

## ARTICLE

# The Importance of Ecotourism Development in Kosovo National Park

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## ABSTRACT

The Kosovo National Park is an area rich in exceptional natural values, including mountainous landscapes, rivers, green forests, and a rich biodiversity. This park offers opportunities for scenic views and is an ideal destination for those who wish to explore untouched nature. The region is rich in rare flora and fauna, which are important for the preservation of local ecosystems and the global environment. The main objective of this paper is to examine the opportunities and challenges of ecotourism development in the Kosovo National Park, focusing on balancing biodiversity conservation with economic benefits for the local community and sustainable tourism development. The methodology used in this paper is multidimensional, combining analysis of existing literature, similar case studies, and interviews with experts in the field and local stakeholders. This process allows for an in-depth understanding of the opportunities and challenges that ecotourism development presents. To collect reliable data, interviews were conducted with local authorities and environmental experts, and management policies and strategies of similar parks were analyzed. The data were analyzed through qualitative and quantitative methods. The research results show that the development of ecotourism in the Kosovo National Park can have a positive impact on nature conservation and can contribute to the economic development of the region. However, this development requires careful management and a balance between biodiversity conservation and economic benefits. Ecotourism activities should be guided by sustainable practices that respect the environment and provide long-term benefits.

**Keywords:** Environmental; Nature; Sustainable; Development

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## 1. Introduction

The environment includes the interaction of all living species, climate, weather, and natural resources that affect human survival and economic activity. The National Park, and especially the, is one of the rich natural areas of Kosovo, known for its extraordinary landscapes, rich biodiversity and natural assets that offer great opportunities for the development of eco-tourism. This region consists of high mountains, deep valleys, clear lakes and green forests, which offer opportunities for various tourist activities, such as mountain hiking, climbing, nature observation and many others. However, to ensure that this development is sustainable and does not harm the environment, it is important that the preservation of natural landscapes and the protection of the natural environment are the main factors for the development of eco-tourism in this region. The conservation of forests and water resources is essential to ensure that ecosystems continue to provide ecological services, such as protecting water quality, preserving biodiversity and stabilizing the climate. Landscape management is also important to avoid the destruction of natural habitats through pollution or unsustainable interventions. In order to develop eco-tourism in the National Park, it is necessary that the protection of the natural environment is a continuous priority. This includes the conservation of biodiversity and the protection of endangered species, which are an integral part of the natural landscapes of the region. The National Park is home to many species of fauna and flora that are rich and diverse. The conservation of these species is essential to ensure that the region remains an attractive destination for tourists seeking to experience nature in its purest and most authentic form.

## 2. Methodology

The study methodology will be based on primary and secondary data, research and literature from local and international authors, which have addressed the topic of environmental protection as a factor in the love of ecotourism in the National Park. Moreover, you will have the best practices of ecotourism from other regions, for which you can apply the successful methods. For this reason, they are related to their different sources, which are related to different ones. Also, the analysis of tourism and environmental policies implemented by local and central authorities plays such a

role in seeking to improve the management of this industry. This methodology will take a different description, which gives a description of these phenomena through secondary data obtained from reports and other relevant documentation, promoted by government and non-governmental actors, in order to harmonize data for a similar purpose of this complex topic. In addition, comparative analyses of the positive and negative impacts of ecotourism on the biodiversity of similar national parks will be included.

## 3. Results and Discussion

The National Park is located at latitude 42°44' N 20°3' E, 93 km from the capital of Kosovo, Prishtina. It covers an area of 20,330 ha. It extends east-west, with a length of 23 km. It is located between the Hajla, Shtedim, Lumbardh and Kopranik mountains. The development of ecotourism in the Kosovo National Park is of great importance, not only for the protection of natural assets but also for sustainable economic development and the preservation of local culture and tradition. This park is one of the greatest natural assets of Kosovo, offering stunning landscapes, rich biodiversity, as well as opportunities for exploration and education of tourists and visitors. This opportunity for the development of ecotourism is very important, as it can contribute to the conservation of nature and the economic development of the region, including also strengthening the connection between nature and the local community<sup>[1]</sup>. An important aspect of the development of ecotourism is the preservation and promotion of cultural and traditional heritage. Local communities are closely connected to nature and have a great wealth of culture and traditional customs, which can benefit from the development of ecotourism. By providing opportunities for visitors to explore traditional lifestyles, crafts, gastronomy and diverse cultural practices, an excellent balance can be achieved between tourism development and the preservation of the cultural identity of the area. The development of ecotourism is also an opportunity to create new employment opportunities and increase the income of the local community. Tourism activities, such as guided tours, eco-lodges, and other services, can provide employment opportunities for local residents, including youth, who may have opportunities for skills development and education in this field. Furthermore, an increased influx of tourists can

