

## Sustainable Tourism as Potential Development in the Region of Peja

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### ABSTRACT

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Peja has a great history with cultural sights and natural beauty, and it is a place that always offers warm hospitality and attractive social tourism innovations. Peja has all the right potential for a tourist destination, such as natural beauties, cultural heritage, and hospitality. Tourism is a very profitable sector for our country because it is directly related to the well-being and economic growth of the local community. Tourism is a sector that can guarantee sustainable economic development, providing employment, promotion of businesses, more income and more well-being for the citizens of the country and the community. This study was carried out through the design and implementation of 195 (one hundred and fifty-five) questionnaires. The study uses ethnographic design based on case studies. The promotion of tourism for our country will serve as an orientation opportunity for all local and foreign tourists who intend to visit these natural beauties and beautiful scenery in Kosovo. Precisely because tourism plays an important role, and the role plays in the well-being of the local community, the government of our country should continuously pay attention to promoting sustainable tourism in Kosovo.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

A sustainable tourism is a form of tourism that fully takes into account coherent and future economic, social and environmental influences, which addresses a range of needs of visitors, industry, the environment and the host community. Peja is a city in western Kosovo. The city has a remarkable history with a rich cultural heritage and rare natural beauty. The context of history, culture, tradition, natural assets, location, protected environment and fertile lands, etc. are important elements that identify and define it. Furthermore, this culture is an important case that could be discovered and explored in different ways and forms, such as organized visits, various manifestations and events, campaigns and promotions, etc., of tourism as a category and a very important pillar the economic importance which enables and brings significant income and an affordable way of life within the country and the region thus contributing towards the achievement and promotion of the UN SDGs [1]. Peja, as one of the most touristic cities throughout the year, is frequented by many visitors from different countries around the world. Peja with the region combines culture with all the facilities that the modern vacationer requires and offers many tourist attractions that make the tourist feel good. Therefore, the development of the tradition of the culture of food preparation, and the way the inhabitants give a worldview to the heritage in the service of the development of genuine tourism is a very interesting aspect of this activity [2]. Consequently, it still remains in question what are the attributes of ecorun events that combine both event management and sustainable tourism dimensions [3].

Evaluating the natural and cultural heritage potentials that the municipality of Peja has, the possibility of developing tourism as an important economic sector represents one of the main pillars of the development of the municipality. The "Bjeshke te Nemuna" National Park and natural monuments such as the Radavci Cave with the Bardhë Drin Spring and Waterfall, the Koproanik Peak and the monuments of architectural and archaeological heritage present unique assets for the promotion of tourism in the municipality of Peja.

## 2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

With this paper, we will achieve the understanding and clarification of the potential of sustainable tourism in the Municipality of Peja as well as the natural, cultural and national-historical values as a result of the development of sustainable tourism and society today, connecting these with the values of cultural and touristic identity. The questionnaire was created to build a theoretical research base to see more closely what are the orientations and guidelines for sustainable tourism development. These questions detail what are the spheres and methods that prove sustainable tourism. The survey method and interview is one of the basic methods of this study. It is used to obtain quantitative and qualitative primary data. It was carried out through the design and implementation of 195 (one hundred and fifty-five) questionnaires. Through the use of this method, it is intended to investigate the importance of sustainable tourism development in this area of the local community and beyond

[4]. The direct factual method in the field is used for the recognition of objects of cultural, national heritage and natural landscapes in the country. The ethnographic method will help with the social perception of business people who are expected to show what are the next behaviors and trends of tourism development. Will they be oriented towards eco-tourism or villager tourism or other forms of sustainable tourism (Figure 1).

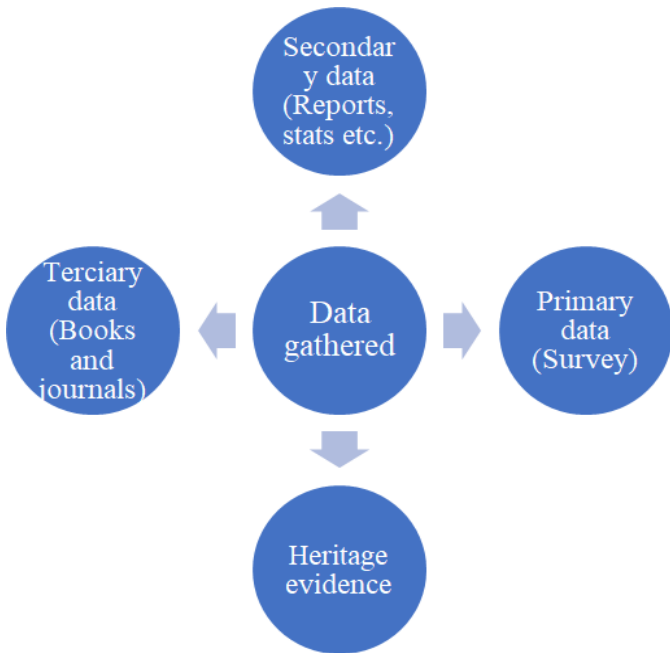


Figure 1. Data format and design [5]

