

Accursed Mountains impact in International Freelance Tourism

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Abstract – Accursed Mountains lies in three states, two of which are neighboring states of the Republic of Kosovo. Consequently, they bring benefits to independent mountain tourism from international tourists. Through the development of alternative mountain tourism and independent guides, the Cursed Mountains, including all the villages and towns that are part of them, have managed to attract the attention of international tourists and turn them into an attractive destination for them.

The purpose of this scientific paper relies in literature research and comparison of findings, to highlight the origins of tourism stagnation in the researched area and through comparisons of different theories and practices, to give recommendations for improving the current situation.

Methods of this study are mainly retrospective, descriptive and comparative based on relevant theories, literature, internet findings and previous studies and as well the personal observation due to experience gained in previous education levels.

Natural beauty, authenticity, history, culture and finally reasonable prices, continue to be determining factors in the decision of international tourists towards the visit of natural wonders that this part of the Balkan Peninsula offers.

Researching and reviewing the preliminary Balkan literature and issuing new assessments of the tourist and geographical values of the Cursed Mountains would be very useful in the process of identifying and evaluating the tourist motives of the Cursed Mountains. With the possession of real and up-to-date statistics, coordination of central and local policies, each of the countries could draw up plans for sustainable tourism development. Creating a sustainable tourism concept for any purpose entrepreneurship is multi factorial process, including environmental, social and economic factors.

Based on the findings, it is recommended coordination between the institutions of the three countries for the design and implementation of a joint strategy, in order to create more suitable conditions for international tourists and at the same time greater economic benefits and the inclusion of local economies.

Keywords – Accursed Mountains, Tourism, Mountain Tourism, Tourists, Tourism strategy

I. INTRODUCTION

Accursed Mountains lies in three states, two of which are neighboring states of the Republic of Kosovo. Consequently, they bring benefits to independent mountain tourism from international tourists.

Tourists who visit the Accursed Mountains trails that stretch into Kosovo or beyond after completing their mountain expedition often have ambitions to see and learn more about the culture of the state they have decided to explore.

By sharing time and interest in visiting the cities or capital of the state in which they have conducted mountain guides, they bring benefits to the economy and tourism of the states in question.

The area of the Cursed Mountains in the past has been identified with several different names, such as "Albanian Alps", "Northern Albanian Alps", "Alps in southern Europe" that are common in European literature and in more heterogeneous encyclopedias, such as The World Book Encyclopedia [1].

The Balkan Peninsula is a hotspot of European biotic diversity. One of its biogeographically most peculiar but poorly explored regions are the Albanian Alps on the border between Albania, Kosovo and Montenegro, characterized by a high number of endemic species, [2].

The Prokletije / Accursed Mountains encompass areas of unique landscape and are one of the most important regions for the protection of biodiversity in the Balkans and the whole Europe. Their name (in English: cursed mountains) best describes the character of this region, considered to be the most inaccessible mountain range in Europe and the wildest range on the Balkan Peninsula, with extremely harsh mountain environment providing for the extremely hard living conditions for their inhabitants. The highest peaks are Jezercë Peak (2694 m) in Albania and Đeravica/Gjeravica (2656 m) on the territory of Kosovo. Zla Kolata (2534 m), Dobra Kolata (2528 m) and Rosni Vrh (2525 m) in Prokletije Mountains are the three highest peaks of Montenegro.

The number of glacial ponds in this area is rare for the European mainland and can only be compared to the Alps. The natural values of Prokletije / Cursed Mountains include the diversity of alpine and sub-alpine mountain habitats, alpine meadows and pastures with species rich vegetation,

and large forest complexes including primeval tree stands of the endemic Balkan pine and Bosnian pine. The region is the mainstay for a large number of fauna species, which includes endangered species of the common European importance, like the brown bear, wolf and Balkan lynx, having their mainstays in habitats crossed by the state border. These unique values should be taken into account when deciding on the future of this region and protecting its natural treasures for the next generations.

During the last decades human impact and pressures on environment and biodiversity of the region has significantly increased. Moreover, the recent wars and armed ethnic conflicts in this region, in particular the war in Kosovo in 1999 resulted in the situation when the control by the state inspections in the remote mountain border areas became either impossible or ineffective for several years. As a consequence of the above situation – different illegal activities boosted at that time in the border areas of the region, which included poaching on wildlife and illegal fishing, illegal timber felling, overuse of medicinal plant species and uncontrolled land development, with adverse effects on the biodiversity of the region.

