

FINAL REPORT

PROJECT:

NaturKosovo - “The natural and cultural capital in Kosovo and the sustainable touristic development of Via Dinarica” Study for the tourist promotion of the territory of Via Dinarica Kosovo

Preview of the final version of the Study for the identification and characterization of tangible and intangible heritage sites of the 3 target municipalities within the territory of Via Dinarica Kosovo



Destination Management Organization (DMO) - West Kosova

CONTRACT TITLE:

Identification and characterization of material and non-material heritage sites in the territories of the 3 target municipalities crossed by the Via Dinarica

ABSTRACT

As tourism is one of the fastest growing industries today, and as within the tourism industry events are getting more and more important, people have grown more interested in events of all kinds, and are ready to travel far away to participate in those events that they find interesting. Moreover, events can offer various economic and social benefits for travel destinations and local communities, therefore the figure of the destination manager can take a more effective role in the tourism industry.

It has become widely accepted that communities and territories of destination need to adopt a long-term, strategic approach to tourism-related events through careful planning and development in order to fulfill their full tourism potential.

This Study has been carried out on the stretch of Via Dinarica that runs through the municipalities of Peja, Deçani and Junik.

In order to facilitate the design and identification of thematic routes crossing and connecting the three municipalities, this study intends to provide a more detailed identification of:

- Sites of natural, cultural and historical interest, their characterisation and geographical location.
- A storytelling regarding social relations, cultural and artistic sites, local handicraft, agricultural and eno-gastronomic features, religious traditions that can all be enjoyed and experienced by tourists.
- Experimental or new tourism attractions that may be further developed.

Furthermore, this Study commits to a further operational objective: its narrative part and the database of information could constitute a useful tool to be made available for municipalities, tourist information offices, tour operators, hotel and tourist service managers, tour guides.

Therefore, it includes the most relevant regional assets such as sites of interest, services, attractions, as well as their availability and visiting hours, local cultural institutions, contact names, etc.

The Study has also considered the fundamental elements of cross-border historical and cultural heritage, with the perspective of enhancing Via Dinarica as a uniting element of the whole Western Balkan region.

INSTRUCTIONS

Via Dinarica is a paradise for nature lovers into one of Europe's least explored mountain ranges. The mountain range of the Dinaric Alps that encompass the Via Dinarica Trail stretches in Southeast Europe through Albania, Kosovo, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Montenegro, Slovenia and Serbia. Kosovo, located at the core of Via Dinarica Trail, offers extraordinary landscapes and resources in terms of both natural and cultural heritage, and it represents a potential great destination for outdoor sports such as hiking, climbing, skiing, cycling, among others.

METHODOLOGY

The collection of data and facts displayed in this study have been collected through research and qualitative analysis, particularly based on primary data, effective communications with local stakeholders, direct observation and use of secondary data (**literature, relevant local bibliography accessible through libraries, on-line sources**).

The survey and interviewing methods have been at the core of this study, to obtain primary quantitative and qualitative data through the design and implementation of surveys and questionnaires. The use of this method is intended to highlight the importance of the development of cultural tourism for the socio-economic development of local communities.

Methods derived from ethnographic, according to the case study research model, and the direct observation in the field have also been used, in order to get acquainted with the cultural heritage sites in the vicinity of Via Dinarica, as well as to identify their current condition or criticalities related to their management.

Purpose of the study

Aims to contribute to the sustainable tourism development in Kosovo and increase the knowledge on cultural, historical and natural resources of this part of the country.

Objectives of the study

- Promote understanding on different cultures among tourist and foreigners.
- Improve the quality of life of local population.
- Provide informations about community facilities, as well as tourist facilities.
- Develop a sense of pride in traditional culture and local identity.
- Environmental education to improve the attitude towards the environment by tourists and local citizens.

Interviews and Meetings

For the implementation of this document, the DMO has prepared a questionnaire directed, among others, to the regional bodies involved in tourism, artisans and craftsmen, the Department of Cultural Heritage. During the months of June 2023, four (4) meetings were held with the above-mentioned representatives. The questionnaire was conducted through voice recordings, meetings and interviews.

Questionnaire

The sources used for the questionnaires have been divided into 3 clusters, as follows:

Part I: Historical Sources

Part II: Cultural Sources

Part III: Tourism Sources

- The first part of the questionnaire was addressed to central authorities, local authorities, institutions such as museums, cultural houses, handicrafts, local population, religious leaders.
- The second part of the questionnaire is more focused on a more in-depth history of cultural resources, cultural attractions, traditional music and festivals.
- The third part of the questionnaire refers more specifically to tourism facilities, such as: municipal tourism offices, local family traditions, tourist operators, tourist clubs, accommodation providers, guest houses, restaurants, local guides and alpine clubs.



RESULTS AND ACTIVITIES

According to the planned methodology agreed upon, the DMO team has started, on the date of 29th of May 2023, a sequence of meetings and interviews with some of the officials from the three Municipalities involved in tourism activities.

The first meeting took place on May 29th 2023, with Peja Municipality **Director of the Mulliri Haxhi Zekës**, Mrs Besa Muliqi Potoqani, who used to be also the Cultural Heritage officer. The interview was done through voice recording, and some of the information gathered were later transcribed in the Study.

The second meeting, on June 15th 2023, was held with Mr. Raif Gjikko, the head of local Alpine Club “SHBA Gjeravica Pejë 1928”; Mr. Gjikko provided information particularly about tourist agencies and operators, tourist clubs, accommodation providers, guest houses, restaurants, local guides and alpine clubs in the Municipality of Peja.

Finally, a meeting with a representative of the local handicraft community was held with Mr. Anton Civlaku, who runs a traditional jewellery handicraft business dealing mainly with products made of silver. The Civlaku family has been in the jewelry business since about the year 1840.

Starting on August 30th 2023, meetings continued with officials from Deçani Municipality. The first meeting was held with the Director of Economic Development, Mr. Isuf Demhasaj.

The next interview was held with a representative of the local tourist information office (**Visit Deçani**), Mr. Longard Dervishaj. The recorded materials were later processed and are present in the chapter dedicated to Deçani Municipality.

A meeting with Ms. Gentiana Tofaj, Director of the Economic Development of the Municipality of Junik was held August 04th 2023. The interview was recorded and transcribed, and can be found in the section regarding the Municipality of Junik.

On June 9th 2023, a meeting was held with Mr. Visar Haxhebeqiri, Director of QRTK (**Department of Cultural Heritage of Gjakova**).

Part of the materials collected can be found in the chapter dedicated to Junik Municipality.



Meeting in QRTK department of cultural heritage, Gjakova

MUNICIPALITY OF PEJA

History, cultural heritage, natural beauties, geographical position and fertile lands are all key features that have made Peja a major tourist center throughout the last decades.

The town has a very antique history and is known as one of the main tourist centres in Kosovo.

Various notes indicate the existence of this city in an organised manner since Illyrian times, and Peja is also mentioned as a prominent settlement on the route that connected numerous trade caravans that travelled from Venice to Ragusa (**modern Dubrovnik**).

Visiting Peja means traveling through different ages, ranging from the Illyrian, Roman, Byzantine and Ottoman era to the most recent events of the two World Wars and the Kosovo war of 1998-99. Strolling around the city, visitors will find traces of different historical buildings from different ages. Although the remains have been covered and no thorough archaeological research has been carried out recently, the history of the city of Peja can be traced back to the Illyrian period (**old archaeological stones can be seen in the museum of the city**). Other major attractions include religious sites such as mosques, catholic and orthodox churches, shrines, the Haji Bey's Hammam, Haji Zeka's Mill and the typical stone tower-houses (**kullas**). Visitors can also enjoy the traditional clothing and crafts, old folkloric traditions, the houses belonging to the families of the famous world stars, Rita Ora and Dua Lipa or sports stars like judo world champion Majlinda Kelmendi. Besides, the territory of Peja can offer great natural resources, starting from the vicinities of its city center to the north-west: the stunning beauty of the Rugova Gorge, the Lumbardhi river (**literally, white river in albanian**) and, towards the mountain range above it, lakes up until 1860 meters of altitude, caves, water springs, waterfalls, rich flora and fauna and mountain peaks above 2000 meters of altitude. One of the main attractions of this area is the 30 meters long Drini Waterfall, which is accessible through the main road and is visited by numerous local and foreign visitors throughout the year (**kk.rks- gov.net/peje/turizmi**). More importantly, the climate of Kosovo is quite favorable for tourism, as one can still enjoy the four seasons of the year: mild temperatures in spring and fall, hot summers and a very snowy winter, all ideal for outdoor activities.

Peja was conquered by the Ottoman Empire in 1462, after prince Lekë Dukagjini III, former vassal of the Sultan, formed a coalition with Skanderbeg and other nobles, mainly Albanians, known as the League of Lezha. According to the source of Sallamaja of the Vilayet of Kosovo, after the conquest the city of Peja was included in the Sanxhak (administrative district) of Dukagjin, which stretched as far as the Adriatic sea and roughly corresponded to the territory previously ruled by the Dukagjins dynasty.

Kazaja e Peja, according to the register of 1485, was divided into two districts: Peja and Alltun-ili, which included Gjakova, Junik and Tropoja. According to this year's census, the process of islamization had began slowly and was confined only to the main cities. According to the Ottoman register, Peja consisted of six mahallas (**districts**): Peter's, Nikola's, Stepan's, Radi's, Ivanko's (**or Gjon's**) and Dabzhev's, with 33 families already converted to Islam and 141 Christians. On the other hand, there were no registered muslim families in the surrounding villages. The area of Peja had 213 villages, 6 minor settlements and 11 monasteries.

By the 1582 Defter (**Ottoman tax register**), the city of Peja itself had been significantly Islamised, as is evident from several cases of Muslim-Albanian anthroponyms: Rizvan Deda, Haxhi Deda, Ali Deda, and others.

NATURAL AND MOUNTAIN SITES

Info-Point and Rugova Valley

The city of Peja can offer two spots for tourist information: The first one is located in the city center, while the second one (**Rugova Valley Tourist Information Center**) is at the foot of the Rugova gorge, right in front of the Monastery.

This beautiful valley stretches from the city of Peja, and it is characterized by a deep canyon in the first few kilometers, making it an ideal place for mountain and outdoor sports enthusiasts. The Rugova valley is also a wonderful spot for trekking or hiking, as it is the starting point for numerous mountain trails.

The Rugova valley hides so many riches, and thanks to the NaturKosovo project, financed by AICS (**Italian Agency for Development Cooperation**) a thematic trail has been created to enhance a resting point known located at the 5th kilometer inside the gorge, and the natural site known as the Deer Waterfall

(**“Ujëvara e Kaprollit” in Albanian**), close the village of Shtupeq i Madh. Along the way, the most adventurous tourists can also find a via ferrata, a zip-line and many crags for climbing. For any information, or to rent the equipment needed for these activities, it is recommended to ask Rugova Valley Tourist Information Center.



Rugova Valley Tourist Information Center: Mbretresha Teute. Pejë 30000

Touristic Information Center: Mbretëresha Teuta, Pejë 30000 (in front of Dukagjini Hotel)

EVENTS, FESTIVAL AND FAIRS

- On April - **BooksFair**
- On May - **Peja Outdoor Turism Festival**
- On June - **International Monodrama Festival "MonoAKT"**
- On June - **Peja International Guitar Festival**
- On July - **Ranch Fest – Country Music Festival**
- On July - **Festival “Into the Park”**
- On August - **Anibar (International Animation Festival)**
- On September - **Cultural Festival for literature and theater**

CULTURAL AND HISTORICAL SITES

The city of Peja and its surroundings host a large number of cultural and historical sites which well exemplify the culture and tradition of its territory, from the Illyrian times to the present day. Among them are historical civil buildings such as stone towers, traditional houses, as well as religious sites such as Catholic and Orthodox churches, mosques and other structures like the Haxhi Beut hammam, the Haxhi Zekës Mill and the Old Bazaar complex, all of which reflect the old history of Peja through the ages. All of these buildings are characterized by a unique architectural style, thanks to the skillful work in the use of stone and wood carried out by the local masters. Therefore, it is inevitable to visit the city of Peja and not to stumble on some of these buildings, which suggest the presence of various civilizations along the centuries.