### 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Based on the sense of the dynamics of increasing the frequency of tourists in Kosovo [6]. Resilience is being done a necessity in our day-by-day action and lifestyle to achieve a balance between people and nature [7]. Therefore, the research statement is how sustainability of socio-economic development can be assessed from an economic perspective [8]. Peja is located in a diverse landscape of different cultures and religions, in the area of Peja there is also the Patriarchal House or Monastery, which is perhaps the most important building for Christians, Orthodox, which is part of the world heritage of UNESCO-s since the year 2004. Sustainable tourism like any culture is a special case that can be explored in different ways, such as organized visits, demonstrations, campaigns, etc., it can also provide good income for the community and a good standard of living within country and contributing to the achievement and promotion of SDG-ve [9]. Referring to the UNWTO, a sustainable tourism is considered a form of tourism that fulfills all the needs of visitors and host areas, while maintaining and developing opportunities for the future [10]. Pertinently, a sustainable tourism can be defined as "tourism that takes full account of its current and future economic, social and environmental impacts, addressing the needs of visitors, industry, the environment and host communities [11, 12]. Specifically, the main tasks of sustainable tourism can be referred to as:

- a) Avoiding the negative impacts that are being created on the environment, natural resources, tradition and local culture of the areas;

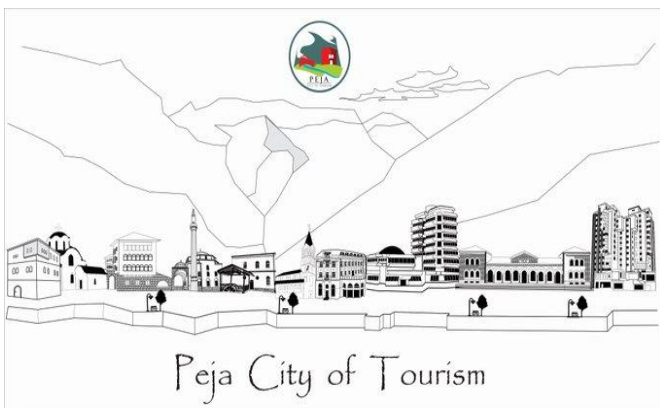
- b) Ensuring the preservation toward local ecosystems;
- c) Revenue income;
- d) Increasing employment;
- e) Increase the country's visibility and competitiveness worldwide.

The intentions of these set goals show a clear possibility of practice which supports sustainable tourism. What is supported even more is the survey distributed and extended to a very large part of respondents, which tends to accumulate as many social elements and their behavior as possible in order to first measure the objectives that guarantee genuine and continuous tourism. There has been an increase in the number of tourists in Peja, which, according to official figures, has a 30 percent increase in visitors per year. Mountain guides have benefited from training from international experts, who at the same time have been certified, have invested in the development of activities such as Via Ferrata, speleology, mountain trails (locally, regionally and cross-border), zip line, paraglide, adventure park, as well as other cultural activities that enhance the values of this country. Peja was evaluated in 2013 as a destination of the future for sustainable tourism by WTTC [13] with the cross-border project "Tops of the Balkans" 1. Also, what should be highlighted is the assessment of the municipality of Peja as a "Model Municipality in the European Green Belt" which was done in 2018 as the first municipality in the history of the Balkans 2 [14]. The trend of visitor growth goes up to 30 percent from year to year. Here it will also affect the development of businesses where families earn directly, it is related to sustainable tourism, a concept where tourism fully takes into account the current and future impacts that may occur in the economic, social and environmental factors, thus addressing the needs of tourists, industry, the environment and the host communities. Tourism is a sustainable economic category and novelties that creates new jobs and promotes inclusive growth with low carbon emissions in harmony with all dimensions and measures allowed for a sustainable development [15]. Involvement of people, system and progressiveness are also accommodated socio-economic and environmental benefits in this business [16]. The market can only recognize a product with a promotion and communication process [11]. Figure 2 presents the three main pillars of sustainability and all the SDGs listed for each of these pillars. There is no strict boundary between social and economic benefits, but they all also relate to or affect the environment in different way benefit.