Furthermore, the discontinuation of traditional land use practices in previously inhabited and cultivated mountain areas is directly resulting not only from the general

demographic trends, but also from the continuous presence of landmines in the border areas of the Bjeshkët e Nemuna mountains, excluding such areas from either economic use or nature management. The natural forest succession to non-cultivated post-agricultural areas would further decrease the landscape diversity, limit the suitable hunting areas for several birds of prey and decrease grazing areas for the hoofed animals being prey to large carnivore species, which may additionally threaten the viability of the populations of species of the common European importance also in this region.

Last, but not least, techniques used for landmines removal often result in land degradation and deforestation, while vast areas on the Albanian side which served as location of refugee camps already turned into polluted wastelands.

One of the major threats to habitats and species populations and main causes of the decline in biological diversity in Europe is the fragmentation and isolation of habitats and the effect this can have on the viability of species populations. The favorable conservation status of different species and natural habitats depend on the size of protected areas. Migration, dispersal and genetic exchange of wild species depend on the existence of ecological corridors linking particular protected areas of different protective categories designated at national level. The continuity and connectivity of habitats in the border areas requires trans-boundary linkages, ecological corridors which link protected area networks of neighboring countries, [3].

Rural tourism products and activities need a good state of conservation of natural and cultural resources, accommodation integrated into the environment, services offering local products and handicrafts, local food and keeping of traditions. Rural tourism is characterized by development in small territories with their own identity that have an extensive offer of diffuse, non-concentrated and small-scale accommodation and leisure activities.

Due to the characteristics of this type, the tourism development of rural areas has to ensure the territory does not lose the identity that makes it a destination capable of attracting the interest of an increasingly demand. Tourists do not buy products; they buy the satisfaction of an expectation and they value that expectation as an integral whole. So, it must be measured social costs that can be derived from rural tourism development as rural areas are quite prone to adopt new values and ideas that in some cases can damage the idiosyncrasy of the place and population.

In recent decades, authors have used multiple concepts to define the term 'development' from different perspectives.

Given that the main dimensions are economics, territory, population and social relationships, economics is not the only factor. It also encompasses an important historical component, including the common cultural values within a community or a society and the idea of future as a goal for a group of people to achieve. In western societies, development has an intrinsic junction with the industrial revolution process. Sustainability must be supported by development and the main place to start is in the local space, [4].

The two main industries that are part of the activities we call tourism are the hospitality and travel industries. Successful hospitality marketing is highly dependent on the entire travel industry, [5].

Human mind is similar to a computer but there is one important difference. A computer has to accept what you put into it, while the mind does not. In fact, it's quite opposite. It accepts only new information which matches its current state of mind. It filters everything else. So if in consumer's mind some brand is related to one particular product, introducing a different product of the same brand would only create confusion, [6].

Investments in sustainable tourism development could be one of the ways to increase the participation of Kosovo in the global economy by facilitating poverty, in particular through the creation of employment in micro, small and medium enterprises. Defects in terms of necessary physical infrastructure, marketing and availability of appropriately qualified human resources are elements which hinder the sustainable development of tourism. Kosovo promotion at national and international level would have major effects on the information of tourists. Micro-credits from micro financial institutions of tourism sector, small enterprises and tourist agencies together, stimulate tourism and strengthen the link with the other economic sectors, [7].

As a freelance guide can work in just about any field in whom they feel comfortable in. He do not need a specific designation like water guide, land guide, step-on guide or sightseeing guide [8].

Together with the main aim of preserving nature, national parks are also expected to play an important role for the local communities, driving economic activities toward the lens of sustainable development, [9].

Interested and experienced rangers and volunteers can make a major contribution to such monitoring programs, but reliable ecological monitoring needs qualified ecologists, [10].

Reference 11 shows that there are three strategies for developing a hotel business:

- Intensive development.
- Collaborative, integrative development.
- Concentrated diversity.

