tourism strategy. The sector is managed within the Ministry of Industry, Entrepreneurship, and Trade, which has limited resources and an insufficient institutional focus^[13]. Most tourism initiatives remain private or donor-funded, resulting in fragmented and short-term outcomes^[14].

As depicted in **Figure 1**, Kosovo is situated in South-eastern Europe, covering a territory of approximately 10,900 km² with an average elevation of 800 meters. The country's diverse topography includes notable features such as Gjeravica Peak (2,656 m) and the Drin River valley (297 m), alongside deep canyons, gorges, and caves, natural formations that hold significant appeal for adventure and eco-tourists^[15].

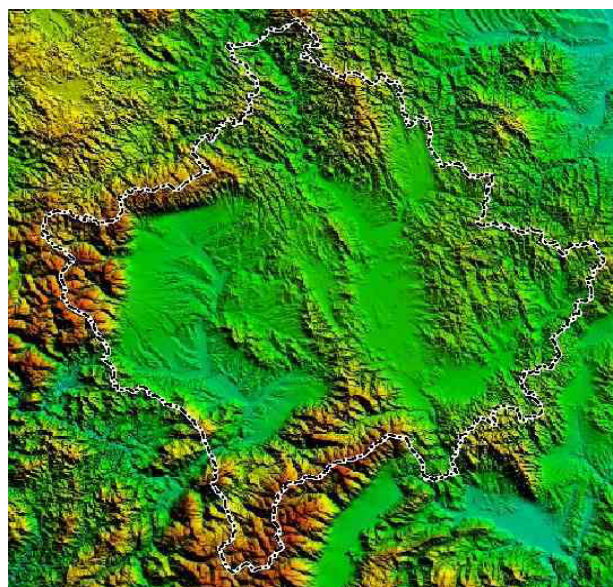


Figure 1. Elevation Map of Kosovo.

Source: Independent Commission for Mines and Minerals (n.d.).

As illustrated in **Figure 2**, despite Kosovo's considerable natural assets, tourism development faces significant challenges, including poorly planned land use, infrastructural shortcomings, and environmental concerns. According to the Kosovo Forest Inventory, forests and forest land account for 47% of the country's territory, followed by

agricultural land at 29%, pastures at 15%, and urban areas comprising only 4.5% ^[12]. These figures underscore Kosovo's strong potential for nature-based tourism while simultaneously emphasizing the critical need for sustainable land management practices.