bring economic benefits to the area, through their spending on accommodation, food, and other tourism activities. This development can also help create opportunities for the promotion of local products, such as handicrafts, traditional food, and drinks, which are attractive to tourists and can contribute to the protection and development of local culture. Another important impact of ecotourism is the creation of a closer connection between the community and nature<sup>[2]</sup>. Participants in ecotourism activities often develop a deep sense of respect and awareness for the environment, learning about the values and importance of conserving biodiversity. This can lead to a change in the behavior of local residents, who can become more engaged in the protection of nature and the sustainable use of natural resources. In this way, ecotourism can act as a catalyst for sustainable development that harmonizes economic needs with environmental conservation. Furthermore, the development of ecotourism can help improve local infrastructure, such as roads, transport services and accommodation facilities, thereby improving the quality of life for residents. This infrastructural development can also contribute to improving services for the community, as well as the possibility of attracting more investment in other economic sectors, such as agriculture, handicrafts, and health. The impact of ecotourism development in the Kosovo National Park is also important for global awareness of Kosovo's natural and cultural assets. Participants from all over the world can see and appreciate the diversity of landscapes, flora and fauna, as well as cultural heritage, becoming ambassadors of Kosovo's nature and culture. This can help strengthen Kosovo's image as an ecotourism destination and highlight the values of the country's nature and traditions on an international level. In conclusion, the development of ecotourism in the Kosovo National Park is a great opportunity to preserve the natural and cultural assets of this region, to improve living conditions for the local community and to contribute to sustainable economic development. This process requires close cooperation between state institutions, non-governmental organizations and the local community to ensure that tourism is developed in a way that respects and protects the environment, while contributing to improving livelihoods and preserving the cultural identity of the area. The Lumbardh River divides it into two parts, creating a valley and then a deep canyon along the way<sup>[3]</sup>. 85% of the total territory is covered by forests, while 15% is cov-

ered by alpine pastures. The relief is rugged, with steep limestone slopes and deep, narrow erosional gorges. The mountain slopes are 15°–30° steep, but there are cases when it reaches 45°–90°. It is composed of various and numerous karst forms such as caves, natural tunnels, waterfalls, glacial lakes, etc.<sup>[4]</sup>. The National Park is divided into 13 villages (Shtupeqi i Vogël, Shtupeqi i Madh, Reka e Allagës, Drelaj, Pepiq, Malaj, Kuqishtë, Dugaivë, Haxhaj, Stankaj, Bogë, Shkrel and Koshutan) and five small neighborhoods (Llaz, Bollpaç, Pecaj, Ujëmirë, Dreshaj). The villages are located 2–7 km apart. The National Park has a humid continental climate with mountain influence, short and hot summers and long and harsh winters. Spring is late and the temperature varies during the day. The hours of sunshine are not long. As a result of the confrontation of hot and humid marine currents with continental ones, there is a lot of rainfall. The maximum rainfall is in December (372.6 mm), while the annual ones go up to (1336 mm). The monthly minimum is in July (0.3 mm), while the annual one (540.6 mm). Snow is present until August, and in the 1990s there was even a fall in August. Its height ranges from 30 cm to 2 m. The average temperature in spring is 4.4–7.5 °C, in summer 10.6–17.2 °C, in autumn 5.2 °C and in winter –10 °C to –15 °C<sup>[5]</sup>. Our country has many opportunities to be exploited by tourism during all four seasons, due to the attractive climate and diversity of nature<sup>[6]</sup>. The National Park has all the natural and cultural resources to develop sustainable tourism and adventure tourism, offering opportunities for tourists seeking natural activities, adrenaline and authentic experiences. By investing in sustainable infrastructure, involving the local community and preserving natural assets, the National Park can become a popular tourist destination for visitors from all over the world<sup>[7, 8]</sup>. The National Park has the potential to develop as a sustainable tourist destination, but this requires a great commitment to environmental conservation and natural resource management. In order to protect the natural beauties and biodiversity of the National Park has the potential to develop as a sustainable tourist destination, but this requires a great commitment to environmental conservation and natural resource management., it is necessary to take concrete measures to protect nature, develop sustainable tourism, and educate the local community about the importance of environmental protection. This will ensure that the National Park has the potential to develop as a sustainable tourist destina-