The typical course of development has the following pattern. Painters search out untouched and unusual places to paint. Step by step the place develops as so-called artist colony. Soon a cluster of poets follows kindred to the painters, then cinema people and gourmets. The place becomes fashionable and the entrepreneur takes note. The fisherman's cottage, the shelter-huts become converted into boarding houses and hotels come on the scene. Meanwhile the painters have fled and sought out another periphery as related to space, and metaphorically, as 'forgotten' places and landscapes. Only the painters with a commercial inclination who like to do well in business remain, they capitalize on the good name of this former painter's corner and on the gullibility of tourists. More and more townsmen choose this place, now en vogue and advertised in the newspapers. Subsequently the gourmets, and all those who seek real recreation, stay away. At last the tourist agencies come with their package rate travelling parties; now, the indulged public avoids such places. At the same time, in other places the same cycle occurs again; more and more places come into fashion, change their type, and turn into everybody's tourist haunt, [12].

Although tourism is one of the most complex activities of contemporary society, it finds application in both developed and less developed countries. Given that the economy, culture, human activities and environment play a major role in the development of sustainable tourism, Kosovo has high potential for the development of alternative tourism.

II. AIM

The purpose of this scientific paper relies in literature research and comparison of findings, to highlight the origins of tourism stagnation in the researched area and through comparisons of different theories and practices, to give recommendations for improving the current situation.

III. METHODOLOGY

Methods of this study are mainly retrospective, descriptive and comparative based on relevant theories, literature, internet findings and previous studies and as well the personal observation due to experience gained in previous education levels.

The methodology used in this study work, will apply comparative data in three respective countries where the Cursed Mountains lie.

IV. FINDINGS

It can be said that the Cursed Mountains have hardly been studied and are fully explored so far. The lack of a proper study and exploration both in terms of tourism and geography is clearly related to the harsh nature of the mountains, the territorial division between the states where they lay, the relations and political conflicts between the states that enjoy the faces of the Cursed Mountains and other factors.

The small number of contemporary researches and studies on the resources, qualities and opportunities that these mountains offer for the development of tourism, are one of the weak sides of sustainable tourism political development, be they individual, collective, national or regional.

Socio-geographical problem and primitive and greedy policies, it can be freely said that they have negatively affected the tourism industry in this area with potential. Canyons, gorges, mountains, fields, lakes, traditions, flora, fauna and high values of agricultural activity have found application only in daily or individual consumption by families with permanent residence. (Fig. 1).



Fig. 1 Map of “Peaks of the Balkans” Trek, (Baxter Nature)

Researching and reviewing the preliminary Balkan literature and issuing new assessments of the tourist and geographical values of the Cursed Mountains would be very useful in the process of identifying and evaluating the tourist motives of the Cursed Mountains. With the possession of real and up-to-date statistics, coordination of central and local

policies, each of the countries could draw up plans for sustainable tourism development.

Creating a sustainable tourism concept for any purpose entrepreneurship is multi factorial process, including: environmental, social and economic factors, (Fig. 2).