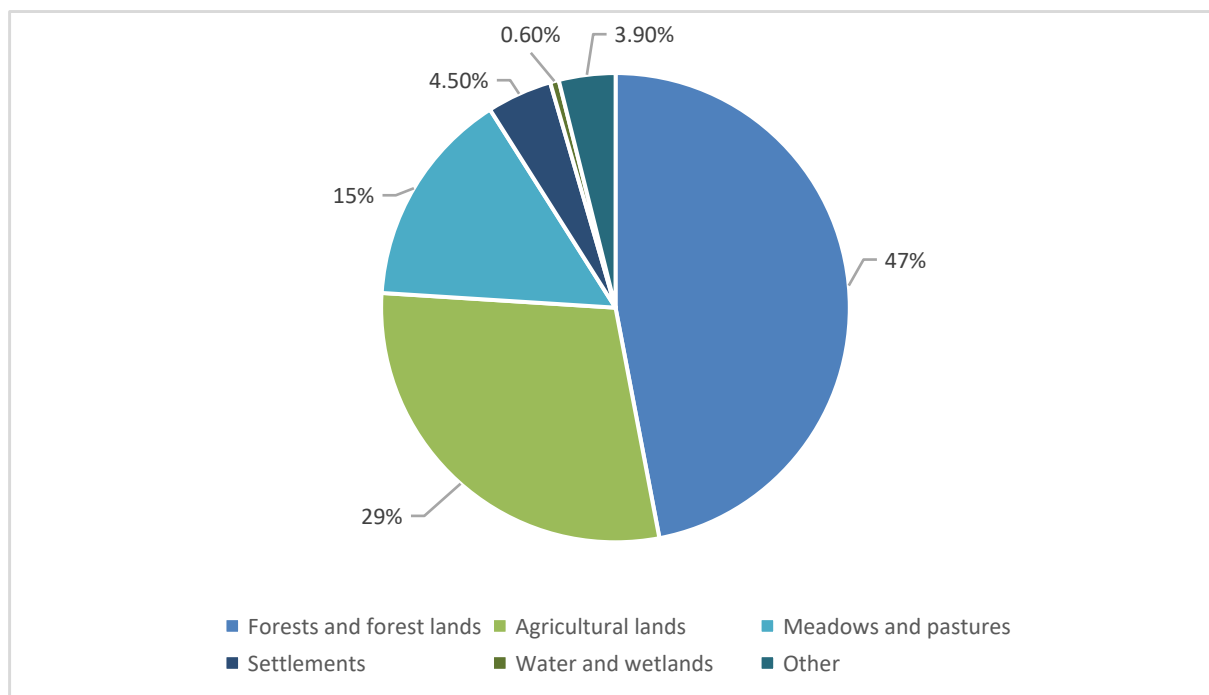


Figure 2. Land Use in Kosovo.

Source: Adapted from Morina (2020).

In this landscape, family-run rural tourism enterprises are increasingly important. Studies show that these businesses are often rooted in lifestyle motivations; owners seek independence and a better quality of life rather than pure profit ^[16]. In Kosovo, however, these ventures face challenges including a lack of training, financial instability, and blurred family-business boundaries ^[17]. Women, in particular, report high work burdens and low returns.

The case of Jezerc exemplifies both the potential and the challenges of rural tourism. The village offers forests, water sources, cultural sites, and traditional food, yet suffers from poor road infrastructure, limited accommodation, and a lack of official promotion. Compared to Brod or Prevala, Jezerc is less commercialized, which offers an opportunity for slow, sustainable tourism development grounded in community participation.

While literature has broadly documented the benefits of rural tourism, this study contributes original findings through a mixed-methods case analysis. It reveals a gap between tourism potential and institutional support, highlights stakeholder perception patterns, and shows strong interest among domestic, young, and educated tourists. These insights contribute to broader debates on localizing tourism development strategies and advancing sustainable practices in post-conflict rural settings.

3. Methodology and Research Methods

This study adopts a mixed-methods research design to examine the impact and development potential of rural tourism in Jezerc Village, Kosovo. The integration of both

quantitative and qualitative approaches allows for a more holistic understanding of the subject, balancing measurable statistical trends with rich contextual interpretation, in line with established mixed-methods methodology^[18]. The rationale for this design lies in the complexity of tourism development, which encompasses both individual perceptions and systemic factors that require different forms of evidence.

Jezerc is located in the Ferizaj municipality in south-eastern Kosovo and has a population of approximately 1,500 residents. The village is situated in a mountainous area with notable natural resources such as springs, forests, and traditional agricultural landscapes. It has relatively low average household incomes and a seasonal pattern of employment, with agriculture and informal trade being the predominant economic activities. Educational attainment among the local population is generally low to moderate, with most residents having completed secondary education and only a minority pursuing higher education. These socio-economic indicators highlight Jezerc's relevance as a case study of an underdeveloped rural destination with latent tourism potential.

Primary quantitative data were collected using structured questionnaires targeting two groups: residents of Jezerc and tourists visiting the area. The survey included 120 valid responses from residents and 72 from tourists. A stratified purposive sampling method was applied to ensure demographic diversity and capture a broad range of opinions across gender, age, education level, occupation, and place of origin. The surveys were administered in person by the researcher and trained assistants during the peak tourist months of July and August 2023, to enhance response accuracy and completeness. The resident questionnaire included questions on the perceived economic and socio-cultural impact of tourism, institutional and infrastructural support, and promotional needs. The tourist questionnaire focused on travel motivations, levels of satisfaction with infrastructure and services, and perceived benefits of visiting the area.

To supplement the survey data, qualitative information was gathered through 15 semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders, including local business owners, tourism workers, municipal officials, and heritage custodians. These interviews provided valuable insights into the institutional framework, planning deficits, and community

attitudes that are not easily quantifiable but essential to understanding barriers to sustainable tourism. Furthermore, direct field observations were carried out to validate and contextualize both survey and interview findings. The researcher conducted systematic observations on aspects such as the condition of roads and signage, the quality of accommodation, the availability of tourism-related services, and environmental upkeep. These observations served as a practical assessment of Jezerc's tourism-readiness and allowed the triangulation of results.