tion, but this requires a great commitment to environmental conservation and natural resource management. remains a natural and cultural asset for future generations<sup>[9]</sup>. In modern ecotourism practices, an increase in its ability to improve socio-cultural and environmental conditions of the natural environment and landscape conservation has been brought under control<sup>[10]</sup>. The natural environment is essential for the survival of most species of life, and any negative impact on this environment can lead to the loss of biodiversity<sup>[11]</sup>. Environmental conservation includes the protection of natural habitats such as forests, meadows, rivers, etc. When these habitats are destroyed, many species lose their homes and may become extinct. The protection of these habitats is vital for the preservation of biodiversity, as they provide necessary resources for food, shelter and protection for many organisms. Nature conservation is very important for the natural environment, as it contributes to the conservation of biodiversity, ecosystems and ecological balance<sup>[12]</sup>. Protected areas and natural parks are places where natural habitats can maintain healthy ecosystems and biodiversity<sup>[13]</sup>. The conservation of these areas, as in figures 1, 2, 3 and 4, through legal protection measures and good management, is essential for preserving biodiversity and avoiding the extinction of endangered species. Nature conservation, as seen in **Figures 1–4**, is of great importance for environmental protection and sustainable tourism development. A clean and well-maintained nature not only helps to preserve biodiversity, but also attracts domestic and foreign tourists who are looking for beautiful and healthy destinations. Through the protection of forests, waters and fauna, favorable conditions are created for the development of ecological tourism activities, which bring economic and cultural benefits to local communities.



**Figure 1.** Natural beauty in the National Park.



**Figure 2.** Kuqishta Lake.



**Figure 3.** Blueberries in the National Park.



**Figure 4.** Picturesque nature on the roads.

The development of ecotourism in the Kosovo National Park is an issue of great importance for the sustainable development of the region and the preservation of the country's natural and cultural assets. This park has rich natural assets that include various types of flora and fauna, which are very important for the biodiversity of the region and the protection of natural ecosystems. In this context, ecotourism offers opportunities to promote tourism without damaging nature and to support the sustainable development of the local commu-

nity. This paper will discuss the importance, value and impact of the development of ecotourism in the Kosovo National Park and will explain how this type of tourism can contribute to the preservation of biodiversity, economic development and the protection of the cultural heritage of Kosovo<sup>[14]</sup>. One of the most important aspects of ecotourism development is the preservation of biodiversity. Kosovo has an extraordinary wealth of flora and fauna species, many of which are endangered and protected. The Kosovo National Park is an environment rich in diverse ecosystems that include forests, mountains, rivers and lakes, where special species of animals and plants live. The preservation of these natural resources is important for the ecological balance of the region and for the well-being of future generations. Ecotourism can play a key role in educating visitors and raising awareness about the importance of preserving biodiversity and protecting nature. Nature-related tourism activities, such as nature walks, bird

watching and excursions to protected areas, can help visitors understand the value of natural assets and the importance of protecting them. This education can create a strong connection between humans and nature, encouraging visitors to respect the environment and contribute to its preservation. In this way, ecotourism can become a powerful tool to support biodiversity conservation in the Kosovo National Park. By raising awareness and educating visitors, it can help protect natural habitats, as well as sustainably manage the park's natural resources<sup>[15, 16]</sup>. This type of tourism can also help support projects aimed at conserving endangered species and restoring damaged natural habitats. Another important element of ecotourism development is the economic impact it has on local communities. **Table 1** shows the number of tourists visiting throughout the year, showing a successful increase in interest in natural destinations.