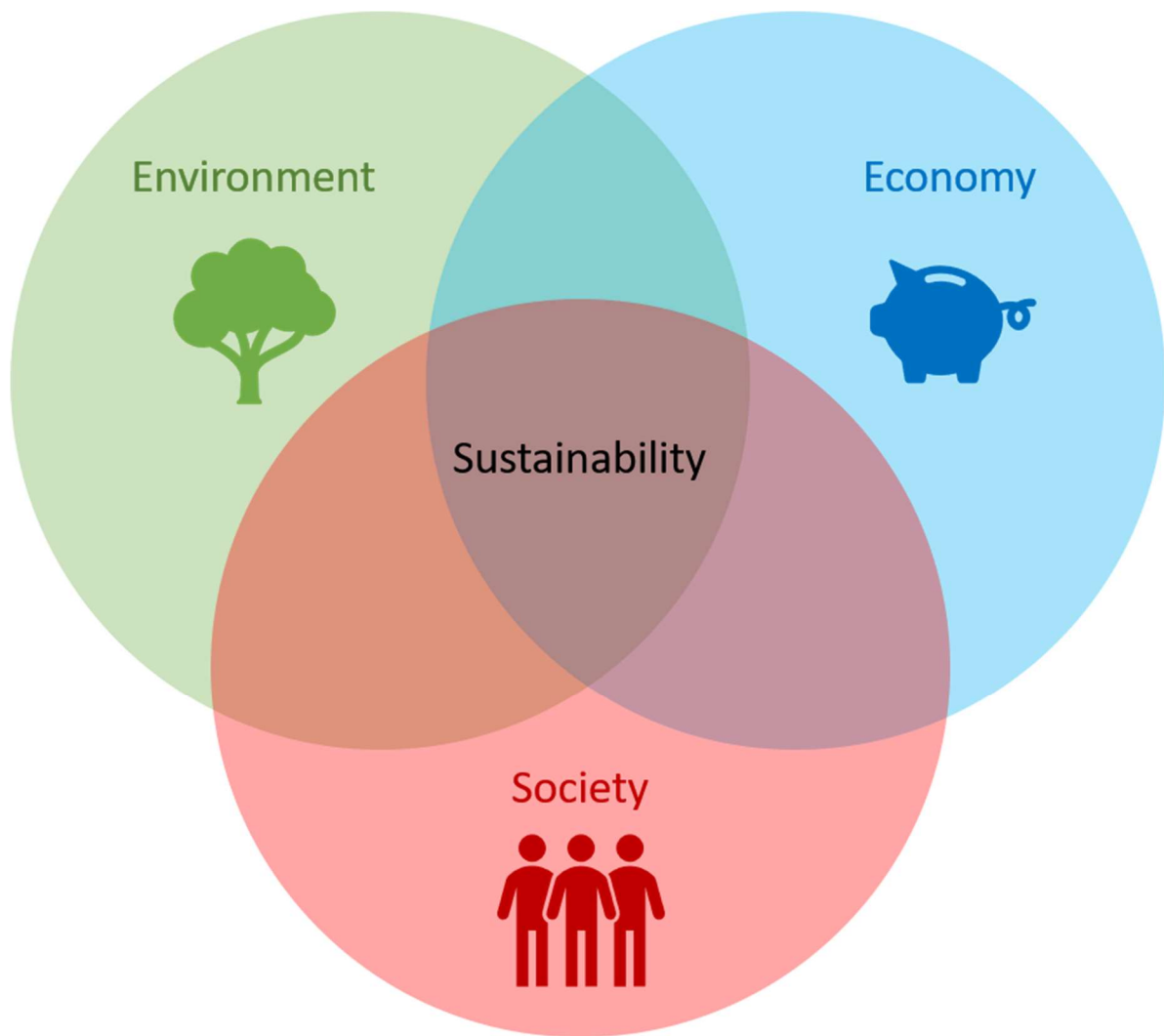


Fig. 2 Sustainability diagram for Tourism Business (Seek PNG)

Recently, there have been some comprehensive initiatives to declare the Cursed Mountains as a National Park or Natural Park, but they have not yet found implementation in practice.

4.1 Spatial plans, development and other documentation for the development of tourism in the Cursed Mountains and their parts

As a basis for comparison between mountain tourism for Kosovo and other countries in the region in which the Cursed Mountains are located, we have taken the research done in 2019 by Kastrati Q, (Reference 1), which does not detail the comparison of the development planet between mentioned above.

From the spatial planning documentation, which addresses the tourist-geographical problems of the Cursed Mountains or their parts, we quote as follows:

The study: *"Prokletije - Mountains feasibility study on establishing a trans-boundary protected area"*, contains a brief overview of natural values in the region, cross-border cooperation of the local population in the socio-economic, economic and demographic context, the state of the environment in the region, legal infrastructure and administrative for protected areas, their labels and management.

Lists protected areas and national parks in the Cursed Mountains area, National Park "Valbona Valley", National Park "Thethi", nature reserve "Gashi River" in Albania, natural monument "Rugova Canyon" in Kosovo and National Park "Prokletije" in Montenegro.

This project is planned in order to make the declaration of protected areas of the Cursed Mountains in Albania, Kosovo and Montenegro.

This study addresses cross-border cooperation (priorities, challenges and opportunities) in terms of conservation and planning of trans-boundary protected areas, habitats, plant and species communities, fauna conservation, etc.

In the *"Mountain tourism development program in Montenegro - Tourist destination of the Cursed Mountains 2005"*, in addition to the mountain tourism development program in Montenegro, in detail are presented the opportunities for the development of mountain tourism in the Cursed Mountains, belonging to Montenegro.

The *"Kosovo Regional Plan - Basic Studies: Tourism - Hunting 1971"*, presents the tourist potential of Kosovo and within this plan, is presented a part of the Cursed Mountains that belong to Kosovo, especially natural and anthropogenic tourist motives.

Among others, the measurement and leveling of the ski trails, the quantitative and qualitative potential of the ski trails, the preparation of the general tourist infrastructure for the construction of tourist centers, etc. have been carried out.