Undoubtedly, most of the SDGs are related to food supply: zero hunger; good health and well-being; clean water; good sanitation; and thriving industry, innovation and infrastructure. Having a variety of safe, affordable and nutritious foods is a differentiating signal of a prosperous society and a consistent tourism business; in general, diets are the link between the environment and human health. Among the 17 SDGs, many experts even rank food security and health (SDGs 2 and 3) higher than climate action (SDG 13), all in the context of the United Nations Decade of Action on Nutrition (2016–2025) [17]. Rugova has potential for the development of sustainable tourism and tourist attractions with food value. Today, to visit Peja, you can orient yourself very easily because Peja, with its much more prosperous tourist offer, has built an advanced tourist infrastructure equipped with relevant tourist signs for easier orientation towards tourist areas both in the city and in the villages of the region of Rugova (Figures 3 and 4).



**Figure 2.** The sustainable development goals can be divided between the three main pillars of sustainability: Environmental, social and economic



**Figure 3.** Peja city of tourism  
Score: Municipality of Peje department for tourism



**Figure 4.** Attributes of sustainable tourism in Kosovo

Today, Peja has become a world tourist destination through the presentation of the tourist potential of its mountainous areas in the project of the cross-border path "Balkan Peaks", which includes the triangle that connects the border points, Kosovo, Albania and Montenegro, inviting the first world prize for Sustainable Tourism Destination Management "Tomorrow's Tourism" in the final international competition at the Global Summit held in Abu Dhabi on April 9, 2013, the prestigious award which was shared by WTTC, World Travel and Tourism Conci. Tourism and hospitality are seen as potentially key players among businesses contributing to the SDGs - something highlighted in the report by UNWTO (2018). The key attributes and benefits of sustainable tourism in Kosovo are elaborated in Figure 4. Figure 4 reflects not only the axis pillars of sustainability, society, environment and economy, but also the cultural prism has been added because it is an added value towards a tourism stable in the country.

The use of traditional elements and their application in any part of the "Mountain Resort" (Figure 5).

It has been the basic, main criteria or concept for the development and improvement of tourist conditions in this location. The use of these elements also has great benefits in the use of recyclable materials and some materials with a high energy saving coefficient, making the project more original and typical for the surrounding context. Accordingly, different tourist activities can be developed (such as transit type or type of tourism), thus incorporating activities such as walking, camping, fishing, partly cycling, photography, video recording, part of the activities that are also related to traditional nutrition (traditional food). Likewise, water values can be used rationally through sports, recreational, scientific research activities, etc. [18].



**Figure 5.** Mosaic of some traditional elements from the region of Peja



**Figure 6.** Traditional table in the Restaurant “Hani” - Rugova

Here is presented a traditional table which can also be served in some restaurants (Figure 6). It is almost the most frequented and requested food by visitors and represents the most traditional food value in this area. The value of this paid table is about 40 euros. This table is available for four people. The requests of visitors are increasing every time [19].



**Figure 7.** Women's and men's national dress from Rugova



**Figure 8.** Spring season



**Figure 9.** Summer season



**Figure 10.** Autumn season



**Figure 11.** Winter season

For almost seven and a half decades, the dances and costumes (Figures 7-11) have been preserved as they were inherited, and this made this ensemble special, which decently represented Kosovo in demonstrations and festivals inside and outside the country, even before all the tools with which it is played and danced, they are original, without improvisations, says Vesel Nikçi, president of AFA "Rugova", so there is no choreography, no elaborations, they are inherited from generation to generation. The autochthonous folklore ensemble "Rugova" has preserved the dances, songs, clothes, and other parts of the Rugova tradition from generation to generation. For more than seven decades, the dances and costumes have been preserved as they were inherited, which makes the Ensemble special and that: "So far, over 500 soloists have been part of the Ensemble, throughout all these years. We have had 1000 cultural meetings, over 30 festivals, local and world, of them 15 gold medals, 16 silver, 35 bronze and many diplomas, recognitions that completely enrich the ensemble "Rugova", said Vesel Nikçi. He says that "Rugova" promotes values through various cultural meetings, festivals,

manifestations. "We are influencing the preservation of the cultural heritage, of what is autochthonous, because our dances have not been affected by the choreography, nor have the clothes been made by costume designers", said Nikçi, according to whom men's clothing has been preserved more than that of women. WOMEN. "Our region preserves the most original works through the Ensemble" [20]. Advertising can be in the form of advertisements on TV, radio, magazines, newspapers, and others [21].

The number of domestic visitors and their overnight stays by region, the region of Peja has the largest number of domestic visitors with 8,688 visitors and 41,486 overnight stays. According to the official data from the competent bodies, it is shown that Peja is a tourist center in our country in Kosovo, and has potential for the development of sustainable tourism.