Neolithic - Eneolithic Period

Due to its geographical importance, the region of Peja has been inhabited since the Neolithic age. Settlements from this period can be found in the localities of Karamakaz, Shpella e Demaje and the cave at the source of Drini i Bardhë river (**White Drin in English**), where fragmented ceramic materials of the Starçeve and Vinçe cultures (**6000-3500 B.C.**) have been found. More broadly, Kosovo and the Dukagjin Plain (**the western part of Kosovo**) have been inhabited and cultivated by prehistoric cultures since the Neolithic. Thousands of years ago, this area witnessed the development of the Neolithic agricultural civilization of Starçev, the Impres-Adriatic and the Vinça-Tordosh cultures. In the Eneolithic period (**also known as copper period**) metallurgy also began, and the products of the metal smelting furnaces of Peja and Gjakova were traded as far as the city of Mycenae (**present-day Greece**). The so-called "**Tombs of the Kings**" from the Neolithic period have been found in the Peja district, and other burial sites like the so-called "**Princes' tombs**" have been found throughout the southeastern corner of Europe, including the ones in Peja. The old name of Peja was Gradina, a term that has Indo-European roots, derived from the word "**gard**", or garden. The same word can be found in many other indo-european languages, like Albanian (**gardh**), Saxon (**gardo**), Gothic (**gard**), English (**in the variants garden, geard, girdle, orchard, yard, court**). In Germany and Austria a few cities bear the same word in their names (**like Graz**). In old Persian, a settlement fortified with trees all around was called gerd or certa, derived from the same root. In Slavic languages, we can find it in the variants "**gorod**" or "**grad**".

The first major urban development of the city dates back to the Illyrian and Roman period. The original settlement of Zahac was gradually moved towards the higher ground of the fortress, the remains of which can be found in the area of the Battery Factory, in the locality of Gradina. During the 15th and 16th centuries, Orthodox Albanians formed the majority of the region's population, whereas Slavic people constituted a significant minority. The Slavs arrived in the region during the period of Serbian rule in Kosovo in the Middle Ages, as colonists from Slavic regions north of Kosovo or as members of the ruling class. The tax registers of the Ottoman period (**defters**) had a specific designation for new-comers: in the regions of Peja, for example, the newly-arrived amounted to a third of the villages, and their anthroponomy indicates that only 4 amongst a total of 180 these people had Albanian names, whereas the rest had typical Slavic names. This suggests that an arrival of a Slavic element to the northeast of the Sanjak of Shkodra occurred during the 15th-16th centuries, and the absence of this trend in the rest of the same region indicates that these Slav populations hailed from slavic-inhabited regions outside of Peja itself. In 1582, Ottoman cadastral records indicate that 23 villages in the district of Peja were inhabited by an Albanian majority, due to the dominance of Albanian anthroponomy amongst its inhabitants, while 85 villages had mixed Albanian-Slavic anthroponomy, and the rest contained almost exclusively Slavic names. The documentation regarding the presence of Albanians in Peja at the end of the 15th century – which coincides with the early Ottoman rule in Kosovo – suggests that the Albanians of Peja were the early inhabitants of the region.

According to the 1582 defter, the city of Peja itself had been significantly Islamised, and that can be observed in the names of a few Muslim inhabitants, characterized by a mixture of Islamic and Albanian anthroponomy, such as the Deda family (**Rizvan Deda, Haxhi Deda**).

According to a census of 1681, the town had a majority of 1,000 Muslim Albanian households, and 100 Christian Serb households. In 1835 the Albanian population, supported by Albanian rebels from Shkodra, took over the town from the Ottomans. An Albanian nationalist organization, established in 1899 and known as the League of Peja, was based in the city. The organization, led by Haxhi Zeka, adopted as its main political goal (**like the League of Prizren two decades before**) of defending the rights of Ottoman Albanians and seek an autonomous status for the Albanian lands within the Empire. The League of Peja ceased to exist after an armed clash with Ottoman forces in the year 1900.

In the Geographia of Ptolemy (**2nd century A.D.**) a settlement called Separuntum, in the Roman province of Moesia Superior (**or Upper Moesia**), is mentioned. The latter was a province placed between the provinces of Prevalitana, Dardania and Moesia Inferior (**or Lower Moesia**). Therefore, Separuntum was located on the border between several Roman provinces, therefore adding to its geographical, economic and military importance. In the etymological aspect, and according to the Indo-European roots, the name derives from the Seika hydronym, which literally means “to pour out” or “to draw out”, which is a cognate of the Indo-European root seip (**meaning “to pour” or “to rain”**). In the same work of Ptolemy we come across the river Ippari at Ragusa (**Sicily**), which is linked to the name of the horse Hipparus, related to the Greek version hipos-kal/i (**maybe related to the Thracian tradition of the horse-riding**). Another explanation of the name of Separuntum could be through the Indo-European root seip or sei, which means “**to be wet**” or “**dripping**”. Based on these evidences, it is clear that they refer to a place with an abundant flow of water, significant rainfall, presence of waterways, all of which actually coincide with the hydric, climatic and geographical reality of the city. On the other hand, the suffix penque may be a Proto-Indo-European word referring the number five. Also, the prefix pent or pend is a verb that refers to an arched construction, which leads to the Latin version pendere which means “**sitting**” or “**standing**”. The word pen, in Proto-Indo-European languages, also refer to something stretched, rolled or worked. The above hypotheses provide evidence about the presence of a fortified structure with five stacks and arched elements.

Construction of roads in the region began at the time of Octavian Augustus, and the improvement of such works in modern-day Kosovo is evidenced in the inscriptions of Antonius Pius and Aurelian. Other Roman emperors, such as Trajan, undertook or encouraged extensive public works in Rome and in all the provinces of the Empire, including the modern Balkans (**roads, bridges, aqueducts, reclamation of wastelands, construction of ports**). For military and commercial purposes, Siparunti offered a good connection with the Via Egnatia, a road which, starting from the Via Appia in the Italian peninsula, connected Rome with Durrachion (**modern Durrës**), Thessaloniki and Byzantium, later renamed Constantinople as the capital of the Eastern Roman Empire (**today's Istanbul**). Emperor Trajan had repaired before he sent the Roman legions to attack the kingdom of Parthia. In later years, the Via Egnatia was revived as a major road of the Eastern Roman Empire. The writer Procopius of Caesarea recorded repairs made by the Roman emperor Justinian I during the 6th century, although even the road was said to be virtually impassable during heavy rain. Almost all Byzantine land trade with Western Europe mainly took place along the Via Egnatia.

During the Crusades, the armies traveling east by land followed this route to Constantinople before crossing into Asia Minor. After the Fourth Crusade, the control of this route became even more vital to the survival of the Latin Empire, as well as the Byzantine successor states, the Empire of Nicaea and the Despotate of Epirus. The main road from Lissus to Naissus (**today Lezhë in Albania and Niš in Serbia**) was the most important road that crossed Kosovo at the time. The region was thus well connected with to eastern part of the Balkans in the direction of Scupi (**today Skopje**) and the main road Viminacium-Scupi-Thessalonica, and to the West in the direction of Dalmatia and the Adriatic coast.

In Kosovo, there were also vicinal roads that connected the smaller centers with the two main roads. With the administrative reform of the Emperor Diocletian (**279 a.D.**), the Roman Empire was split into a western and an eastern part. When, in the year 330 a.D., Constantine proclaimed Constantinople as the capital of the Eastern Roman Empire, Separunti (**modern Peja**) remained under the control of the Eastern Roman Empire, later known as the Byzantine Empire. The following centuries were characterized by incursions from barbarian tribes, as well as by the spread of Christianity in the region. From the north, Huns, Goths, Sarmatians and later Avars and Slavs penetrated.

It is notable to mention that traces of Jewish synagogues were found in Illyrian urban settlements, dating from the 1st century, which perhaps served as points from where Christianity spread. In the outer wall that surrounds the Patriarchate of Peja, the presence of three fish carved on a stone are thought to represent an early symbol of Christianity in the region. Above the fish, a Star of David is visible, and two poplars on the sides of the figure. The fish represent Saint Paul, who is said to have preached in Dardania and other Roman provinces in the 1st and the 2nd century a.D. Interestingly, the name of the fish in the Greek language can also stand for an acronym of the name of Christ (**ΙΧΘΥΣ - Ἰησοῦς Χριστός Θεοῦ Υἱός Σωτήρ**", **Iēsoûs Khrīstós, Theoû Huiós, Sōtēr**, in English: **Jesus Christ, the Savior, the Son of God**). The first Christians, in fact, were identified with this symbol. On the other hand, the Hexagon (**or six-pointed star**) consisting of two equilateral triangles, symbolizes the shield of David, which, in the Middle Ages, was used in the coat of arms of the Albanian treasury, as well as in the flag of Skanderbeg. The two poplars (**populus in Latin**) symbolize the popular classes. Although the exact time of the carving of this symbol has not been proven, the established elements provide sufficient evidence for elements of early Christianity.

In the year 325, the Emperor Constantine, himself originally from the Balkans, convened the Council of Nicaea: on this occasion, Dakus, bishop of Dardania, is mentioned speaking of the actual organization of the ecclesiastical hierarchy in the region. In the next centuries, with the penetration of Huns, Sarmatians, and other barbarian tribes, many cities and towns were destroyed or abandoned. However, some of the Roman-Illyrian settlements in Kosovo were rebuilt and continued to survive until the migration of the Slavic peoples.

In his work *De Aedificiis*, Procopius of Caesarea talks about the public buildings financed by Emperor Justinian I, who restored the cities destroyed by the earthquake of 518 a.D. as well as those damaged by the prolonged wars with the Ostrogothic kingdom for establishing control over Italy and the Balkans. Besides, to protect the northern borders of the Empire, Justinian ordered the construction of a system of fortifications from the border on the Danube through the whole region south of the river. Justinian was himself originally from Dardania, a region that included all of modern-day Kosovo and parts of Albania, Northern Macedonia, Serbia and Montenegro.

He established the region at the center of his Empire, both spiritually and politically, and encouraged the construction of new cities (**Justiniana Prima, near today's Skopje, and Justiniana Secunda at the site of ancient Ulpiana, near Prishtina**). According to the work of Procopius of Caesarea, in addition to the magnificent constructions of San Vitale in Ravenna or Hagia Sophia in Constantinople, Justinian erected 8 new forts and rebuilt 61 more in the region of Dardania, one of which was Pentza, possibly identified with modern day Peja. It is also worth mentioning that the review of the collection of roman jurisprudence, known as the *Corpus Iuris Civilis*, the base for the civil law system of many modern states, may also be at the foundation of the customary law of medieval and modern Albanian peoples, known as the Kanun of Lekë Dukagjin.

Dukat

In the year 530 a.D. Emperor Justinian gave more military authority to the governors of the provinces, and thus he created the figure of Dux (**duke in English**), provided with both military and civil authority.

In the 7th century, the Avars and the Slavs broke through the Byzantine western borders, just as in the east the Arabs were advancing in depth in the territory of the Empire. In order to react to these threats, the system of provinces established by the emperors Diocletian and Constantine was replaced by the new administrative-military system called theme. A theme was an arrangement of plots of public land given to soldiers for farming, and whose descendants had to serve in the imperial army. Although the new system implied the abandonment of the old Roman military doctrine, professional regiments were still stationed on the borders of the Empire, and to coordinate them, small duchies, led by a dux, were formed. Since the late 10th century, the area which faced the birth and growth of the state of Rashka, administered by a duke, gave its name to western region of Kosovo, still called Dukagjin today. Hence, in the late Middle Ages, the Albanian noble family of the Dukagjins emerged.

Towers

Since ancient times, fortified buildings have had the purpose of protecting a territory and its economic resources. After the Ottoman conquest, the Albanian kingdoms and principalities shrunk in territory, and were mainly concentrated in some economic and political centers protected by a network of strategically important castles. The decline in the importance of these castles (**castrum in Latin**), as well as the absence of noble families that opposed the Ottomans until the XIV-XVII centuries, led to the birth of a small nobility that enjoyed the new imperial lifestyle. As a result, life in these castles was reduced to narrower socio-architectural dimensions, but preserving the same economic, security and political destiny.

To better understand the meaning of towers as historical and socio-cultural buildings, providing security and political power, we must try to understand the historical aspect of a wider geographic and historical scope that goes beyond our region. Different types of towers have been used in cultures and state organizations over the centuries. The etymology of the word offers a clearer picture:

The Anglo-Saxon form tower, the Germanic crowd; that of the Neo-Latin languages torr, la tour, torre; The Basque version dorrea; the Gaelic word tùr; the Slavic version toranj. All of these lead us to the root of the word **τύρρις (túrrhis)** or **τύρσις (túrsis)**, which is an old pre-Indo-European form that was used in the Mediterranean. Since the expressions related to the military, urbanistic, socio-political aspects of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance have been replaced by the Ottoman rulers, the old expressions were restricted to the economic life, or hunkered down in more peripheral social organizations, such as livestock or agriculture. The word torrishte is a typical provincial expression of the north of Albania, and indicates a flock of sheep or animals surrounded by a fence (**goats, cows, etc.**). Also, the word turre, which can describe a pile of grapes placed on top of one another, a stack, or a pile of objects of any kind, is an Albanian version that derives from the old pre-Indo-European form túrrhis.