The data were coded and analyzed using SPSS statistical software. Descriptive statistics were used to map demographic trends, satisfaction levels, and general perceptions among respondents. The Pearson Chi-Square test was applied to determine whether statistically significant differences existed between residents and tourists on key issues. Hypothesis 1, which proposed significant differences in stakeholder perspectives on how rural tourism should be developed in Kosovo, was supported by a Chi-Square value of 28.777 and a p-value below 0.001, indicating strong divergence between groups. In contrast, Hypothesis 2, which suggested that stakeholders hold different perceptions about the impacts and motivations of rural tourism in Jezerc, was rejected due to a p-value of 0.679. Although this result was statistically non-significant, it should not be dismissed. The consensus between residents and tourists in this case is an important finding, suggesting shared recognition of rural tourism's value in income generation, community revitalization, and preservation of local traditions. This convergence in views implies that coordinated development strategies could be feasible and broadly accepted by stakeholders, offering a promising foundation for participatory rural tourism planning.

Beyond hypothesis testing, cross-tabulation was used to explore relationships between demographic variables and attitudes. For instance, younger tourists (aged 18–25) predominantly cited natural beauty as their main travel motivation, while older age groups were more likely to highlight interest in cultural heritage and gastronomy. This insight can inform segmentation strategies for future tourism promotion. While advanced statistical techniques such as factor analysis were not employed in this study due to sample size limitations, their inclusion in future research could uncover latent variables and deeper dimensions in stakeholder perceptions.

One limitation of prior drafts of this research was the underutilization of qualitative findings. This has now been addressed. For example, interviews with local business owners revealed that while there is a willingness to expand services, most lack the financial resources and institutional support to invest in infrastructure or marketing. Municipal officials acknowledged the tourism potential of Jezerc but cited constraints in funding, capacity, and coordination as major barriers. Interviewees consistently emphasized the importance of road improvement, waste management, and clearer signage, observations that were confirmed during fieldwork. Tourists echoed these concerns in their comments, often noting that the natural experience was exceptional but marred by inadequate infrastructure and poor promotional materials. These qualitative insights enrich the empirical narrative and reveal the structural disconnect between potential and implementation.

This mixed-methods approach, combining statistical analysis, fieldwork, and stakeholder interviews, allows for a nuanced exploration of how rural tourism can be leveraged for local development. The findings underscore the importance of collaborative planning, context-sensitive policy frameworks, and targeted investment in human and physical capital. Importantly, the study identifies both alignment and divergence in stakeholder perspectives, which can serve as a

foundation for evidence-based planning in Jezerc and comparable rural communities across Kosovo.

4. Results

This section presents the key findings of the study on the role and importance of rural tourism in the sustainable development of Jezerc Village, Kosovo. The results are based on data collected through surveys, interviews, and observations, and are organized thematically using descriptive statistics in tabular format.

As detailed in **Table 1**, the demographic profile of the 120 survey respondents reveals that 56% were male and 44% female. The predominant age group was 25–44 years, accounting for 63% of participants, followed by those aged 45 and above (22%) and the 18–24 age group (15%). In terms of occupational background, 48% of respondents were employed in agriculture or tourism-related sectors, 30% worked in the public or private sector, while the remaining 22% were either students or unemployed.

The following **Table 2** displays what motivated tourists to visit Jezerc. The majority (72%) were attracted by the natural environment. Other key motivations included peace and relaxation (61%), local gastronomy (51%), and cultural heritage (38%).

Table 1. Demographic Profile of Respondents.

Variable	Category	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	56%
	Female	44%
Age	18–24 years	15%
	25–44 years	63%
	45 years and above	22%
Occupation	Agriculture/Tourism	48%
	Public/Private Sector	30%
	Student/Unemployed	22%

Source: *author, according to the survey results.*

Table 2. Tourist Motivations for Visiting Jezerc.

Motivation	Respondents (%)
Natural environment (forests, rivers)	72%
Cultural heritage	38%
Local gastronomy	51%
Peace and relaxation	61%

Source: *author according to the survey results.*

As illustrated in **Table 3**, tourists evaluated their satisfaction with various elements of rural tourism in Jezerc. While 68% of respondents expressed satisfaction with the hospitality of local residents, other aspects received nota-

bly lower ratings. Only 34% were satisfied with the road infrastructure, 42% with the accommodation facilities, and merely 29% found the signage and availability of tourist information to be satisfactory.

Table 3. Visitor Satisfaction Levels.

Service/Feature	Satisfied (%)	Dissatisfied (%)
Road infrastructure	34%	66%
Accommodation facilities	42%	58%
Signage and tourist info	29%	71%
Local hospitality	68%	32%

Source: *author according to the survey results.*

As presented in **Table 4**, residents were surveyed regarding the economic effects of rural tourism. A significant portion, 57%, agreed that rural tourism contributes to an increase in household income, while 62% recognized its

role in preserving local traditions. However, only 21% of respondents believed there was adequate institutional support, and a notable 74% emphasized the need for greater promotional efforts to enhance its impact.