**Table 1.** Number of domestic visitors and their nights of stay in hotels in Kosovo.

	Visitors		Night Stay			
	October 2023	October 2024	% October 2024 October 2023	October 2023	October 2024	% October 2024 October 2023
Internal visitors	24689	23080	-6.5 %	87290	68352	-21.7%
Gjakova	437	173	-60.4%	587	299	-49.1%
Gjilani	4627	4269	-7.7 %	12896	20195	-30.3%
Mitrovica	1360	1153	-15.2 %	1837	1497	-18.5%
Peja	8688	8578	-1.3%	41486	30353	-26.8%
Prizereni	4505	3246	27.9 %	7946	6679	-15.9%
Prishtina	2347	3237	38.0%	4309	4541	33.2%
Ferizaj	2726	2424	-11.1%	3064	4788	56.3%

Source: Kosovo Agency of Statistics<sup>[17]</sup>.

The largest number of domestic visitors to hotels is in the Peja region with 8,578 visitors and 30,353 nights. Today, there are still disagreements about the extent of the environmental impact of human activity, so protective measures are sometimes debated. In industrialized countries, voluntary environmental organizations and agreements often provide a platform for companies to be recognized for going beyond minimum regulatory standards and thus support the development of best environmental practices<sup>[18, 19]</sup>. The increase in the number of visitors and nights in some regions suggests that tourism attractions and opportunities are growing. This may include new activities and events that are attracting

more and more visitors. There may also be a positive impact of successful tourism promotion and marketing for these destinations. Preserving the natural environment is essential for the development of sustainable and attractive tourism. Visitors who choose natural destinations seek an authentic and untouched experience, and preserving these environments ensures that nature remains intact and accessible to all. The desire for ecotourism is growing, fueling the development of activities that respect nature, such as mountain hiking and ecological excursions. Destinations that protect the environment also gain the trust of visitors and create sustainable opportunities for local communities. Preserving nature is



also a way to ensure that future generations will be able to enjoy the same natural beauty that is attractive to tourists today. Therefore, promoting tourism that respects nature is essential to help economic development and to guarantee a sustainable future for tourism and the environment, as seen in **Figures 5** and **6**.



**Figure 5.** Traditional clothing.



**Figure 6.** Rock climbing.

For tourists visiting the National Park, this is the opportunity to experience a place rich in history and traditions, discovering small, welcoming villages and enjoying the traditional cuisine that this region has to offer. For example, they can taste traditional foods such as maza e zire, kerlana, flija, pies and other foods that reflect the rich gastronomic traditions of this region. In addition to its natural beauty, the National Park is also a popular destination for winter sports, such as skiing and snowboarding, as well as mountain biking in the summer<sup>[20]</sup>. For those looking for more adventure, the region offers opportunities for mountain climbing, hiking on the mountain slopes and exploring incredible landscapes. The National Park is also known for the warm hospitality of

its residents, who offer visitors an authentic and unforgettable experience, as seen in **Figures 7** and **8**.



**Figure 7.** Mountaineering on the trails.



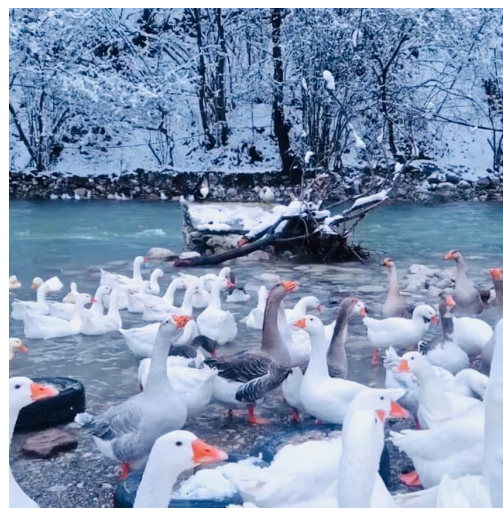
**Figure 8.** Traditional food.