The other reliable version to give meaning to the edifice of the tower is the one that comes from the word burg, burgh or burh, which was used from the end of the second century AD until the early Middle Ages, and derives from the Germanic languages. This word is related to the Greek word pyrgos (**meaning stack in the Albanian language**). It can also refer to a fortified tower, sometimes used for observation. The preserved towers of our region, dating mainly from the 18th, 19th and 20th centuries are a proof of the good conservation methods that have preserved the materials from outside interventions and events. Moreover, the local, patriarchal way of life, has been preserved within the walls of towers, resisting external influence over time. This particular type of towers of south-eastern Europe developed, after the Ottoman conquest in the late Middle Ages, were built and used by both Muslim and Christian populations. As for the Albanian tower, a similar term can be found in Bulgarian (kulli), Serbian (kulla, which means stack), likewise derived from the Arabic language: قَلْعَة (qal'a, fortress) which, in turn, comes from Persian kulla, meaning mountain or peak, and which the Turkish adopted in the form kule. Similar buildings can be found in Kosovo, Albania, Greece, Romania, Bulgaria, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Macedonia and Serbia. The current shape of the towers that we encounter today began to appear in the time of the decline of the Ottoman Empire, flourishing from the end of the 19th century to the beginning of the 20th century.

The Tower of Zenel Beut

It was built in 1870, and is one of the towers of the family of Mahmut Begol of Peja. This tower was built at the time of the Eastern Crisis, on the eve of the incursions of Tsarist Russia into the region Balkans, concluded with the Peace of Saint Stephen and the Berlin Conference of 1878. The last decades of the 19th century marked the rapid decline and the shrinking of the Ottoman Empire dominance in the Balkans, with the occupation of Albanian lands by the kingdoms of Montenegro, Serbia and Greece. The Albanian National Assembly, which held its work in Peja between January 23th and 29th, 1899 (**and was dissolved in May 1900**) was attended by representatives of religious leaders and various chieftains of the then vilayet of Kosovo, as well as representatives of the vilayet of Ioannina. Here, the formation of the new Albanian League was announced, and, following the example of the League of Prizren of 1878, was called the League of Peja. Haxhi Zeka from Peja was elected Chairman of the Assembly and of the League's Steering Committee. The 36 delegates, who enjoyed the right to vote, came from the cities of Kosovo and represented the middle classes of citizens and peasants, teachers of both schools and madrasas (**muslim religious schools**), employees of the local administration, landowners, senior officials and clergymen. The most prominent names were Zenel Bey, Bajram Curri, Halil Hasan and Pashë Begolli. The main purpose of this organization was to protect the Albanian lands from the occupation of the new neighboring kingdoms: Montenegro, Serbia, Greece.

Address: 51 William Walker, Pejë 30000



The Towers of Gockaj



The Shaban Goska tower belongs to the buildings of the late 20th century.

A reconstruction of this tower was made after 1908, around the time of the Young Turks Revolution in the Ottoman Empire. The Tower has two floors and a ground floor, divided into three parts. The ground floor was mainly used for storing the family's food. The first floor consisted of a fireplace room and a bedroom, and was used by the members of the family. The guest room, or men's room, is located on the upper floor, which is carefully decorated with crafted wooden ornaments. This room has a fireplace and is furnished with a breadboard, a ceiling, shelves and a wardrobe. What stands out is the wooden ceiling, which was carved out with a knife, and the wooden door that leads to the other rooms is decorated with the ornamental pattern typical of the region. The divanhane is a space, right before the entrance to the men's room, with several windows surrounded by stone arches. The exterior part of the tower is built with carved stone on both the front façades and reinforced with local wood.

The tower also has a semi-arched gate, made of carved stones, that leads to the courtyard of the house. It is believed that the name Gocka derives from the Latin word **"margarita" (pearl)** which is derived from the ancient Greek language **"margaritēs" (μαργαρίτης)**, also meaning **"pearl"**. Even in the modern Albanian language, we can find the name "margaritare" derived from the same root. It may be related to the Sanskrit word **"mañjarī" (cluster of flowers, pearl)** or it may be related to the Persian **"marvârid" (a pearl or daughter of light)**. In the Albanian language the term gós/ë, is also found, a feminine noun that means moist place. The name húrdh/ë-a; which means pond with stagnant water, or deep place in the course of a river. In Albanian we can find the toponym of Goska e Madhe and Goska e Vogël, which is a stream running through Pukë, while in Peja we can come across the patronymic Goska.

Museum of Peja - Muzeu i Pejës (Konaku i Tahir Beu)

Konaku i Tahir Beu is an old civic house that dates to the second half of the 18th century. It is one of the most beautiful examples of the old Ottoman house of the asymmetric type. This house is also quite interesting for the well preserved old interior elements such as the wall cabinets, the wooden ceiling, the doors and the windows, as well as the wooden floor. All these features contribute to make it an artifact of cultural relevance, both in terms of architecture and ethnology. Ottoman sources mention Tahir Pasha Begolli as a descendant of the Hanedan (**Dynasty**) of Peja, and the son of Mahmut bey. He took the role of Pasha and, in 1705, Mytesarif (**governor**) of Dukagjin. In 1731 his presence is attested in Konya, where he was the local administrator for the Empire.

The building also houses the Peja Museum. On the first floor, the environment of a typical Albanian family from past centuries has been reconstructed, including furniture and everyday objects. On the ground floor and in the external courtyard, a collection of historical artifacts dating back to various periods is exhibited, mainly from the Illyrian period, the Roman and Byzantine domination and the Ottoman era. This includes a remarkable collection of coins and artifacts found in Peja and the surrounding region.

Address: Sheshi Haxhi Zeka, Pejë 30000



Haxhi Zeka's Mill

Haxhi Zeka's Mill is a large industrial heritage complex that dates back to the second half of the 19th century. It was built with the assistance of Austro-Hungarian engineers. The building consists of the proper mill and a barn. With its three floors, at the time of its construction it stood as the tallest building of the city. The façade is made of combined stone and brick, and is decorated with arched and framed windows. Haxhi Zeka's mill is the first of its kind in Kosovo and displays the most advanced technology of its time, brought from the Austro-Hungarian Empire. At first, the mill functioned with hydraulic energy, and only later was powered with electricity. In other words, it is the place where the modern industrial economy began in Peja. In the past, the entire region provided grain milling and flour production services. After the death of Haxhi Zeka, his nephew, Jashar Pasha, took over in the possession of the Mill. In 1997, it was put under state protection. During the 1998-1999 war, the mill was burned down but was quickly restored twice: the mill in 2004 and in the barn in 2016.

Address: Vëllezërit Gërvalla, Pejë 30000



Kulla Haxhi Zeka

In the vicinity of "Haxhi Zeka" square stands the Pasha's Tower, also known as Haxhi Zeka's Tower, whose walls of which are decorated of the characteristic works of the Albanian masters of the time, such as the lion and the seal of Sulejman. Its characteristic architecture, dating back to 18th and 19th century, it consists of a two-story building made of stone, with windows and turrets made by Albanian craftsmen.

Haxhi Zeka was born on December 20th in the village of Shoshan, located in the hilly area of Gjakova, the son of Mehmet of Abedin Byber and Zelfije Doçi from Deçan. His family then moved to Peja, where they possessed land estates. Haxhi Zeka was among the organizers of the Albanian League of Prizren and one of the most determined fighters for the autonomy of the Albanian vilayets (**districts of the Ottoman Empire**) and for the protection of their territorial integrity. In the first Assembly of the League, on June 10th 1878, he was elected as member of its Central Committee. He participated, as a military commander, at the head of the forces of the League in Gjakova, where in September 1878 fought against the forces of Mehmet Ali Pasha.

Together with Sulejman Vokshi and Kadri Bajri, Haxhi Zeka led the anti-Ottoman uprisings of the Kosovo Albanians in 1884-1885, which aimed to restore the League and implement its autonomist ideas. In 1893, Haxhi Zeka and Bajram Curri organized the uprising that involved Peja, Gjakova and other cities in Kosovo against the economic and political policies of the Empire. After the uprising was put down by force, Haxhi Zeka asked to surrender only to the Sultan. In December 1893 he was escorted to Istanbul, where he was received by the Sultan. He spent two years in exile there and returned on October 15, 1895.

In cooperation with the Albanian Committee of Istanbul, headed by Sami Frashëri and other patriots both at home and abroad, Haxhi Zeka promoted the Assembly of Peja (**January 23th-29th, 1899**) where around 500 participants gathered. The League of Peja was finally founded, and he was elected chairman of its Committee, in representation of the autonomist program for Albanian lands of the Istanbul Committee. In April-May 1899, he organized committees to fight the Bulgarian revolutionary groups. Such committees then prepared to revolt against the Empire, but were quickly put down by the Ottoman army. In February 1901, in his role of President of the League, he organized a gathering at the Tyrbe (**tomb**) of Sultan Murat in Fushë Kosovë, where he expressed his concerns about increasing menace of Serbian territorial ambitions.

It is believed that Haxhi Zeka offered his services to the Austro-Hungarian Empire several times, and came to suggest the annexation of the Albanian vilayets by the Austrian Empire, but the authorities in Vienna did not trust him since he was in some way still connected to the Sultan's court. The Serbian authorities later sent to their consul in Prishtina, Sima Abramovic, one of Haxhi Zeka's personal enemies, the bloodthirsty Mehmed Zaim, to liquidate him. This encouraged his son, the captain of the zaptije Adem Zajmi, to kill Haxhi Zeka. The assassination took place on February 21, 1902 in Peja. Haxhi was buried in the cemetery of the Sultan Mehmed Fatih/Carshi Xhami mosque in Peja. His murderer was killed in 1912 by Serbian authorities, after demanding the promised reward for the murder.

Address: Lidhja e Pejës, Pejë 30000



Hamam of Haxhi Bey

In 1463, after Prince Lekë Dukagjini joined the League of Lezha, Sultan Mehmet II Fatih (the Conqueror) imposed the Ottoman rule in Pejë, which at the time was the administrative center of the Dukagjini region. Within the Vilayet of Rumelia, the Dukagjini sandjak (1436) and the Arnavud sandjak were formed. Gjon Dukagjini, grandson of Lekë Dukagjini is mentioned after 1480 in the Republic of Venice, precisely in the San Servolo castle in Capodistria. We can therefore assume that the descendants of the Dukagjin princes were castellans (landlords) in the Republic of Venice at least until the end of the 18th century, when the Dukagjins are no longer mentioned. Hamam of Haxhi Bey in Pejë also known as Kurshumli Hamam, is a public building erected at the beginning of the Ottoman rule over Kosovo, namely when Peja was part of the Sanxhak of Dukagjin (1462-1485).

Haxhi Bey donated the funds for the construction of this building was Haxhi Bey, from whom the hammam took its name. It should be noted that in this period, out of 174 households in Peja, 33 had already converted to Islam, while 141 were Christians. The building is a classical artifact of the Islamic architecture of the period. The oriental-style public bath was not part of an urbanized area for a long time, until the Mosque Hamam was built in 1587. It is worth noting that from the bath, the earthen pipes that carried the hot water were conveyed to the Mosque of the Pashallars (**also known as the Mosque of the Defterdar**), erected in 1570, whose name comes from Mehmed Efendi, the defterdar (**the turkish government officer of finance**) of Sultan Selim II, who also contributed to finance its construction. It is thought that in this mosque the pashalars took ablutions using the warm water coming from the Hamam.

Address: Ramiz Sadiku, Pejë 3000

Bazaar Mosque

In the center of the Old Bazar stands the old mosque known as "**Bajrakli Mosque**" or "**Bazaar Mosque**", built in 1471, of which the smaller cupolas and dome's architectural style stand out.

Address: 30000 Çarshia e gjatë, Pejë 30000

Old Bazaar

The Old Bazaar of Peja dates back to the 15th century, when it was developed around the Bajrakli Mosque (**or Qarshi Mosque**), as the pillar of the economic, social and political center not only of the city but of the whole area of Dukagjin and the wider region including Plav, Guci and Rozhaje (**modern-day Montenegro**), up until

Novi Pazar in modern-day Serbia. Since its foundation, this urban and economic center has spurred the development of the city of Peja from the part of the Old Town Castle all the way towards the north-west, closer to the Rugova Gorge. From the very beginning, the Bazaar further expanded into four parts: the Great Bazaar, the Long Bazaar, Okoli and the Fountain Bazaar. Later, the Bazaars of Terziva and Zhgunaxinje were added. During its heyday, 960 workshops could be found, where several crafts were present. In addition to the old medieval pre-Ottoman crafts, such as the cultivation of the silk-worm, many more were added: furriers, potters, trays, blacksmiths, goldsmiths, millers, typists, silversmiths. Today, very few of the crafts practiced in the traditional way are left.