Table 4. Economic Impact on Local Population.

Statement	Respondents Agreeing (%)
Tourism increases household income	57%
Tourism helps preserve local traditions and products	62%
There is sufficient institutional support	21%
More promotional efforts are needed	74%

Source: *author according to the survey results.*

Table 5 presents resident opinions (n = 28) on the need for protected and supportive tourism policies. A significant majority (78.6%) believe such policies are essential, while only 21.4% consider them non-essential.

From **Table 6**, gender distribution among 72 surveyed tourists shows a nearly equal split, with 51.4% male and 48.6% female respondents.

Table 7 reveals that most tourists were aged 18–25

(59.3%), followed by ages 26–35 (19.4%), 36–50 (19.4%), and above 51 (2.8%). The data indicate that a young demographic primarily engages in rural tourism in Jezerc.

As shown in **Table 8**, the educational qualifications among surveyed tourists indicate that a majority, or 57%, held a bachelor's degree, followed by 31.9% with a master's degree, 8.3% with a PhD, and 2.8% possessing other forms of qualification.

Table 5. Residents' Opinions on Supportive Policies.

Response	Percentage (%)
Essential	78.6%
Non-essential	21.4%

Source: *author according to the survey results.*

Table 6. Tourist Gender Distribution.

Gender	Percentage (%)
Male	51.4%
Female	48.6%

Source: *author according to the survey results.*

Table 7. Tourist Age Distribution.

Age Group	Percentage (%)
18–25	59.3%
26–35	19.4%
36–50	19.4%
51+	2.8%

Source: *author according to the survey results.*

Table 8. Tourist Educational Background.

Education Level	Percentage (%)
Bachelor's	57%
Master's	31.9%
PhD	8.3%
Other	2.8%

Source: *author according to the survey results.*

As shown in **Table 9**, the majority of tourists originated from the Ferizaj region (72.2%), followed by visitors from Prishtina (13.9%), Prizren (9.7%), Gjakova (2.8%), and Peja (1.4%). These findings indicate a strong local and regional interest in the tourism offerings of Jezerc, highlighting its growing appeal within nearby communities.

As presented in **Table 10**, the employment status of surveyed tourists shows that 58.3% were employed, while 38.9% identified as students. A small percentage, 1.4%, were either retired or selected the 'other' category. These figures reflect a predominance of economically active and

younger individuals among visitors to the area.

As illustrated in **Table 11**, respondents largely perceived tourism as a driver of job creation and income generation (37.5%) and a contributor to local economic development (36.1%). Smaller proportions associated tourism with cultural exchange (6.9%), cultural preservation (5.6%), business improvement (2.8%), and the promotion of knowledge (1.4%). Additionally, 6.9% of participants recognized all the listed benefits, highlighting the multidimensional value of tourism within the community.

Table 9. Tourist Geographic Origin.

Region	Percentage (%)
Ferizaj Region	72.2%
Prishtina	13.9%
Prizren	9.7%
Gjakova	2.8%
Peja	1.4%

Source: *author according to the survey results.*

Table 10. Tourist Employment Status.

Employment Status	Percentage (%)
Employed	58.3%
Student	38.9%
Retired/Other	1.4%

Source: *author according to the survey results.*

Table 11. Perceived Benefits of Tourism.

Perceived Benefit	Percentage (%)
Job creation and income	37.5%
Local economic development	36.1%
Cultural exchange	6.9%

Table 11. Cont.

Perceived Benefit	Percentage (%)
Preservation of local culture	5.6%
Improvement of local businesses	2.8%
Increase in local knowledge	1.4%
All of the above	6.9%

Source: author according to the survey results.

4.1. Chi-Square Test Analysis Results

This section presents the empirical findings based on the hypothesis testing carried out through Pearson's Chi-Square test. The hypotheses aimed to examine the attitudes of two distinct focus groups: one comprising residents of

Jezerc village and the other composed of tourists who visited the area.

As presented in **Table 12**, the analysis of **Hypothesis 1 (H1)** indicates that there are significant differences in stakeholder perceptions concerning the appropriate strategies for the development of rural tourism in Kosovo.

Table 12. Chi-Square Test for Hypothesis 1.

	Value	df	Asymptotic significance (2-sided)
Pearson chi-square	28.777	6	<0.001

Source: Author's data.

