

## **TOURISM AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES IN THE MUNICIPALITY OF ISTOG - REPUBLIC OF KOSOVO**

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**Abstract – Purpose** -The research aims to reflect the possibilities of tourism development in the territory of the municipality of Istog. As an attractive field with an extraordinary impact on not only the economic development of this region, requires the identification of factors and opportunities for sustainable development.

**Methodology/Design/Approach**- The collection of data and facts research and qualitative analysis, research based on primary data, effectiveness of communication, observation method and secondary data. For the generation of primary data, we used the questionnaire which contains 10 questions.150 respondents answered the questionnaire. The descriptive approach of natural attractions and beauties.

**Findings**-As a result of this analysis of tourism aspects in Istog, it is in the direct interest of the area and local authorities that natural resources are used in the most careful and far-sighted way for the development of tourism, creating well-being and long-term development. Awareness and the development of a tourist culture are aspects that will bring Istog and its surroundings the possibility of developing sustainable tourism.

**Originality of the research** – We protect the originality of the work with our integrity.

**Keywords** – Tourism, Natural Beauty, Resources, Development, Historical And Cultural Heritage.

### I. INTRODUCTION

Istog is a quiet town near the mountains of Mokna with an altitude of up to 2155 m. Istog is well known for its natural beauty, with fertile plains that lie

mainly along the course of the Istog River. The source of this river is very rich in fresh water. A place with great potential for tourism, especially for rural tourism, many elements that this municipality has in the treasure of cultural heritage, but also

nature measured by the mountains, plains and water wealth that it has. The mountain of Istog and that of Radusha is a mountain with great tourist potential where, in addition to its beauty, it is known for the variety of plants, many of them with healing effects, trails suitable for skiing, and for other sports such as hang gliding, thanks to the relief and the altitude it has. In order to put these potentials into operation, investment in infrastructure is needed, since climbing these mountains is still done only with cattle. Another natural resource in Istog of great value are the water sources, such as Scourse of Istog, White Drini, the source of Vrella as well as other sources. The Istog river is a river with great potential for kayaking.. the source of thermal water in Baja, which has healing properties, is considered a water resource of high value. Istog also has a rich cultural heritage and remains of great value, where according to a recent research in the territory of Podgur, which includes the municipality of Istog, have been identified: 72 tower, a series of water mills as technology facilities for grinding grain. From religious buildings: 8 mosques, 3 mejtepe and 3 orthodox churches, a Stone Bridge, Ottoman architecture and 11 archaeological sites. The archaeological sites, in the municipality of Istog, lie in the belt of the "Bjeshke te Thata" range, starting from the east to the west. The whole organization and social functioning are a special presentation of the mountain community (Lajqi et al, 2022).

The municipality of Istog covers an area of 454 km<sup>2</sup> and includes the town of Istog and 50 villages. Istog has 39,289 inhabitants. (ASK-2012). Istog is also known as a place with cultural heritage where approximately 28 archeological sites have been identified (as in Studenica, Vrellë, Bojnica and Surrigane) and there are approximately 72 towers.

With the development plan 2018-2026, the Municipality has presented the objectives of this development, which should provide a framework for the long-term development of the Municipality, defining the long-term development goals and identifying the strategic priorities with which they must ensure:

- A sustainable economic development, with more new jobs.
- An advanced social development and equal opportunities of access for all.
- Protection and sustainable development of the environment - natural and cultural resources.
- An integrated infrastructure and efficient services for citizens (Municipal Development Plan 2017-2027).

The vision for the green and clean Istog that the strategy has, requires the leadership of a more proactive marketing to bring more private and public investments in the development of businesses, education, health, tourism, agriculture and information technology. It should also develop its capacity for cultural, mountain and sports tourism. To ensure more events, such as gatherings of political importance, cultural, sports and other events of a regional and cross-border character, especially with Montenegro. This involves creating a marketing strategy and promoting opportunities to invest and develop in these areas. (Municipal Development Plan 2017-2027).

Strategies in the field of economic development have included; agriculture, tourism and small and medium enterprises. Where the steps of tourism development are presented as follows:

- a) Creation of the local tourism board in order to coordinate the development of tourism;
- b) Promoting an efficient connection between the city and the mountain and creating a center for visitors;
- c) Creation of tourist infrastructure;
- d) Promotion of Istog as a city of fish;
- e) Protection of nature and environment, advancement of health tourism services;
- f) Promotion of speleotourism;
- g) Promotion of hunting as a complementary activity to the tourist offer;

h) Development of cross-border cooperation. (Municipal Development Plan 2017-2027).