Address: Çarshia e gjatë, Pejë 3000



Patriarchate of Peja

It is worth mentioning the archaeological excavations in the Patriarchate of Peja in 1931-1932, that revealed a much more ancient and larger church, probably a three-nave basilica, to which the side walls of today's central church of the Apostles belong. The modern Patriarchate is thought to have been built on the foundations of this Paleo-Christian church, from the third decade of the 13th century to the middle of the 14th century.

The main church of the Holy Apostles, next to which the church of Saint Demetrius and the church of the Virgin Mary were built. On the southern side stands the small church of St. Nicholas. In the middle of the 13th century, the Church of the Holy Apostles was built by Archbishop Arsenije I, who was raised to the rank of Patriarch in 1346. After the occupation of Smederevo by the Ottoman Empire (**1459**) and the death of the Patriarch Arsenius II (**1463**), the patriarchate was abolished, and the church was placed under the Archbishopric of Ohrid. During the restoration of the Patriarchate of Peja in 1557, Mehmet Pasha Sokollu, Grand Vizier of the Ottoman Empire and born in a Serbian family from Hercegovina, played a major role.

His brother, Makarije, became the first Patriarch of the renewed Patriarchate (**1557-1574**). The Patriarchate of Peja was destroyed during the Austro-Turkish war at the end of the 17th century, when the population that collaborated with the Austrian army, namely some of the Serbian, Albanian and Vlach orthodox people, left these areas, including Patriarch Arsenija III Čarnojevic. The bishop of the Catholic Church, Monsignor Pjetër Bogdani, had told Patriarch Čarnojević to take his grixen as he left. This period was characterized by large movements of populations from one territory to another, on the border between the Ottoman and the Habsburg Empires. The population displaced from today's Kosovo resettled in the territories of the Austrian Empire, while within the region between the Albanian Alps and the Morava River (**today part of Serbia**) much of the population moved towards more

fertile lands. In 1776, the Ottoman Empire transferred the title of the Patriarch of Peja to the Patriarchate of Constantinople. After the First World War (**1914-1918**), the formation of the Kingdom of the Serbs, Croats and Slovenes (**later renamed Yugoslavia**) saw the unification of the Serbian Orthodox Church within the borders of one political entity after centuries. The first Patriarch of the renewed Serbian Patriarchate was Dimitrije who was enthroned in the Monastery in 1924. Since then, all elected Serbian Patriarchs have been enthroned in this important place.

Address: 30000 Patrijasiska ulica, Peja



Saint Catherine Catholic Church

The territory of today's Peja through its different denominations, from the ancient Siparantum of the Roman period, Pensa of the Byzantine era, the medieval Pecha or the Ottoman Ipek, has witnessed an uninterrupted presence of Christianity in different forms. Christianity in this region, as in most of ancient Illyricum, was spread by Saint Paul the Apostle himself and his disciple Titus.

The ecclesiastical hierarchy in ancient Dardania (today's Kosovo and parts of Serbia, Montenegro and Northern Macedonia) developed quite early. The first written document that mentions an ecclesiastical hierarchy in this region dates back to the first Council organized by the Emperor Constantine the Great in 325. The main centers of Christianity at that time were Scupi, present-day Skopje, and Ulpiana.

Archaeological excavations in the Dukagjin plain found evidence of a paleo-Christian church in Banjë i Pejë and in the village of Vrellë, dating back to the 4th and 5th centuries. Another notable proof of early Christianity in Peja is the carved stone located in the south-western part of the outer wall of the Patriarchate of Peja. On this stone are carved the star of David with two poplars on its side and three fish in the lower part, all of which are a clear evidence of the symbolism of early Christianity. The use of the fish as a symbol of early Christians appeared approximately in the late first century CE.

The Greek word for fish (**Ichthus/ΙΧΘΥΣ**) is an acronym that stands for: "**Jesus Christ, Son of God, Savior**", (in ancient Greek **Jesus Christos Theos Soter / Ιησοῦς Χριστός, Θεοῦ Υἱός, Σωτήρ**). The Star of David, a clear symbol of Judaism, speaks of the preservation of the Jewish element in the region, often merchants that formed part of the first Christian communities. The poplar (**populus in latin**) is believed to symbolize the gathering place of the Christian community. All of these evidences, together with archeological findings and written sources, document the early presence of Christianity in Peja.

The presence of Christians dwindled but did not disappear during the turbulent centuries that saw the penetrations of the barbarian tribes of Goths, Avars, Slavs, Huns into southeastern Europe. Several important events from the 4th to the 6th century mark a transitional period, during which the division of the Roman Empire into eastern and western began. Constantine I (324-337) reorganized the Empire, declared Constantinople the new capital and legalized Christianity.



Under Theodosius I (**379-395**), Christianity became the state religion and other religious practices were banned. During the reign of Heraclius (**610-641**), the army and administration of the Empire were re-organized and Greek was adopted as the official language in place of Latin.

In the struggle for the hegemony in the Balkans between the Church of Rome and that of Constantinople, from time to time we can see the penetration or rise of new kingdoms in the region. With the Great Schism of 1054 between the Catholic church, centered in Rome, and the Eastern Orthodox church based in Constantinople, this territory almost entirely fell under the administration of the latter, and communications of the local Catholic Church with the Catholic dioceses of the Adriatic coast became increasingly difficult.

In the year 1204, with the conquest of Constantinople by the Crusaders, the Catholic Church began a new penetration in the region, founding the Bishoprics of Prizren and Skopje, and in later years Catholic churches are also witnessed in Graçanica, Trepça, Novobërdë and other smaller villages.

From the administrative point of view, all these churches were connected to the Eastern Orthodox Church, but retained the Catholic rituals. The uninterrupted continuity of the existence of the parish of Peja has brought us since 1701, on the eve of the First Council of Arbër (**1703**). Within this parish are included the 12 churches of the Rugova region, as well as those of the villages of the district of Peja, until the time when they were separated as independent parishes. According to the sources of bishop Gjon Nikollë Kazazi and Karagiq, as well as the episcopal vicar of Pejë, Don Logoreci, in 1722 the church of St. Catherine in Peja was demolished, and its stones were used for the construction of the city's Clock Tower.

The current building of St. Catherine's Church was erected in 1928, thanks to the contribution of the citizens of Peja, Catholic and Muslim alike. The funds for the construction were collected by Father Lorenc Mazreku, parish priest of the church of Peja and one of the martyrs of the Albanian Catholic church.

Address: Wesley Clarke, Pejë 30000



HANDICRAFTS

The presence of numerous handicrafts in Peja has made this city known since ancient times as a major hub for trade and for the passage of commercial caravans from different countries of Europe. In Peja city center, the area of the Old Bazaar has always been the heart for the development of many kinds of handicrafts such as cell workers, jewellers, watch-makers and razor-makers. Nowadays, even though many of them have disappeared, a few are still present and still represent an attraction for potential visitors. The history of crafts in Peja goes back as far as the city's two thousand-year-old history. The historical continuity of urban life, under the rule of several powers, has been accompanied by the economic development of craft activities according to the needs of the inhabitants, of the armies and of the merchants. The city was always an important economic center, where the upper classes coexisted with a broader population of craftsmen and merchants. Though, from the Middle Ages and until the Ottoman period, artisan shops were not at the same level as in the largest urban, political, economic and cultural centers of the region, such as Scodra (**Shkodra**), Scupi (**Skopje**), Viminacium, Singidunum, Thessalonika and others. The handicrafts in the city of Peja that survived throughout history have taken the form that we know today especially in the late Middle Ages and during the Ottoman rule. The title of Master comes from the Latin language “**magister**” (**which in Albanian coincides with the terms boss, chairman, director, teacher**) and can be found in numerous other european languages (**Old French “maistre”, modern French maître, Spanish and Italian maestro, Portuguese mestre, Dutch meester, German meister**).

From the end of the 12th century, it came to indicate a person exceedingly or thoroughly skilled in something, or a craftsman qualified to teach his apprentices and perform a trade on his own account. The master (**or Ustah**) was the owner of a craft shop, which also employed a journeyman and an apprentice. The apprentice usually worked for years without pay, until he became skillful enough to be appointed as a journeyman. He was then paid according to the technical level of his production, and after an exam held by the leaders of the corresponding guild could reach the title of master. In fact, all the craftsmen were organized in guilds led by the chief master (**ustabashi**). The çaushti was also a title for a guild leader, himself a craftsman and shop owner. Among the Christian craftsmen, the chief master was also called epitropus (**a kind of arbiter or supreme leader allowed to rule over disputes**). The guild operated according to a statute called Şecere (**Shexhere in Albanian**). The Shexhere of the trays of Peja, dating from 1697, has been preserved in the Patriarchate of Peja. In the cadastral register of the 15th century, the craftsmen that mostly met the needs of the army are also mentioned: blacksmiths, jataganxhi (**swordsmen**), samarxhi (**saddle-makers**), cebexhinj, hallac (**craftsmen that worked with cotton**), butchers, bakers and painters.

In the 16th century, new trades were added, including shoemakers and farriers (**who produced horse-shoes, as well as shoes and boots**), locksmiths, dunjers (**carpenters and masons**), joiners who took care of decorating wooden objects, ashxins (**cooks**), mutabxhinj (**specialized on goat and camel skin**), kazanxinj (**who produced manufacts made of copper**), kujunxinj (**goldsmiths**), papuchxinj, and others.

At the beginning of the 17th century, we have proof of the presence of kandarxji (**people appointed of measuring the goods on scales**), sahatçi (**specialized in repairing clocks**), jarganxji (**quilt-makers**), abadxji (**craftsmen specialized in wool fabrics**). Moreover, all their shops were divided into their own specific bazaars. Saracs, for example, were located in the area around the Çarshi mosque, while tanners (**leather craftsmen**), blacksmiths, tailors, bakers, grocers, coffee vendors had their own districts, all spread out throughout the Çarshia (**Old town**).

Briskatar - B Gorani

This business was started in 1885 by Mr. Gorani's great-great grandfather, and is located in a small square in Peja's old bazaar, traditionally known by the name of **"Tyfek circle" (from the pistol triggers that local craftsmen used to produce until the end of 19th century)**. This shop was originally specialized in making scissors for cutting sheep's wool and other parts for guns. Nowadays, Mr. Gorani still produces and sells all kinds of knives and other souvenirs on the ground floor of the shop. Very interestingly, the second floor is occupied by the painting studio of Mrs. Naska Gorani, called Gallery Abstract, where many paintings and artworks are on display. Some of the artifacts produced by Mrs. Gorani are also available for sale on the ground floor.

Address: Çarshija e Gjatë, Pejë 30000

Civlaku Jewelry

Eduard and Anton Civlaku are two brothers who run a traditional jewellery business, dealing mainly with products made of silver. The Civlaku family has been in the jewellery business since the year 1840, and is one of the few remaining shops of this kind left in the old city that still handcrafts jewels made of silver.

Address: Çarshija e Gjatë, Pejë 30000



YARN'S ART BY MIMOZA NIKQI

On the ground floor of Haxhi Zeka's Mill, visitors can admire and purchase the creations of Mimoza Nikqi, a craftswoman who produces crocheted clothing, such as sweaters, bags, gloves, hats and other items. The sale is available on the days and during the opening hours of the facility.

Address: Vëllezërit Gërvalla, Pejë 30000



CULTURE

Rugova dance

The Rugova war dance (**in Albanian: Vallja me shpata e Rugovës or Loja Luftarake e Rugovës**) is a traditional Albanian sword dance, named after the Rugova valley of Kosovo, which stretches from the outskirts of Peja to the border with Montenegro.

The modern Rugova dance is considered a relic of the war dances (**called “valle luftarake” in Albanian**) or the remnant of pantomimic dances performed during re-enactments or in preparation for battles. Such dance is usually performed by two male dancers, who fight a mock battle for the hand of a girl (**“maiden's dance”**).

It was made internationally famous by the Kosovo Albanian Rugova clans (**hailing from the Kelmendi tribe of Albania**). The dance can also be found in the mountainous regions of Montenegro, where a tribe of shepherds settled in the 18th century. Based on the war dance of the Rugova clans, in 1971 Slavko Kvasnevski created the Rugova choreography, as part of a Yugoslav folk dancing ensemble, which gained wide popularity in the next decade.



Modern Culture

Famous superstars from the worlds of entertainment and sports can trace their family origins from the city of Peja. In fact, the families of both Rita Ora and Dua Lipa hail from Peja, and the grandfathers of the world-renowned singers used to be friends by coincidence.