In this case study, two focus groups were surveyed to gain insights into their respective perspectives on rural tourism development. Hypothesis 1 was evaluated using the question: "What are the most appropriate methods for encouraging community participation in tourism development?" Participants were asked to select from predefined options. The Pearson Chi-Square value of 28.777, with 6 degrees of freedom and a p-value of 0.001, falls below the acceptable error margin of 3% ($p = 0.001 < 0.03$). There-

fore, Hypothesis 1 is accepted. The results indicate that there are indeed differing views between residents and tourists regarding the strategies for developing rural tourism in Kosovo.

As shown in **Table 13**, the analysis of **Hypothesis 2 (H2)** confirms that there are significant differences in stakeholder perceptions regarding the impact of rural tourism, reflecting diverse views on its social, economic, and environmental implications.

Table 13. Chi-Square Test for Hypothesis 2.

	Value	df	Asymptotic significance (2-sided)
Pearson chi-square	4.847	7	0.679

Source: Author's data.

To test Hypothesis 2, the question posed was: "What is your opinion on rural tourism?" The responses were analyzed to determine whether notable perceptual differences existed between the focus groups. The Pearson Chi-Square test produced a value of 4.847 with 7 degrees of freedom and a p-value of 0.679. Since this value exceeds the 3% threshold ($p = 0.679 > 0.03$), the hypothesis is rejected. Thus, the findings suggest that there is a consensus between residents and tourists concerning the perceived impact of rural tourism.

While this led to the statistical rejection of the hypothesis, the shared perception itself is a key policy insight. It suggests that both groups recognize tourism's economic and cultural value, making cooperative development strategies more viable. Municipal planners could use this consensus to implement inclusive policies that foster co-ownership of tourism initiatives between residents and external visitors.

Qualitative Insights from Interviews and Field Observations

Interview data reinforced survey findings. Of the five stakeholders interviewed, including two guesthouse owners, a local guide, a municipal official, and a community leader, all expressed concern over inadequate infrastructure. One guesthouse owner noted, “We could attract more visitors if the roads were paved and signs were clearer”. The local guide added that “nature here sells itself, but people can’t find the trails”.

Direct observations confirmed these gaps. While Jezerc boasts scenic trails, fresh springs, and cultural relics, signage was often missing or poorly maintained. Accommodation varied in quality, with several homes informally hosting guests but lacking formal service training or digital visibility. Comparatively, neighboring villages such as Brod in Dragash have more developed signage, stronger municipal coordination, and active online promotion, suggesting a model that Jezerc could adapt.

These findings highlight the importance of policy localization and regional benchmarking. While Jezerc is rich in natural and cultural assets, without investment in accessibility and promotion, its potential remains underutilized. The qualitative data thus enriches the statistical evidence, offering a clearer picture of opportunities, challenges, and community readiness.

5. Discussion

The results confirm that Jezerc Village has tangible assets for rural tourism development, including a pristine natural environment, culturally rich traditions, and a relatively welcoming local community. These features, while consistent with broader literature on community-based tourism ^[5,7], gain local specificity through this study’s empirical insights. Jezerc, a village of approximately 1,500 residents, is characterized by seasonal underemployment, modest household incomes (estimated at €250–€350/month), and a workforce primarily engaged in agriculture and informal economic activities. Educational levels are moderate, with most adults having completed secondary school and a growing number of youth pursuing higher education in nearby cities ^[14].

Tourist responses reflected strong satisfaction with local hospitality, while simultaneously pointing to serious infrastructure deficits, particularly regarding roads and signage. These critiques were echoed in the qualitative data.

A local guesthouse owner shared, “We host many visitors, but when the roads are bad or signs are missing, they struggle to find us, and many don’t come back”. This infrastructural inadequacy was further observed by the researcher, especially on unpaved access roads and poorly marked hiking trails. Despite such limitations, tourists showed high interest in Jezerc’s natural landscape and peaceful ambience, suggesting that basic improvements could unlock significant tourism potential.

The survey revealed that 57% of residents believe tourism increases household income, yet only 21% believe institutional support is sufficient. This disparity points to a lack of coordinated governance and planning. A municipal official interviewed stated, “We are aware of the village’s potential, but tourism is still not treated as a strategic priority in our budget or policies”. This reflects a governance gap noted by residents, 78.6% of whom indicated the need for protective and supportive tourism policies. These findings reinforce the importance of creating local tourism strategies that prioritize inclusive development and institutional accountability ^[19].