The National Park area is known for its rich cultural and natural tradition, where traditional food plays an important role in the tourist offer. Restaurants, hotels, taverns and private homes in this region offer cuisine that reflects the heritage and hospitality of the local inhabitants. The traditional food of the National Park is rich and varied, including dishes such as grilled meat, pies, stewed meat and other dishes that use fresh and organic ingredients from the surrounding nature. This type of food is an inseparable part of the experience of visitors, who can enjoy not only the beauty of nature but also the authentic flavors that are part of the cultural tradition of this area. This makes every stay in the National Park a complete experience, where tourists can enjoy delicious dishes that are closely related to the history and customs of this region. Natural and cultural resources are of particular

importance for the preservation of the natural environment in the country<sup>[21]</sup>. The environment provides important natural resources such as water, clean air, and food, which are essential for the survival of species. Sustainable management of these resources, for example, by avoiding overexploitation of forests or waters, helps to preserve ecosystems and biodiversity. Air, water, and soil pollution is one of the greatest threats to biodiversity. Environmental conservation includes measures to reduce pollution, such as reducing greenhouse gas emissions, waste management, and wastewater treatment. These measures help to preserve ecosystems and improve the living conditions of various species. Climate change is one of the main factors threatening biodiversity, changing the living conditions for many species. Environmental conservation also includes efforts to combat climate change, such as reducing greenhouse gas emissions and promoting renewable energies. This helps maintain a stable climate and protect species from the harmful effects of climate change. One of the main criteria for declaring a natural area as a National Park is the richness of biodiversity. The National Park is among the rarest and most characteristic mountain ranges in the Balkans, in terms of floristic, faunal and vegetative richness. Although, in spatial terms, the National Park belongs to the region with a continental climate, they are also under the influence of the Mediterranean, namely sub-Mediterranean climate, which penetrates through the White Drin valley. As a result, in the lower parts of this mountain range, a modified Mediterranean climate dominates, while in the higher parts, the climate is alpine. This interweaving of the sub-Mediterranean and continental climates has created a complex set of ecological conditions, which have enabled the development and existence of a rich and diverse flora and vegetation, with the presence of woody, shrubby and herbaceous forms, among which a considerable number are relicts, endemorelicts and autochthonous endemics of the Balkans and Europe<sup>[22]</sup>, as seen in **Figure 9**.

Areas such as the National Park (see **Figures 10 and 11**), the clear water of the rivers and the high peaks, create a fascinating landscape that will remain in the memories of every visitor. Entering this region is an opportunity to discover one of the treasures of Kosovo, and every step is an opportunity to create unforgettable memories. Overall, the National Park is a place with a rich and diverse biodiversity, where nature has remained largely untouched, offering an

excellent environment for exploration and conservation of flora and fauna.



**Figure 9.** Lumbard Lake.



**Figure 10.** Nature photos in the National Park.



**Figure 11.** Waste from tourists.

The development of ecotourism can bring great benefits to residents living near the Kosovo National Park. An

important issue mentioned in the corona era and relying on the post-corona era is the revitalizing green economic growth<sup>[23, 24]</sup>. Tourism can create new job opportunities for residents, as tour guides, service workers, and accommodation and restaurant service providers. These opportunities can help increase income and improve living conditions for the local community<sup>[25]</sup>. In addition to job opportunities, ecotourism development can bring opportunities for small business development and support for local producers. This can include the production of artisanal products, such as paintings, souvenirs and agricultural products, that can be sold to tourists visiting the park. This type of development can contribute to increasing the economic sustainability of the community and can help reduce poverty and emigration from rural areas<sup>[26]</sup>. There are also great opportunities for the development of agritourism and agricultural services. Ecotourism can support traditional agricultural practices and can provide opportunities for the production and sale of local products, which can be consumed by visitors and exported. This can create a direct link between nature and local business development. Despite the great benefits that ecotourism development can bring, there are several important challenges that need to be considered to ensure the sustainable development of this sector<sup>[27]</sup>. One of the biggest challenges is the management of tourist flows. Mass tourism can put great pressure on the environment and can damage sensitive ecosystems. For example, if tourist numbers are not managed properly, damage to natural habitats, pollution and destruction of landscapes, and disturbance of wildlife can occur. For this reason, it is important that tourism is managed carefully and in accordance with the principles of sustainability. This means that controlled measures should be put in place for the number of visitors and for the activities that take place within the park, ensuring that they are compatible with nature conservation. Policies should also be developed that encourage visitors to respect the rules of the park and contribute to the protection of the environment. Another major challenge is infrastructure development. To support ecotourism, it is necessary to create appropriate infrastructure, including good roads, parking areas, information centers, and other services that can enhance the visitor experience. The construction of these structures requires significant investment, and it is important that these are in harmony with nature and minimize negative impacts on the environment.