Majlinda Kelmendi is a famous Kosovar-Albanian former judoka and coach, native of Peja.

She can boast the victory of two gold medals in the World Championships (**2013 and 2014**), four gold medals in the European championships (**2014, 2016, 2017, 2019**) and especially one Olympic Gold medal in the women's 52 kg category at the 2016 Olympics in Rio de Janeiro, the first Kosovo-born athlete ever to win an Olympic medal.

In 2014, Majlinda Kelmendi topped the IJF Women's Prestige World Ranking List, and she also represented Albania at the 2012 Summer Olympics.

MUNICIPALITY OF DEÇANI

Deçani is located in the western region of Kosovo near the borders with Montenegro and Albania, at about 550 meters above the sea level. To the west of the city lie the Albanian Alps. To the northwest, the river Bistrica of Deçani emerges from the mountains, and then crosses Deçani north of the city center. The municipality of Deçani is also the administrative seat of the omonymous municipality. About ten kilometers to the southeast lies the Radoniqi reservoir, the second largest lake in the country.

Deçani is located about halfway between Gjakova and Peja, while the capital of the Country, Prishtina, is about 70 kilometers to the east. The old Deçani (**Ulëza**) and the surrounding areas have been inhabited since ancient times by Illyrian tribes, namely the Dardani, who also gave the name to the broader administrative region of Dardania of the late Roman/early Byzantine period.

One of the most famous landmarks of the city is the **Visoki Deçani Orthodox monastery**, which dates back to the Middle Ages. Built in the 14th century, it is located about two kilometers west of the city, at the entrance of the gorge that leads to the mountains. The Monastery, dedicated to Christ Pantokrator, contains the only frescoes ensemble of Byzantine art that has been completely preserved from the Middle Ages. It was declared a World Heritage Site by UNESCO in 2004. Culture life in the city of Deçani enables optimal development for all cultural and artistic creations. The Municipality has a communal theater for all sorts of cultural events. There are also two cultural and artistic associations active in the Municipality of Deçani: the cultural and artists' association **Isuf Gervalla** and the rhapsody group **Der-vish Shaqa**, along with the well known town's traditional dance group. The most important cultural activities in the municipality of Deçani are the national folk festival **Eshkë e ndezur mbi Shkelzen**, the children's festival **Ardhmëria**, the chess tournament **March 24**, the small fiva-a-side football tournament **Luan Haradinaj**.

Located at the foot of the Albanian Alps and in the western part of Kosovo, the Municipality of Deçani is located in a strategic border area with Albania and Montenegro, and such an advantageous geographical position has influenced the economic development of the area over the centuries. Deçani is renowned for its stone towers (**kullas**), where many Albanian families still used to live until 1999. It is thought that there were 293 towers in the Municipality, but many were destroyed during the Kosovo war of 1998-1999. Today only few are left in good shape, but they still stand to witness the centuries-old traditions of Albanian people. The history of Deçani, of course, is older than these towers and goes back to Antiquity, but unfortunately very little evidence is available for that period, due to the poor archaeological research carried out so far. 2 kilometers to the west of Deçani, at the entrance of the Lumbardhi gorge, the Visoki Deçani Monastery is located. This is one of the most famous medieval monasteries of Kosovo, which in 2004 was registered as a protected monument in the UNESCO World Heritage List. Deçani hosts the second largest water reservoir in Kosovo, and its territory borders the highest peak of Kosovo, Mount Gjeravica (**2656 meters**) in the Accursed Mountains range (**Bjeshkët e Nemuna in Albanian**) and the second-highest in the Dinaric Alps after Maja Jezercës of Albania. The Municipality of Deçani consists of 37 settlements, and most of its territory is covered by high mountains and rich forests. A major landmark of the Municipality are the centuries-old stone castles (**kullas**), mostly built from the 18th century onwards, which stand as witnesses of the troubled history of this part of Kosovo. The towers are the best example of the local traditional construction style, and some of them are still inhabited today. In addition to housing, in the past the towers also held protective and defensive functions, while today they can represent an important tool for the development of tourism. The village of Drenoci, close to Deçani, is well known for individual stone castles, which carry an important historical and cultural value, and they are currently being gradually transformed into a tourist village. The Cultural heritage of Deçani is enriched by two preserved old mills, one of which is still in function, while the other one has been converted into a local craft store.



NATURAL AND MOUNTAIN SITES

Kolonia e Artistëve (Kompleksi Fetnete Ramosaj)

The Youth Center, or Artists' Colony, part of the complex dedicated to the memory of Fetnete Ramosaj, is a new multipurpose facility located within walking distance from the city center, at the foot of the mountains. It is a place designed to accommodate tourists heading to the Via Dinarica, precisely along the stages no. 12 and n. 13 that lead visitors to places of great attraction such as Liqeni i Zemrës **(a heart-shaped lake on the slopes of Mount Gjeravica)**. The complex is equipped with cabins to accommodate visitors, a bar, a basketball and volleyball court and an outdoor wall for climbing. In addition, the facility is equipped with a Cultural Heritage Center, dedicated to the promotion of local culture, music and folk dances. This space is conceived as an open place to all citizenship, where scholars, artists and students can interact about the rich cultural heritage of this territory.

Address: UCK- Kompleksi Iliria, Deçani 51000

“Visit Deçani” Tourist Information center

A short distance from the Youth Center, along the road to Visoki Deçani Monastery and to the Accursed Mountains, visitors can easily stop by the “Visit Deçani” Tourist Information Center, run by the Municipality of Deçani.

Here, tourists can find all sorts of information about the town and the surrounding mountains, and they can rent a wide range of equipment for mountain activities: Hiking and trekking gear, ski equipment, bicycles and climbing gear.

Address: Rruga Sali Çeku, Deçani 51000

Via Ferrata Deçani

A few kilometers from the Monastery, the more adventurous tourists can take advantage of the Via Ferrata of Deçani, located on the rocky banks along the gorge of the Lumbardhi River. In order to use the facility, it is advisable to contact the tourist information point “Visit Deçani”.

Rruga 108, Deçan 51000

The mountains of Belegu

In this context, winter tourism holds an important place, given the numerous and suitable conditions **(nature, climate and terrain)** for the development of winter sports, especially in the mountains of Belegu and Kurvalla. According to a study done by Croatian experts in 1985, the terrain of Belegu and Kurvalla offer a suitable space for the development of tourism. The project to transform Belegu in a touristic and recreational area would be favorable not just for the Municipality of Deçani, but also for the whole region. Bjeshka e Belegut has a great potential for winter sports, as there are many spaces for the construction of short, medium and long ski tracks. The Institute for Tourism Research in Zagreb has been working on a detailed plan for investments in the ski resorts in the mountains of Belegu, since the 1980's, with a planned budget of about 53 million American dollars. However, all these projects were halted due to the political tensions between the Albanian communities of Kosovo with the central government of then Yugoslavia.



Finally, the investments and funds intended for this project were transferred to Sarajevo, thanks to which the Bosnian capital could host the 1984 Winter Olympics.

For all these reasons, attracting investments in the mountains around Deçani would be profitable for the economy of the whole of Kosovo, and could represent an alternative for the development of winter sports alongside the more renowned facilities of Brezovica and Bogë. According to the data obtained from the Municipal Directorate for Economy and Development, the skiing tracks in Deçani are significantly longer than those in Brezovica and Bogë, and are fit to host events such as the 2004 "Kosovo Cup" of skiing, which was held in the mountains of Belegu.

Mountains of Isniq

The localities of Belleja, Pleqja, Roshkodol, Milishevc and Zlanopoja are known for their beautiful nature, abundant sources of water and for their geographical location, and are most suitable for sustainable tourism during either warm and colder seasons. The area is a crossing point between three bordering countries (**Kosovo, Albania, Montenegro**), and its slopes are covered with plants such as wormwood and lincura, together with blueberries, which are collected and largely consumed by the inhabitants of this area.

Dervishkomi

Dervishkomi is a plateau, located at an altitude of 2110 meters above sea level, bordering Plaçice e Vokshi, Mount Gjeravica, Kurvalla valley, as well as the mountains of Carrabreg and Deçani. This locality, with an area of nearly 120 hectares, is well connected with the cities of Deçani and Junik. Although the popularity and the increasing number of skiers, unfortunately the above-mentioned municipalities are lacking investments for the development of infrastructures suitable for winter sports, even though the area of the Bjeshkët e Nemuna National Park would enable the basic conditions for this purpose. According to a study of the 1970's by an international expert in the field of winter tourism, Dervishkom has a very good configuration for winter sports, as well as sufficient and qualitative snow for the development of alpine and nordic skiing, both for professionals and amateurs.

Kozhnjeri

Kozhnjeri is located in the gorge of Deçani, and hosts a former barracks of the Yugoslav army, called Kozhnjer. It is located at about 200 meters of altitude to the west of the Lumbardhi hydropower plant. This locality, although still wild, would be suitable for winter sports, thanks to its position within reach to all the mountains of the municipality. Placed along the Deçani Gorge, with a length of 18 kilometers and a width of 300 meters, it could be used for alternative tourism, especially for promenades, as it continues along the course of the Albanian Stream, up until Zall te Rupa.

Jodova

The Vokshi Mountains, included in the Bjeshkët e Nemuna National Park, are located between the Lloçani River to the north and the Erenik River to the South. The most attractive places for the development of tourism are Jodova and Zharret, which have great potential for sustainable tourism. Jodova is located in the central part of the Vokshi, amidst coniferous forests of fir and spruce, accessible both from Junik, along the Erenik gorge, and from Deçan, along the Lloçani gorge. Jodova is the most suitable starting point to reach various natural attractions such as the Erenik Canyon, Kërshi i Jodova and Mount Gjeravica and all the surrounding lakes.

Zharre

The area of Zharre is also included in the region between the Lloçan and Erenik rivers, and about 95 percent of its territory is covered with deciduous forests of beeches, molasses, hemlocks, hazels, birches, hornbeams, chestnuts, as well as a mixed forest made of conifers, spruce and hornbeam. Since the area is covered with dense woods, it is a very favorable habitat for the growth of both low vegetation, such as lichens, algae, fungi, and woody or herbaceous vegetation.

Such forests represent a favorable habitat for wild animals, especially bears, wolves, wild boars and roe deers. It would be of great public interest to preserve this area, particularly relict trees that are currently endangered, such as some varieties of maple and chestnut. Even more, a focus should be put on the preservation of many species of wild animals of this area, which are seeing their numbers reduced almost to the point of extinction. In Zharre, as in Jodova alike, it would be of particular interest to set up a research and sanitary scientific institute for studying the geological, hydrological, climatic and speleological features of Bjeshkët e Nemuna's wildlife. Such center could also be used to carry out sanitary research for the prevention and the cure of various diseases which are endangering the flora and fauna of this area

Pishat e Deçanit (Deçani's pine forest)

The Pishat e Deçanit hotel complex, in terms of its capacity and position, is among the most renowned facilities of the region. The resort "Pishat e Deçani" was built at the foot of Bjeshkët e Nemuna mountain range. At an altitude of about 670 meters above sea level and with a suitable climate, this holiday facility has been operating since 1985, with the main purpose of recuperating sick children. The complex as a whole has a capacity of 550-600 beds, with five residential buildings equipped with a hall, kitchen, sports grounds, health clinic and an open amphitheatre.

These spaces used to accommodate thousands of children from the region every year, within a year, and complex was used for various other cultural and sports events, regardless of the season. In the aftermath of the wars in Yugoslavia, though, this complex has been never re-activated and is waiting to be repurposed.



The villages in the Vokshi Region

Jodovë, Kurore, Lugi i Gatë, Qurshize, Kurvall, Stanishta e Zogut and Pllaqic, Qafë e Kunorë, could be interesting spots to enjoy local culture and experience sustainable tourism. Other interesting spots for tourism are the mountains of Carrabreg, Baballoq, Rupa, Dobroshi, Kurvalla and, above all, Mount Gjeravica and the numerous lakes in the valley below it. These glacial lakes, locally known as **"Cat's eyes"**, represent an attractive spot for all those tourists that are considering to try the ascent of the highest peak in Kosovo.

Lugu i Gatë

Lugu i Gatë is a locality in the middle of a conifer forest of pine trees, at the foot of the slopes of mount Gjeravica, at a height above sea level of 1870 meters. The pollen of the pines is believed to have healing effects for lung diseases and breathing difficulties. The favourable climate, the cleanness of the air and water, and road access from two directions (**Deçani and Junik**), could make favourable conditions for the construction of rehabilitation and healing facilities.