As for foreign visitors, compared to the previous period (October 2022), there is an increase in visitors by 14.2%. In total, 30,333 foreign visitors, of which the largest number was from: Albania, Germany, Switzerland, Turkey, etc (Tables 1 and 2).

**Table 1.** The number of visitors and their net stays by region

	Visitor			Night Stays		
	October 2022	October 2023	% October 2023 October 2022	October 2022	October 2023	t % October 2023 October 2022
<b>Internal visitors</b>	<b>15,489</b>	<b>24,689</b>	<b>59.39%</b>	<b>21,258</b>	<b>87,290</b>	<b>310.62%</b>
Gjakovë	80	437	443.85%	159	587	268.91%
Gjilan	1,082	4,627	327.72%	1,172	28,960	2,370.88%
Mitrovicë	1,032	1,360	31.74%	997	1,837	84.26%
Pejë	2,106	8,688	312.56%	5,005	41,486	728.97%
Prizren	4,883	4,505	-7.76%	5,255	7,946	51.21%
Prishtinë	3,344	2,346	-29.85%	5,032	3,409	-32.25%
Ferizaj	2,961	2,726	-7.94%	3,638	3,064	-15.78%

**Table 2.** The number of visitors and their net stays according to the countries they come from

	Visitor			Night Stays		
	October 2022	October 2023	% October 2023 October 2022	October 2022	October 2023	t % October 2023 October 2022
<b>External visitors</b>	<b>26,561</b>	<b>30,333</b>	<b>14.20%</b>	<b>49,697</b>	<b>63,457</b>	<b>27.69%</b>
Shqipëria	5,278	6,683	26.64%	7,971	15,865	99.04%
Gjermania	2,630	2,908	10.56%	6,176	6,005	-2.77%
Zvicra	2,103	2,402	14.19%	3,324	5,199	56.41%
Turqia	1,695	2,151	26.88%	2,429	3,247	33.67%

#### 4. RESULTS FROM INFORMATION COLLECTION QUESTIONNAIRE

The touristic potential of the Municipality of Peja must be promoted and is an important factor in the economic development of the local and wider community. Realization with the respondents, during the month of December 2023. The responses of the respondents to the questions were mainly focused on the development of tourism and its promotion. We have chosen only the answers that were most interesting for the object of treatment in the paper. The answers received from the respondents bring us a result from which we can conclude that tourism continues to be an attractive and very important activity towards preserving the authenticity of culture. In the

framework of this research and this distributed survey, 195 respondents were taken who gave their opinions and judgments on various issues such as: the number of tourists, employment opportunities through the creation and development of businesses in the region of Peja, the impact on development economic and regional, cultural information centers and promotion of cultural potentials. The data obtained in Table 3, they show from the respondents show that the level of reliability of this information is at a high level of consistency and show that this data is increasing, taking into account that this branch of the economy is also growing and is influencing the improvement. of employment and part of tourism development.

**Table 3.** Research conducted in the Peja Region

No.	Question Description	Excellent	Very Good	Good	Poorly
1	Do you think that the number of tourists has increased from year to year?	168	22	4	1
2	Do you think that tourism will help the economic development of Peja??	192	3	0	0
3	How satisfied do you think the tourists are with the hospitality of the local community?	179	11	5	0
4	Are there foreign investments in tourism in the Municipality of Peja?	83	58	20	34
5	How satisfied are you with the promotion of tourism by the competent bodies?	124	31	30	10
6	How satisfied are you with the tourist information centers in the City of Peja?	101	61	30	3
7.	Are you satisfied with the Government's strategy for the development of tourism?	120	35	30	10

## 5. CONCLUSIONS

Kosovo has attracted a large number of visitors, especially the city of Peja, from all over the world for the sole reason that it has, from one end to the other, rare natural beauties that do not allow the pearls of cultural and historical heritage to fade. These beauties that Peja and the district have today and for several years continue to present us as a unique country not only in the region, on the other hand they require an adequate tourist infrastructure but also an orientation as easy as possible for visitors. Thanks to the history, culture, tradition, natural assets and many other reasons that make Peja special, Peja is one of the most chosen cities in Kosovo by local and foreign tourists. Meeting at first sight with the Rugova Gorge and the course of the Drini Bardhë, including many other tourist attractions, attract attention and increase the tourist potential of this city. Our country promotes natural and cultural tourism as an important factor in economic development and reducing unemployment. The Government of Kosovo has the development of the tourism sector as part of the governing program for the years 2021-2025. A special focus is placed on mountain tourism, including: ski resorts, the increase of accommodation and human capacities and the improvement of the relevant infrastructure in touristic places.

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