Another important aspect of ecotourism development is environmental education and awareness<sup>[28, 29]</sup>. The National Park can be used as a tool to educate visitors about the importance of nature protection and to promote sustainable practices<sup>[30]</sup>. Educational programs and visitor guides can help raise awareness about the impact of tourism on nature and can encourage visitors to contribute to the conservation of the park. Educational activities can include cleaning natural areas, planting trees, and helping to conserve endangered species. Opportunities can also be created to develop activities related to the preservation of local culture and traditions, which are closely linked to nature. These activities can include festivals, fairs and exhibitions that promote the cultural values of the region and are related to the preservation of nature<sup>[31]</sup>. The development of ecotourism in the Kosovo National Park is of great importance for the preservation of biodiversity, the development of the local economy and the promotion of environmental sustainability. Regardless of environmental issues, population growth, and the lack of control of greenhouse gas emissions, industrialization has been the most crucial cause of the climate change crisis<sup>[32]</sup>. This type of tourism can contribute to the preservation of nature and biodiversity, support the economic development of the community and provide opportunities for the education of visitors and raising environmental awareness<sup>[33]</sup>. However, to achieve these goals, it is important that the development of ecotourism is carried out in a sustainable and carefully managed manner, ensuring that the nature and biodiversity of the park are preserved and protected for future generations. The ultimate goal of these green policies is a green economy, an environmentally friendly economy, a zero carbon economy, or a sustainable economy<sup>[34]</sup>. They define the green economy as a broad concept comprising green industry, agriculture, and services<sup>[35]</sup>.

## 4. Conclusions

The preservation of natural landscapes and the protection of the natural environment are important factors for the sustainable development of ecotourism in the National Park, especially in the area. This region, with its stunning beauty, rich biodiversity and intact ecosystems, has the potential to become an internationally renowned ecotourism destination. The preservation of nature, such as through sustainable man-



agement of natural resources, protection of flora and fauna, and the prohibition of destructive activities, is essential to ensure that visitors can experience and respect this natural wealth for future generations. To this end, clear strategies for the management of protected areas should be created and implemented, including monitoring of tourist activities and potential impacts on the environment. The protection of the natural environment is also an opportunity for the economic development of the local community, the creation of employment opportunities and the promotion of local products, while raising awareness of the importance of nature conservation. This can be achieved through training and support for local entrepreneurs who can offer ecotourism services, such as tourist guides, ecological accommodation and artisanal products, promoting the culture and traditions of the area. Through the development of ecotourism, the National Park can offer a sustainable model for other regions, where tourism is harmonized with nature conservation, thus helping to strengthen the link between economic development and biodiversity conservation. Also, good management of visitor flows can reduce the potential negative impact on the environment and ensure that natural values are protected from potential damage, such as litter and pollution. Ultimately, to ensure sustainable development of ecotourism in the National Park, close cooperation between government institutions, environmental protection organizations and the local community is necessary to create policies and practices that protect and preserve this extraordinary natural asset. This cooperation can lead to the development of long-term management plans that ensure the conservation of natural resources and, at the same time, support the sustainable development of tourism and social well-being.

## Author Contributions

Conceptualization, B.K. and L.L.; methodology, B.K. and L.L.; software, B.K. and L.L.; validation, B.K., L.L.; formal analysis, B.K., and L.L.; investigation, B.K. and L.L.; resources, B.K. and L.L.; data curation, B.K., and L.L.; writing—original draft preparation, B.K.; writing—review and editing, B.K., L.L.; visualization, B.K., L.L.; supervision, L.L. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

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## Institutional Review Board Statement

This study did not involve humans or animals, or require ethical review or approval.

## Informed Consent Statement

All data used to derive the results presented in the tables and graphs of this paper were obtained from the Statistical Office of the Republic of Kosovo.

## Data Availability Statement

Data can be provided based on the request.

## Conflicts of Interest

There was no source of funding or anything else that could have influenced the results obtained. The authors declare that they have no conflicts of interest.

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