EVENTS, FESTIVALS AND FAIRS

- Every June 16th - 18th: **The Summer fair (to commemorate the Deçan Liberation Day)**
- Every June 15th: **National Folk Festival**
- Every July: **Diaspora days (events&fairs)**
- Every October: **Dita e Gështenjës (Traditional Chestnut Festival)**

Dita e Gështenjës (Traditional Chestnut Festival)

One of the most important traditional events to take place in the city of Deçani, the Chestnut Festival is organized every October by the association **"Development Initiative"** and is supported by the Ministry of Culture and the Municipality of Deçani. Visitors can enjoy exhibitions of local painters, lectures and various other cultural events to promote the local culture and, of course, chestnut-based traditional dishes. Surrounded by the green landscape of the Belle village, various Albanian artists display their works or and read poems dedicated to the chestnut.

The mountains around Deçani are famous for the harvest of chestnuts during the early autumn season, and this fruit represents an important source of income for the inhabitants of the village of Belle and other surrounding villages.

Diaspora days' fair

Every year in July, the Mentor Tolaj square in the center of Deçani hosts the fair dedicated to Albanians living abroad or in the neighboring countries. Sponsored by the Mayor of the Municipality, in previous years this event has seen the participation, for instance, of the Mayor of Ulcinj and representatives from the Municipality of Plav in Montenegro, as well as State officials, MP's and other fair participants. More similar to a traditional fair, it is organized within the framework of numerous other activities celebrating Diaspora Days, with the aim of promoting local businesses, tourism and traditional products of the territory of Deçani and other neighboring municipalities.

National Folk Festival

This festival is the biggest cultural event organized in Deçani since 2004 until 2023, this year the 10th edition is organized. The festival is organized in honor of Dervish Shaqa and Demush Neziri, two famous folk rhapsody singers and, more broadly, it is dedicated to the memory of all the other rhapsodes from Deçani.

The organization of this festival follows a long tradition of preservation, development and promotion of local culture, with the aim of preserving and promoting authentic Albanian folk music and Albanian culture into civil society.



CULTURAL AND HISTORICAL SITES

Monastery of Visoki Dečani

The famous Monastery of Visoki Dečani was built in the first half of the 14th century, as stated by the inscription engraved on the architrave of the southern portico in the narthex of the church, and is located on the bank of the Lumbardhi river.

The dome of the church is 32 meters high, and during the medieval period it was known as High Deçani. From the outside, the construction of the church appears as a mixture of the Romanesque and Gothic styles, while inside it is covered with the combined styles of traditional Eastern Orthodox and Byzantine painting. The Monastery is a monumental building, with five naves covered with a dome, which stands on the drum and the narthex with three naves. Two separate altars can also be admired inside the Church: One in the northern part of the Church of St. Dimitri, while the other on the southern side of the Church of St. Nicholas. The most notable architect of the Monastery was Friar Vito Kuqi from Kotor, a Franciscan monk who also supervised the decoration of the Monastery with many elements that distinguish the Romanesque style in the property of Hak Kuqi from Deçani.

At the same time, the monastery is rich in frescoes from the 14th century. In the upper part of the large columns, on the right and left, paintings of Christ and the Virgin are visible. Christ is unusually depicted holding a sword, representing the blade that cuts away sins, while the Virgin is once again depicted as interceding before Christ. Together with the status of world cultural heritage monument under the protection of UNESCO, in 2016 the Monastery was declared under the permanent protection by the Kosovo Council for Cultural Heritage, thanks to its remarkable historical, artistic, social and spiritual value. The Municipality of Deçani is also renowned for the production of chestnuts and honey of very good quality.

Chestnut trees are numerous in this part of Kosovo, so much so that a Chestnut Festival is organized every October in the city. Before the Kosovo war of 1998-99, Deçani hosted the famous "**Apiko**" apiary, which has now been destroyed. Deçani can boast natural landscapes and panoramas of rare beauty, suitable for most of the outdoor activities such as hiking, cycling, skiing.

Besides the Monastery of Visoki Deçani, there are many sites and natural beauties to admire:

The Lumbardhi river with its valley and gorge, the Lumbardh of Lloçan, the high mountains and forests of the Albanian Alps with their rich pastures, glacial lakes, the diverse flora and fauna and the springs of clear water that descend from the heights, all contribute to make Deçani an important tourist center in Kosovo, with a great potential for sustainable tourism. In fact, all these resources enable the development of touristic activities both during the winter and the summer season. Last but not least, this region carries a history, traditions and values inherited and jealously preserved by its inhabitants.



Address: Rruga Sali Çeku, Deçani

Ethnological museum (Muzeu Etnologjik)

The Ethnological Museum of Deçani is hosted in the beautiful tower of Zymer Hima, built in the 18th century by the Mushkolaj family.

Even though it consists of three floors, its style is typical of the so-called two-story wooden towers. The first floor is an open space room, the second floor was originally dedicated to the family's everyday life, while the third floor was dedicated to the men's room, equipped with a sofa.

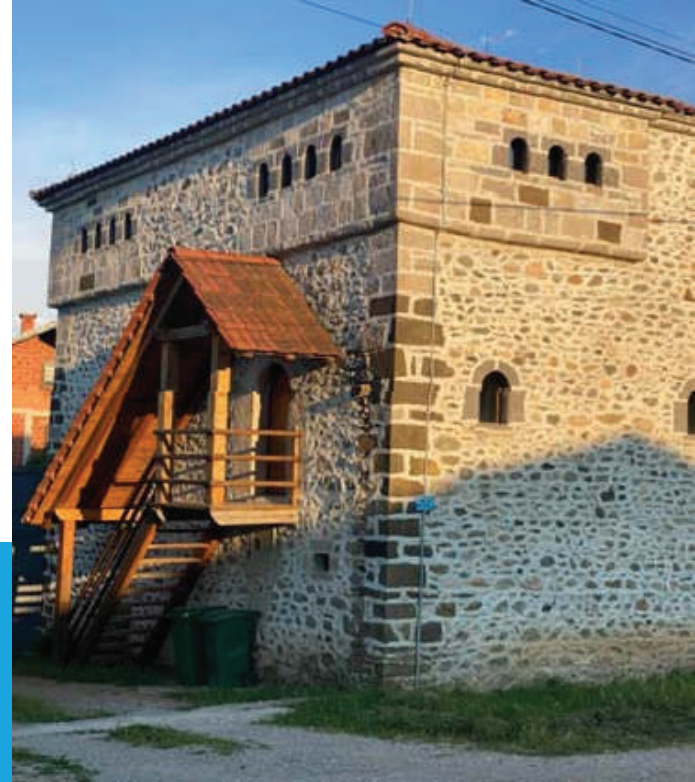
Like other buildings of this kind in Deçani, it was damaged during the 1998-99 war in Kosovo, and restored in 2009.

Kulla e Demë Ali Pozharit

The Kulla e Demë Ali Pozharit is a cultural heritage monument located in Pozhar, in the Municipality of Deçani. The person to whom the building is dedicated, Demë Ali Pozhari, was born in 1905 in Pozhar and was a notable figure of the Second League of Prizren. The history of the Pozhari Family goes back at least three centuries. Demë's great-grandfather, Ali Rexha, was killed at the Castle of Nish (Serbia) in 1876, while his grandfather, Mehmet Ali Pozhari, was killed in the siege of Avdullah Pasha Dreni, on September 6th 1878, in Gjakova.

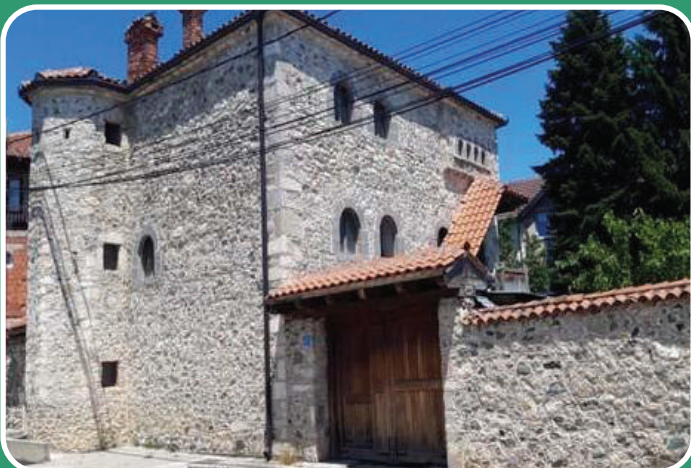
His father, Ali Mehmeti, opened the first Albanian school in Pozhar in 1915-18 in his house, with the help of the teacher Ibrahim Fehmiu, father of the well-known Hollywood actor, Bekim Fehmiu.

Demë Ali Pozhar's tower was burned four times: during the Ottoman era, during the occupation of the Kingdom of Serbia, under communist Yugoslavia and by Milosevic's Serbian forces during the last war. Every time, the tower has managed to rise from its ashes.



Kulla e Rustë Alisë (Demukajve)

Originally built at the beginning of the 19th century, it was burned down by Serbian forces on June 1st 1998, and rebuilt with funding from the European Union in 2002.



Mill of Shabanaj

In the center of Deçani stands one of the oldest buildings of the town, the Mill of Shabanaj.

Property of the Cacaj family, it was built in the 19th century by local masters. This mill is a typical agrarian construction of its age, and worked as a public facility, serving the needs of the population of Deçani for grinding of grains. The structure is a typical water mill of this region and has only one indoor space. The part that stood above the course of the river is covered from the outside with an arch of slightly processed stones. With a quadrangular base, the building as a whole is built with hewn stones. It has a simple hipped roof, covered with traditional tiles, and houses two mills activated by water. Despite the fact that it was in a very poor state of conservation, after the war it was chosen to be rebuilt as a community center. With the help of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Italy and the Italian NGO Intersos, the Mill was restored in 2005, after which it returned to its original appearance. Currently, the mill is used for exhibitions, with an emphasis on the display of traditional crafts and traditional clothing of the Dukagjin area.



Kulla Osdautaj

Located in the village of Isnqi, it is one of the rare four-floor kulla that are still in good condition. Built in stone, it belongs to the type of kulla typical of the Dukagjini region.

The perimetral wall is approximately 80 cm thick, and the interior parish is rich with ornate wood. The last conservation works were carried out in 2002 by the association Cultural Heritage Without Borders.

MUNICIPALITY OF JUNIK

The Municipality of Junik is one of Kosovo's treasures, known for its irreplaceable natural beauties and its rich cultural heritage. Located in the heart of the Albanian Alps, Junik attracts visitors from all over the world with a range of impressive attractions.

Junik is a small municipality located in the western part of Kosovo, between Deçani and Gjakova, along the mountainous border of Kosovo and Albania. The town was founded in a suitable geographical location: it lies in the northern end of the plain of Junik, at the edge of the mountain sides of Bjeshka e Junikut (**Junik mountains in Albanian**) to the west and to the north.

The territory of Junik is rich with water resources and it is characterized by a medium continental climate, along with some features typical of the Mediterranean climate.

The beautiful mountains of Junik are included within the Accursed Mountains National Park. About 8.4% of the Park's surface belongs to the Municipality of Junik. In these mountains, visitors can admire breathtaking sceneries and an abundant and varied flora and fauna.

Junik is also enriched by a rich cultural heritage. The Tower "**Oda e Junikut**," the historic site where 14 assemblies, prior to the declaration of Albania's independence, were held, still remains a symbol of national pride. Visitors can also explore Jah Imeri's Tower, Isufaj Tower - QRT, the Tower Library, and ancient structures such as Valavica, the Mills, and the Qoku Mosque. Besides, the Sheh Xhaferi Tekke represents the spirituality and religious tradition of the area.

Many traditional events bring together the community and tourists, highlighting cultural life and promoting Junik's rich heritage.

What makes Junik unique is the combination of unspoiled nature with a rich historical and cultural heritage, making it an irresistible destination for anyone seeking adventure, tranquility, and inspiration in the heart of Kosovo.



NATURAL AND MOUNTAIN SITES

Junik is crowned by Gjeravica, Kosovo's highest peak at 2,656 meters above sea level, offering breathtaking views for nature and mountaineering enthusiasts. Mount Gjeravica is surrounded by glacial lakes formed during the last ice age, namely: the Great Lake and the Small Lake under Mount Gjeravica, the Lake of Tropoja, and the Liqeni i Zemrës (Heart-shaped lake in Albanian). A symbol of love for nature, it attracts many visitors for its beautiful views and is a perfect spot for photography. The most notable cabin in this area is the Grand Gjeravica Hotel, located at an altitude of 1800 meters in the village of Gropa e Erenikut, surrounded by the stunning view of the Albanian Alps.