In the project *"Study on the rationale of declaring the Cursed Mountains - Municipality of Peja for National Park 1985"*, the basic rights and obligations of ecological protection, recreational-tourist, cultural-artistic features and other functions of the Park are treated very pragmatically.

The project *"Study on the Reasonability of the Proclamation of the Territory of the Cursed Mountains for the National Park 2003"*, provides the basic justifications on which are based the ideas for declaring the territory of the Cursed Mountains the National Park through: ecological features of the area, forest use and towers, recreational and tourist features, educational, cultural and other functions that can be organized in that area.

The study is presented in detail: the specifics of the geographical position and natural tourist motives such as mountain peaks, mountain passes and slopes with degraded ski trails, etc.

The *"Kosovo Tourism Development Strategy 2007-2013"* presents some tourist-geographical characteristics of the Cursed Mountains area that extend to the part of Kosovo and the types of tourism that can be developed in this part.

For objective reasons we also mention the *"Integrated Development Strategy of the Municipality of Rozaja 2003"*, which contains only 4 pages of text on tourist motives within the text on the physical and geographical features of the Municipality of Rozaja. A content which is not at the appropriate level and shows the insufficient care of the

Municipality of Rozaja for poor treatment of tourist potentials in this development document.

In the *"Tourism Strategy and Action Plan for the area of Kukes 2010"*, are provided superficial data for the territory of the Municipality of Tropoja that belongs to the District of Kukes, where the Cursed Mountains and the most important motives are located: Valbona, Qeremi, Tropoja, Gashi, Nikaj, Merturi etc. Not forgetting spaces that offer development opportunities for eco-tourism, winter tourism, nature walks, etc.

Information is also provided on cultural and tourist facilities such as the Tower of Mic Sokol, the Tower of the Bujan Conference and the Historical Museum of the city in Bajram Curr.

In the *"Three-year Strategic Plan of the Municipality of Lekbibaj 2012-2015"*, despite the declarative priority of winter and rural tourism development in the Municipality of Lekbibaj, the content of the plan does not show any strategic commitment for the development of tourism in this municipality.

In addition to the above, there are also a number of tourist guides and fewer individual monographs of the countries, which contain a large amount of tourist-geographical information about certain parts of the Cursed Mountains. Here we emphasize:

- *Rozaja Tourist Guide 2007*, mainly describes the natural and anthropogenic tourist motives of Rozaja, but in a superficial and gloomy way.

- *Cultural guide through Rozaja 2010*, presents the anthropogenic monuments of Rozaja and its surroundings.

- *Tourist Guide for the Valbona Valley - Margegaj Commune 2007*, contains a summary of the natural social characteristics of the Valbona Valley, which is accompanied by illustrations and very solid information.

- *Eco-Guide: The nature of Rugova, a property turned upside down in 2001*, contains a guide in which the Rugova region is described as one of the most suitable regions for tourism development. The Rugova region is described with a large number of natural and anthropogenic motifs which are very attractive.

- *Eco-Guide: Theth National Park 2012*, contains a more detailed overview of the area of Theth National Park which is located in the central part of the Cursed Mountains, addressing all tourist, natural and anthropogenic motifs, but presented in descriptive way. The tourist motives in this guide are presented as a source and as a tourist potential, which can

be used in the development of tourism as a priority economic branch in the area of Thethi National Park.

Among other things, it is said that there are still institutions in the Cursed Mountains area, which consider this documentation "strictly confidential" and continues to be inaccessible to researchers. However, the acquaintance with the above-mentioned spatial planning documents was a great help in the process of proper identification of the tourist motives of the Cursed Mountains and their accurate tourist-geographical evaluation.

4.2 Assessment of Identified Tourist Motives of Cursed Mountains

Valuable biographical tourist motives of cursed mountains and the numerical-measurement scale consists of numbers that correspond to certain values, as follows:

- Value 1-1.5 (insufficient quality), the motive is not suitable for presentation and numerical use
- Value 1.5-2.5 (satisfactory quality) local tourist character (LTC)
- Value 2.5-3.5 (good quality) regional tourist character (RTC)
- Value 3.5-4.5 (very good quality) national tourist character (NTC)
- Value over 4.5 (excellent quality) international tourist character (ITC)