Moreover, the findings highlight a shared understanding between residents and tourists about the value of rural tourism. Hypothesis 2, which tested for differences in perceived impact, was rejected based on a high p-value (0.679), indicating consensus rather than divergence. While some may interpret this as a null finding, it is significant. It suggests that Jezerc’s residents and visitors have aligned interests, namely, that tourism should improve economic well-being, support local culture, and preserve the environment. This convergence opens the door for participatory planning, where both groups collaborate in co-designing tourism services and environmental protection efforts ^[9].

Interview data deepened this perspective. One cultural heritage advocate noted, “Tourism helps us revive old traditions, but only if it’s done respectfully and involves the whole community.” Such statements highlight the potential of tourism as a vehicle for cultural preservation, but only under locally guided development frameworks.

It is also critical to note that all data were collected during the peak tourism season (July–August). While appropriate for capturing high-volume perceptions, this seasonal concentration likely skews the findings toward more positive visitor experiences and higher community engagement. Tourism in Jezerc drops significantly in colder

months, affecting income stability and limiting year-round employment opportunities. A comparison with Brod, a rural village in Dragash that has successfully diversified its offerings into all seasons (including snow hiking and local festivals), illustrates what Jezerc could aim for. Brod's success stems from a mix of municipal involvement, community ownership, and targeted promotion, practices currently underdeveloped in Jezerc^[20]. This comparison underscores the importance of policy localization and inter-village learning for sustainable tourism in Kosovo.

Tourist demographics revealed a predominantly young and well-educated visitor base, with 59.3% aged 18–25 and nearly 90% holding at least a bachelor's degree. These visitors emphasized interest in nature, peace, and relaxation, but were less aware of Jezerc's cultural heritage. This gap suggests a missed opportunity in heritage interpretation. Future tourism strategies should include educational elements, e.g., guided cultural tours, storytelling events, or signage about local traditions, to enhance visitors' understanding and appreciation of Jezerc's intangible heritage^[13].

Furthermore, several tourists and stakeholders noted the role of informal promotion, such as word-of-mouth and social media, in attracting visitors. However, this cannot substitute for structured branding and regional promotion. Jezerc has the potential to position itself as a model of eco-rural tourism in southeastern Kosovo, but this will require coordinated investments in visibility, quality standards, and community-based enterprise development^[16].

This study's empirical contributions lie in its multi-dimensional portrayal of a rural village grappling with both opportunity and constraint. It offers localized insights into stakeholder alignment, infrastructure barriers, and seasonality, reinforced through both quantitative data and grounded qualitative voices. The findings suggest that rural tourism, when approached strategically and inclusively, can address socio-economic challenges in underdeveloped regions like Jezerc. To build on these insights, future research should investigate seasonal visitor patterns, test the effectiveness of community co-management models, and apply comparative frameworks across more villages to strengthen policy transferability.

6. Conclusions

This study offers original, context-specific insights into the opportunities and limitations of rural tourism development in Kosovo through the case of Jezerc Village. While previous literature confirms the general benefits of rural tourism, this research adds empirical depth by revealing the practical barriers that hinder those benefits from materializing at the local level. These include limited institutional engagement, poor infrastructure, fragmented stakeholder coordination, and insufficient promotional strategies.

The findings demonstrate that although residents show a high degree of interest in tourism participation, this willingness is constrained by a lack of technical knowledge, seasonal instability, and weak municipal support. Tourists, primarily young and educated, show clear demand for nature-based and authentic experiences, yet their satisfaction is undermined by inadequate access and information. These dynamics point to a missed opportunity that can only be addressed through integrated and localized planning efforts.

This study's contributions lie in identifying a policy gap between national tourism legislation and local implementation. Compared with more advanced rural destinations like Brod, Jezerc shows potential but lacks the strategic cohesion and institutional backing needed for sustainable growth. The results underscore the importance of targeted investment in infrastructure, hospitality training, and promotional campaigns tailored to domestic and regional visitors.

To move forward, tourism must be elevated within local development priorities and supported by participatory governance models that include community voices. Strategic development should aim not only to increase tourist numbers but also to ensure year-round activity, equitable benefit-sharing, and the preservation of environmental and cultural assets.

Future research should explore the long-term outcomes of rural tourism investments and examine seasonal variations in tourism activity. Comparative studies across similar villages in Kosovo would provide valuable insights for designing more adaptable and transferable rural tourism policies.

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Informed Consent Statement

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Data Availability Statement

The data used in this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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