The Gusani Peak (2,540 meters), Mount Rupa (2,500 meters) and Rrasa e Zogut (2,309 meters) are other alluring points for explorers, while the Tri-border point between Kosovo, Albania, and Montenegro symbolizes the area's cultural and historical ties. This area holds great significance for the local community and tourists who enjoy this symbolic spot and the feeling of unity among peoples. Among the mountain passes, such as Qafa e Ali Qela and Qafa e Sylbica, hikers can find picturesque trails with extraordinary views.

Junik's Canyon

Extending at an elevation of 1,400 meters, this natural attraction unfolds an impressive landscape with naturally sculpted rocks and wild trails. The Junik Canyon is a deep, protected natural canyon known for its unique geological formations and narrow pathways through rocky landscapes.

Erenik River

The water resources of Junik's territory originate from mount Maja e Zezë and the slopes of Gjeravica in the Albanian Alps and flow directly into the Erenik river, which eventually passes through the mountain of Lipovicat (in the Gacafer neighbourhood), at the foot of the Moronica ridge (in the middle of the Berishe neighbourhood), through the village of Reka and finally through the city center, before merging with the river Drini i Bardhë near Gjakova. The river Erenik, thanks to its constant water capacity, is used to irrigate the fields in the surrounding area, making it very fertile.

The river Erenik runs to the west of the city center, and has two branches: one originates in Mountain Rrasa e Zogut and the other in the mountains near the lakes of Gjeravica. Erenik then flows into the Drini i Bardhë (White Drin river) to the east at Ura e Terzinjve in the Municipality of Gjakova. Erenik river is 51 km long and, because of its length, it has a larger flow of water than the tributaries of the White Drin passing through Peja and Deçani. Compared to the other branches of the White Drin, for most of its length it runs through the lower parts of the plain (about 30 kilometers), at an altitude between 300 and 500 meters, while in its upper part the water flow is quite rapid due to the conformation of the terrain (the average annual flow of Erenik is about 11m³/sec). Along the river, both tourists and local people can enjoy a walk or sit, and playgrounds for children.

Moronica Park

On the eastern side of the river Erenik, the Moronica Park is a public space surrounded by pine woods, most suitable for daily trips or even camping. In the middle of the park, the Municipality is currently building a tower (near completion) that it envisions to become a Cultural Centre for the citizenship. In the vicinity of the park, visitors can taste a vast choice of traditional local food at Moronica Restaurant, located in a pine grove, or enjoy an amazing view and taste trout-based dishes at Trofta e Junikut (trofta meaning "trout" in Albanian).

Info Point

Right in the center of the town, the Municipality has recently inaugurated a tourist Info Point, within the frame of the NaturKosovo project funded by AICS (**Italian Agency for Development Cooperation**). The Info Point has been established as the best point of departure from the town of Junik to the Via Dinarica hiking trail, recently repurposed by the NaturKosovo project with the partnership of CAI (**Club Alpino Italiano**).

Here, visitors and hikers can get all kinds of information regarding nature, mountains, local culture, traditions and the hiking routes that depart from the city center.

Another notable entity that works in the territory of Junik is Rrasa e Zogut Mountain Association. Together with the Municipality, they organize a popular event, "**Days of Gjeravica**", that occurs every year in the second weekend of June, with the goal of promoting mountain tourism. This two day festival has taken place without interruption in the last 15 years: here visitors can camp, hike and get in touch with the local culture and music.

EVENTS, FESTIVALS AND FAIRS

- On June: **Days of Gjeravica** (promoting Gjeravica as a tourist destination and offers activities such as mountaineering, hiking, and youth activity)
- On summer: **Concert for compatriots (diaspora)**
- On December: **Fair of the holidays** (to decorate the city)
- On October / November: **Lama dinner** (traditional dinner)
- On August / September: **Kah Drita Festival** (for promotion of local culture, music and nature and the festival combines art, culture, and music to showcase Junik's heritage and natural beauty)

On October: **Days of Chestnut**

Chestnut Festival

Junik is well known for chestnuts, which have special significance for the local economy and biodiversity. The municipality of Junik, in partnership with the Dutch Organization for Development in Kosovo and CNVP, organizes the festival "Chestnut Day" every year.

The festival includes many attractions, such as fairs, family activities, traditional cuisine and the farmers' market, where visitors can find various local products made of chestnuts, honey, cloves and other non-wood forest artifacts, along with performances by local music and dance folk groups.



CULTURAL AND HISTORICAL SITES

Ancient History

The most notable archaeological findings in the territory of Junik are the ruins of ancient settlements found at the mouth of Mount Gradina. These ruins undoubtedly testify the presence of a Dardanic settlement, which continued to exist during the first century of Roman rule. Though they are not open for visitors, due to poor excavation campaigns, the ruins were recorded by the Regional Institute for the Protection of Cultural Monuments and are included in a database for the protection of cultural monuments of Kosovo.

Shiita Haveri Monastery

The Shiita Haveri monastery, officially “Sheh Xhafer Tekke”, is one of the most important religious and cultural sites in the area of Junik. It belongs to the Bektashi religious order and has a long history connected to the work of Sheh Xhafer, a well-known spiritual and cultural figure in the region.

The Bektashi Order is a Sufi religious group that originated in the 13th century. It was founded by Haji Bektash Veli in Anatolia, modern-day Turkey. The Bektashi community has a rich history and played an important role in the culture of the Balkans and parts of Turkey. The Bektashi Order is known for its unique teachings and practices. It combines elements of Islam, particularly Shia Islam, with local traditions and philosophies. The followers of the Bektashi are called Bektashis, and they practice a form of Islam that is both spiritual and mystical. They believe in the importance of personal experience and the inner journey towards God. One of the key features of the Bektashi Order is its acceptance of various beliefs and practices. Bektashis respect all religions and promote tolerance. They believe that there are many paths to God, and that love and compassion are the most important values. This open-minded approach is a significant part of their philosophy. The Bektashi Order has its own rituals and ceremonies. One of the most important rituals is the “cem,” which is a gathering of believers based on worship and reflection. During the cem, songs, poems, and stories are shared. The atmosphere is very welcoming, and everyone is encouraged to participate. This communal spirit is central to the Bektashi way of life, and music also plays an important role in their practices. They use traditional instruments, such as the saz, to create a joyous atmosphere during their gatherings, while their songs often express deep emotions and spiritual themes. This connection between music and spirituality is a key aspect of Bektashi culture. Another important feature of the Bektashi Order is their reverence for specific figures: Haji Bektash Veli, of course, is a central figure, but they also honor other saints and important personalities of their history. These figures are seen as guides who can help followers on their spiritual journey. Their teachings are often focused on love, kindness, and understanding. For all these reasons, the Bektashi community has faced many challenges throughout history: during the Ottoman Empire, they were sometimes persecuted, especially during times of political tension. Despite this, the Bektashi have maintained their identity and continued to grow as a community. In the 20th century, they faced new challenges, including the rise of secularism and nationalism in various countries. Today, the Bektashi Order is mainly centered in Albania, Turkey, and some other parts of the Balkans. In Albania, the Bektashi community is recognized as an important part of the country’s cultural heritage. They have been able to flourish and are involved in various social and cultural activities. Bektashis in Albania celebrate their festivals and ceremonies openly, contributing to the religious diversity of the country. The Bektashi Order also promotes education and learning, by encouraging their followers to seek knowledge and wisdom. This approach helps to create a more informed and tolerant community.

The Monastery (or Tekke) of Junik has served not only as a place of worship but also as a center where the spiritual and cultural values of the community have been nurtured. It has been a supportive hub for keeping alive traditions, customs, and narratives associated with faith and the social life of Junik. Even though the Tekke is always open to visitors, reservations are highly recommended.

Junik Towers

Junik is well known for the stone traditional houses (kulla in Albanian), in some cases converted into Bed and breakfasts for accommodating tourists. These old buildings are a fundamental part of the cultural heritage of Junik, and assume a pivotal role in the preservation of local culture and traditions.

Hoxhaj Towers

Hoxhaj Towers make up a complex of very peculiar buildings, in terms of construction style: One of them, for instance, was transformed by the Municipality into a library, named after the great local poet Din Mehemeti, while two other towers have been converted into museums and are open to visitors. In the near future, the Municipality is planning to create a unified structure to host a multi-functional and cultural center. The project aims to create a vibrant hub of cultural and community services, including a museum, a library, together with spaces for artistic, educational, and social activities. The museum will focus on preserving and promoting the cultural heritage of Junik and the Dukagjin region, showcasing significant historical objects, ethnographic artifacts, and documents that tell the story of Albanian culture and way of life through the centuries.

The center's library will be a valuable resource for the community, with a collection of books for all age groups and reading areas designed for quiet and comfort. This library will serve as an inspirational space for youth and a meeting point for local researchers. Another similar building, the Isufaj Tower, has a highly historical value, as in 1912 it welcomed dozens of delegates on the occasion of the Junik Assembly, an event which shortly preceded the declaration of independence of Albania. Today, the tower has been turned into the Regional Center for Tourism in Dukagjin, a hub where several non-governmental organizations operate and develop their activities. Also, the festival **"Days of Chestnut"** takes place here every September.

Ramë Zyberi Towers

The Ramë Zyberi Tower, located in the Krasniq neighbourhood, serves as a hostel for local and international tourists.

Here, visitors can be easily reminded of the traditional Albanian way of life, and can enjoy traditional food.



Junik's Tower

The Oda e Junikut Tower, built at the end of the 17th century, belongs to the Dukagjin tower type, featuring wooden floors, and stands out as the oldest tower in Junik, among the oldest in the Dukagjin Plain. The tower was primarily constructed from stone, with chestnut and beech wood shaped with an axe, according to the rustic building technique. The Oda e Junikut has three floors, with a large entrance, several ventilation slits, a stone-paved floor, and stairs leading to the first floor.

Moreover, Oda e Junikut is a symbol of resilience and survival, hospitality and bravery, Albanian honor and trust. In its more than 200-years history, it has hosted meetings to settle blood-feuds among rival families, and has seen the passage of many Albanian patriots. This tower has served as a place where important decisions were taken, sealed with the authentic stamp bearing the inscription **"Kanun of Lekë Dukagjini – Oda e Junikut"**. It is also known as the meeting place which led to the Albanian uprising and the Declaration of Albania's Independence in 1912. In fact, during the years 1908-12, leaders of the National Movement decided to hold the Assembly of Junik (**May 2st1-25th 1912**) where various Albanian tribes united to wage war against the Ottomans. Even after 200 years, this tower is passionately preserved and its owners always keep its doors open to visitors, upon previous request.

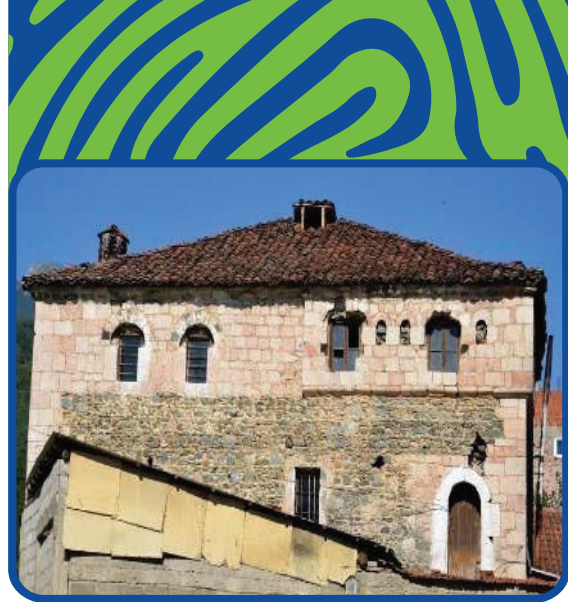
Today, this tower is maintained by Naser Hoxha, who tells us the story of this building: **"This tower was built by our great-grandfather, Imer Hoxha, and was built at the time of the League of Prizren. It has been important at a national level for the reconciliation of blood, entanglements and conflicts between Kosovo Albanians."** Hoxha says that the towers in general bear a special importance in the history of Albanians, but that these traditions began to be forgotten. **"Junik has always been an extremely popular place for towers. There were famous families who had towers here. There were more than 300 towers, but today the preserved ones can be counted on your fingers. Instead, only some families have stubbornly preserved them and have not destroyed them"**. Despite this, this tower has never closed its doors to receive guests: **"There are tourists who come, mostly Albanian, but also foreign visitors from other countries, like Germany and France."** The heir of this property, Naser Hoxha, adds that he will continue the tradition of keeping the tower open.



Kulla e Jah Imerit

In the center of Junik, near the main mosque, in the Hoxhaj neighbourhood, there is a stone three-story tower, known as the Jahë Imeri Tower. Now a private home, it was built at the beginning of the 19th century.