Tab. 1 Assessment Of Bio-geographical Tourist Motives Of Cursed Mountains

	Geographical-tourist position and traffic approach of motives	Attractiveness or rarity of tourist motives	The environment of tourist motives	Uniqueness of tourist motives	Possibility to use the motive for tourist purposes	The degree of utilization of the motive for tourist purposes	The degree of preservation of tourist motives	Compliance and completeness with tourist motives	Overall assessment of motive	Ranking
1 BIOGEOGRAPHICAL MOTIVES										
1.1 LOCALITIES WITH ALPINE BIOGRAPHICAL FEATURES										
a) Tourist-geographical region of the Cursed Mountains of Albania										
Massive mountain of Trokus	1.90	4.00	4.80	4.40	3.50	1.50	4.60	3.70	3.55	N
Jezerce Mountains	0.70	3.10	4.10	3.50	3.30	1.60	3.90	3.10	2.91	R
Massive mountain of Kolaj	2.00	3.30	4.00	3.50	3.30	1.40	3.90	3.10	3.06	R
Mean Turistic Value of AL	1.53	3.47	4.30	3.80	3.37	1.50	4.13	3.30	3.18	R
b) Tourist-geographical region of the Cursed Mountains of Monte Negro										
Hajla's Massive Mountains	2.60	3.70	4.20	4.10	3.70	1.60	3.50	3.70	3.39	R
Bjelic, Karanfil, Popadije Massive	2.30	3.70	4.10	3.80	3.90	1.60	3.70	3.70	3.35	R

Mean Turistic Value of MNE	2.45	3.70	4.15	3.95	3.80	1.60	3.60	3.70	3.37	R
c) Tourist-geographical region of the Cursed Mountains of Kosovo										
Gjeravica Mountains	1.90	3.10	4.10	3.60	3.70	1.50	3.70	3.50	3.14	R
Massive: Hajla-Rusolia-Shtedim	2.70	3.70	4.20	3.90	3.70	1.60	3.60	3.50	3.36	R
Lumbardh's Mountains	1.70	3.50	4.00	3.60	3.50	1.40	3.70	3.10	3.06	R
Kuqishte's Mountains	2.10	3.40	4.30	3.90	3.90	1.60	3.70	3.60	3.31	R
Mean Turistic Value of KS	2.10	3.43	4.15	3.75	3.70	1.53	3.68	3.43	3.22	R
Mean Turistic Value of Cursed Mountains	2.03	3.53	4.20	3.83	3.62	1.54	3.80	3.48	3.25	R

During the tourist evaluation process as we can see in table 1, we found that out of 29 identified bio-geographical tourist motives in the Cursed Mountains area, 27 of them have a higher value, tourist average than 2.50 (3.45). Given their spatial distribution in the tourist-geographical regions of the Cursed Mountains, the greatest bio-geographical diversification and the most valuable bio-geographical tourist motives are found in the tourist-geographical region of the Cursed Mountains belonging to Kosovo (12 or 44.44% of the number of the bio-geographical motifs of the Cursed Mountains), in the region belonging to Albania are 9 or 33.33% of the total number of bio-geographical motifs of the Cursed Mountains, while in the region belonging to Montenegro is the smallest number of this type of motive (6 or 22.22% of the total number in the Cursed Mountains).

The greatest bio-geographical diversification of the part of the Cursed Mountains that belongs to Kosovo is conditioned by:

- Climatic position;
- Management of mountain morph-structures;
- Height and rough relief;
- And other bio-geographical factors.

Bio-geographical motifs are also of great tourist-geographical importance, both for the life of people in general and for tourism. Indeed, the flora and fauna of the Cursed Mountains is special and diverse, which is manifested by the wide diversity of the tourist offer and in all aspects of tourism planning.

An example to be followed by country of Albania, Kosovo and Monte Negro in where the Cursed Mountains lie would be the initiative for cooperation agreements in the field

of tourism between Kosovo, Macedonia and Albania, specifically the Sharr Mountains.

Definitely, that would be an interesting agreement which would create a new tourist attraction in the three countries mentioned above.

V. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Characteristics of the Cursed Mountains have made it possible for international tourists to visit it both independently and through tourist guides.

The importance of the Cursed Mountains and the opportunities it offers for sustainable tourism should be exploited by the countries to which they are located.

The Cursed Mountains can be one of the most attractive destinations in the entire Balkan Peninsula.

Based on the findings, it is recommended coordination between the institutions of the three countries for the design and implementation of a joint strategy, in order to create more suitable conditions for international tourists and at the same time greater economic benefits and the inclusion of local economies.

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