The tower was demolished during the war in Kosovo (1998-99), even though it was under the protection of the law since 1988. After the war, no intervention was carried out to restore it. This rural dwelling presents multiple values, both on the architectural and aesthetic level, and on the historical, social and spiritual one, and still stands as an evidence of the rich treasure of past of Junik.



Kulla e Brahim Hoxhës

During the rule of the Balshaj family, and especially of the Dukagjini family (late Middle Ages), the construction of residential towers began in Junik. Since 1462, Junik and the whole Dukagjin region (the southwestern part of Kosovo) were under the rule of Leka III, during which the Brahim Hoxha Tower (also known as Oda e Juniku) was also built. It is located in the center of Junik, precisely in the Hoxha neighborhood.

According to historical accounts, this tower was built as a fortified residence. In the 18th century its registered owner

was Imer Hoxha, and at a later time it passed to Avdyl Hoxha. This tower, now a private home, has an important history: In fact, its rooms were used for the local chieftains' assemblies and the administration of justice according to the Kanun, the most important set of customary laws of the Albanian tribal societies from the Middle Ages until the 20th century.

Other Heritage sites

In addition to the towers, other facilities include Mullirin e Tofaj (Tofaj's mill) and the Valavica plant. The water mills in Junik are evidence of an early tradition of grain processing and now Mullirin e Tofaj hosts a small museum. Instead, Valavica was a site of traditional craft production, where wool was treated to produce clothes and pleats.

GASTRONOMY ALONG VIA DINARICA

Gastronomy is undoubtedly a cornerstone of the culture of Albanian families in this part of Kosovo. On their tables, for instance, traditional foods made of dough assume a great importance. Visitors can enjoy all kinds of traditional foods in the restaurants located in the cities, as well as in the restaurants or guesthouses along Via Dinarica.

Flija

Flija is a staple local dish that can be found also in Albania, mainly in the northern regions bordering Kosovo.

It is one of the most popular dishes in Kosovo, and can be found in most of the restaurants and bakeries.

Flija is usually baked in a Saç, a quite simple, primitive oven, used to bake various other foods and most common among families of modest economic condition, who could not afford a stove in their homes. Moreover, the lid of the Saç itself is often used as a flat baking dish.

This traditional roaster nowadays is commonly used throughout all the countries of the Balkans (Albania, Kosovo, Bulgaria, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Slovenia, Croatia, North Macedonia, Serbia, Montenegro, Greece and Turkey).



Byrek and Pite

They are a very popular dishes, which can be prepared in different shapes and with different ingredients, mainly traditional cheese, meat, zucchini, spinach, potatoes and pumpkin. The main difference between byreq and pite is the type of dough used: while byreq is made of a thinner, rolled dough, pita is made of a thicker dough and it's similar to a savoury pie. In addition, while the byreq can be found in almost every bakery around Kosovo, pite is more commonly prepared in private households or guesthouses.



Rice and chicken casserole

One of the most popular local dishes is the rice and chicken casserole. In some way, it is a bit similar to risotto with chicken fillet, but only the preparation differs. It is necessary to boil the cleaned chicken (breast or legs), and in the meantime cook finely chopped onion with butter in a separate pan. When the chicken is ready, cut it into pieces. After that, put the rice in a large pan, pour chicken stock (depending on the quantity of chicken and rice), and add water if needed. Finally, put the chicken in the pan, add salt, pepper and chopped dill and bake at high temperature until all the liquid has evaporated.



Albanian cornbread (Buka e misrit shqiptar)

Albanian cornbread is a tender crumbly type of bread made with cornmeal, egg, milk and baking powder batter. It can be found in most of traditional menus, and it can be combined with a wide variety of foods such as white cheese, olives, pickles, or served as a side dish with stews, soups, salads and many others. Albanian cornbread can be made in different versions: plain (the most common version) or stuffed with leeks, spinach, zucchini and feta cheese.

Burjan

Burjan is another dish that cannot be missing from the table of local families. To prepare it, it is necessary to rinse the meat (usually veal and pork) and cook it in abundant water with spices. Then, fry some chopped onions with a little oil, until it turns yellow. Add the washed and drained rice, then fry it until it looks almost transparent. Then, add the chopped spinach and fry a little more. Gradually, pour some of the water used to cook the meat. In addition, put the pork in a pan with white pepper, salt and dried herbs and pour some more beef stock to be absorbed a little more. After arranging the meat chop into the pan, cook it in the oven ready while making some holes and breaking an egg into each of them.

Add a little salt and put back into the oven to cook the eggs.



Traditional pancakes

This is a very versatile dish, that can be eaten with yogurt and garlic, honey, powdered sugar, cinnamon, jam or cheese. Easy to prepare, they are mostly consumed as a starter. The reason why pancakes are one of Kosovo's staple is the fact that preparation doesn't take much effort and time. The basic ingredients are a glass of lukewarm water with flour, oil, a little salt and, if desired, a bit of sugar.



Samun with sausages (samuna me suxhuk)

Just like byrek, samuna is a type of bread that can be found all over the bakeries of Kosovo, and it's especially typical of the area around Gjakova. Among the citizens of Kosovo, they are broadly combined with the typical kosovar sausage, called suxhuk in Albanian. Another version of samuna is the one stuffed with eggs and soft cheese.



Lakrori

Lakrori (also known as Laknori in the Geg variant of Albanian spoken in Kosovo) is a traditional dish made of dough and filled with different ingredients, mostly different kinds of vegetables or meat.

The term lakror derives from the Albanian term laker or lakën (cabbage), as originally the basic ingredient of this dish, along with the dough made of flour, was precisely the remains of different types of cabbages.



Sarma me gjethe rrushi (Grape leaf sarma)

This is another traditional food of Kosovo that can be found, in many versions, throughout all the Balkans. Sarma in Kosovo is prepared with grape leaves, minced meat, onion, eggs, salt and pepper, even though in some areas is also made with but only rice inside.



Paça

Paça is a very widespread dish in both Albania and Kosovo, and at first glance it looks like a very thick soup, consumed with some lemon juice. This old, traditional specialty is prepared with flour, eggs, sour cream and garlic. Its preparation differs greatly, depending on the area, and in many regions minced meat can be also found in the recipe.



Speca me gjizë (Peppers with cottage cheese)

Pepper with cottage cheese is one of the most widespread dishes in Kosovo and in the surrounding region, and it is usually prepared for breakfast or dinner. It consists of fresh, green peppers baked in the oven with cottage cheese.



Specat e mbushur (Stuffed peppers)

Stuffed peppers are prepared, with some variants, in most of the Balkans and, of course, they form part of the traditional cuisine of Albania and Kosovo. This recipe can be either vegetarian (mainly peppers stuffed with rice and herbs) or non-vegetarian (with the addition of minced meat), as in the picture below.



Specat turshi me vaj, uthull dhe hudhër (Pickled peppers in oil, vinegar and garlic)

Pickled peppers are probably the most popular starter among local foods, and are typically prepared from the end of summer to the winter season, thanks to the immersion in vinegar or oil, which guarantees a long conservation.



Meatballs (qofte) and traditional kebabs (cebapi)

Qofte and cebapi are two other dishes that can be found all over Kosovo. Both can be found in dedicated restaurants (qebaptore), often along the main streets of all cities in Kosovo.

Qofte can sometimes be cooked in a pan with cheese (this recipe is more common in traditional restaurants). Meat dishes are often eaten with ajran, a drink made of yogurt, water and salt from Turkey.



Lakra turshi (Sauerkraut)

In Kosovo there are many traditional recipes of conserving pickled cabbage. Raw cabbages are usually arranged in a large pot, then salt and hot water are added. After the salt has dissolved, they are usually poured into a float or a large plastic drum, adding water up to the rim. Normally, chunks of red beet that are also added, and then the pot is covered with a thin cotton cloth and a thin porcelain plate is put on top. On top of the plate, a stone or large jar filled with water (**approximately 1.5 liters**) is placed (**traditional conservation masters “Krusha womens”**).



Ajvar

Ajvar is a very popular sauce made principally from sweet bell peppers and/or eggplants, and can visitors can encounter it in almost every supermarket or groceries around Kosovo. Ajvar became a popular side dish throughout Yugoslavia after World War II, and it is also very popular in the rest of Southeastern Europe (**Albania, Northern Macedonia, Bulgaria, Serbia, Montenegro especially**). At the end of summer, it is not unusual to see some families from Kosovo, following a consolidated tradition, cooking ajvar (**made of roasted peppers**) in big pots, sometimes placed in the family's gardens or backyards.



Peja Beer

Probably the most famous Kosovar brewery, its establishment began in 1968. Since 1971, it has stably been produced in a factory in Peja. In 2010, the company was privatized. In addition to the brewery, Birra Peja company also operates warehouses, transport and distribution facilities, as well as wholesale and retail branches in Kosovo.

The company's headquarteres are still in the city of Peja.



Rose syrup (Shurup Trendafili)

In traditional medicine, rose syrup is deemed to be an effective medicine for liver and intestinal diseases, while in the cosmetic industry it is keknowned for producing skin-care products. Besides, refreshing drinks based on this plant are popular during the summer season, or are served in traditional restaurants.



Rakia

Rakia is a popular highly-alcoholic beverage, produced by distillation of fermented fruit. Its alcohol content of is normally around 40%, but home-produced rakia can be much stronger (**from 50% up to 80%**). Rakia is widely considered the national drink of Kosovo and Albania, but many other varieties are widespread all over the Balkans (**especially in the Slavic countries**).



TRADITIONAL DRESSES

Traditional white scarf (Gezof)

Gezofi designates the upper part of the Albanian traditional costume, and specifically a garment made of sheep or goat skin. In the past, it was worn over blouses and vests, covering the shoulders, the neck and the waist to protect them from heavy cold. During the winter, the woolen side was usually worn inwards, while in summer it was usually turned upside-down due to the higher temperatures.



Typical men's costume with Gezofi



Traditional women's clothing

Traditional wedding dresses for women are characterized by plenty of beautiful colors and embroideries. Particularly in the Rugova mountains, the typical skirt for girls and brides is called "Xhubleta". The girls' dresses were similar to the women's, except for a shorter and tighter skirt made of woolen threads woven with a loom, with floral designs embroidered at the edge. The socks are white for unmarried girls and black for married women, and wool mittens for the upper arm are also used. The girls' shirts are not as richly decorated on the front as the women's, and they are shorter in length. The other parts are the same for both the married women and brides.



Portraying Ajshe Muriqi
a female Lahut player



Traditional female clothes of the western part of Kosovo
usually worn during celebrations and festive holidays

REFERENCES

- Anton Civlaku, traditional jewellery handicraft business located in the city of Peja – Interview, Recording – transcript.
- Virtyt Morina, Head of Tourism Office of the Municipality of Peja - Interview.
- Rene Xharavina, Department of Cultural Heritage of the Municipality of Peja (QRTK Peje).
- Besa Muliqi Portoqani- Directorate for culture, youth and sport of the Municipality of Peje – Interview - Recording.
- Raif Gjikolli, Director of the Alpine Club “SHBA Gjeravica 1928” of Peja.
- Mr.Isuf Demhasaj, Director of the Economic Development of the Municipality of Deçan -Recorded interview.
- Ermal Qufaj, Tourism Info Point “Visit Deçani”, Municipality of Decan, Recorded Transcript.
- Longard Dervishaj, Tourism Info Point “Visit Deçani”, Municipality of Deçan - Recorded Transcript.
- Gentiana Tofaj, Director of the Economic Development of the Municipality of Junik - Interview, recorded transcript.
- Jetmir Jasiqi, Director of Economic Development of the Municipality of Junik - Interview.
- Enver Rexha - Director of Archaeology.
- Bedri Muhadri, Historian of the Municipality of Deçan - recording - transcript.
- Shkodran Imeraj, Historian –recording - transcript.
- Idriz Zeqiraj, former ambassador of the Republic of Kosovo in Albania.
- Kuqi, B. (2018). Theoretical approach concerning the development of sustainable tourism as tourist destination in Kosovo, Peja, Kosovo.
- Atonk, I. (2017). Basics of Tourism and Management of Tourism Destinations. The Gateway to Media Literacy and the Ambarrukmo Tourism High School Yogyakarta.
- <https://pejaturism.org/>
- KAS, Kosovo Agency of Statistics, (2018). Available: <http://ask.rks-gov.net/sq/agjencia-estatistikave-te-kosoves/ekonomi/hotelet-dhe-turizmi> (in Albanian)
- Municipality of Peja, Tourist Information Guide 2023 (kk.rks-gov.net/peje/turizmi)
- Bekim Gaxherri, spokesperson of “Rrasa e Zogut” alpine association of Junik.