Tourism and recreation in the Municipality of Istog are based on natural resources and attractions and therefore the municipality should promote ecotourism as a form of sustainable tourism defined in the vision. The goals of tourism development in the municipality of Istog are:

1. Provision of tourism spaces and facilities, as well as services that meet the requirements of the local population, those who work and those who visit these spaces;
2. Promotion of the tourist potential of the area, to help the local economy and improve the quality of life of the residents of the area;
3. Meeting special requirements for sports and recreation in appropriate locations;
4. Creation of attractive and safe tourist areas for those who live, work and visit these areas;
5. Supporting and increasing opportunities for informal, quiet recreation in quiet parts of tourist areas; (Municipal Development Plan 2017-2027).

## II. MATERIALS AND METHOD

With the research project we aimed to achieve an efficient understanding and clarification of the importance of the natural resources of this tourist area in Istog. So, the collection of data and facts (research and qualitative analysis, research based on primary data, effectiveness of communication, observation method and secondary data. Through the use of this method, it is intended to emphasize the importance of natural resources and the development of tourism in the development of the local community.

For the generation of primary data we used the questionnaire which contains 10 questions. These questions are formulated in the direction where we as researchers and policy makers will be able to develop development strategies by clarifying the levels of current exploitation of the area's natural beauty.

150 respondents answered the questionnaire, some of whom are visiting the area for the first time, but also some who have visited the area more than once.

Secondary data have been consumed by various institutions, at the level of the municipality of Istog, the development strategy of the municipality of Istog, but also from other reports.

The presentation of the data is done through the main table and the data reflected in the graph. For the visual aspect of the area, the beauties and the argumentation of these tourist attractions, the snapshots developed by the authors of the paper were also used. The descriptive approach of natural attractions and beauties, in our opinion, has been important both from the touristic aspects, but especially for the policy makers. From this they will have a support for the formulation of the relevant policies as well as the undertaking of the necessary investment steps that will increase the accessibility and experience of these beauties of the area.

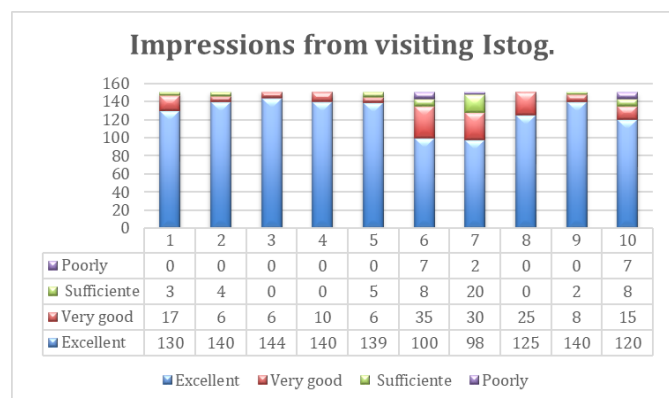
## III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

From the data of question one, we can strongly conclude that the local government bodies in the municipality of Istogu should engage in marketing activities, since 86% of the respondents have given their proposals and comments that a genuine marketing strategy will influence much in increasing the number of visitors. The respondents who answered question 2, directly 93% supported the opinion that tourism will help the economic development of this area. Supporting other relevant sectors related to tourism, especially mountain tourism. One of the important arguments for the development of tourism and the visitors of this area is that from their answers 96% are lovers of these natural beauties of the municipality of Istog and the surroundings.

94% of respondents have emphasized the need for investments in this region, stressing that investors should be from abroad, as experience has a great impact not only on development but also on the preservation and protection of the environment. Satisfaction with the infrastructural capacity of the area is low compared to the opportunities that this

region offers to visitors from the country and from abroad. The touristic information center with tourist guides would greatly advance the experience and save time for finding the interesting and unique locations of this region. Of course, signage and other facilitators will help and offer even more services and interesting experiences of the area. 65% of respondents have visited this region at least twice. This shows that the area is attractive, offering unique experiences with natural beauty. People come to visit and have recommendations for others to visit these natural attractions.

One of the most visited places according to the respondents is the place called the source of Istog, which is characteristic with the beauty of the water source but also the position that offers an extremely attractive view of the entire region and beyond. 80% of the visitors have expressed that they will come back to this region, which offers a lot for both local tourists, not only with the natural beauty but also with the cultural and historical heritage of the area.



Source: Authors calculations from research.

In the continuation of the discussion, we also argued with presentations and data that strongly support the argument of natural beauty, but also very useful data for policy makers and potential investors. Istog is known for its convenient geographical position and numerous tourism potentials, which could be transformed into an attractive tourist spot. High tourist potential based on the known natural and cultural heritage (PDKK 2011). In addition, promoting the competitiveness of the local economy is aimed at supporting economic growth and the generation of new jobs and the local economy. The activities of the project are: Infrastructure - the

construction of the bridge that connects the two banks of the source for the development of tourism such as: climbing (hiking), walking and cycling, business support - the allocation of grants directly for the support of local businesses, capacity building. - Raising and developing the skills and capacities of local businesses, civil society and local government, tourist information center - creating a sustainable information center for tourism and agriculture and promotion. – placing informational signs for tourism and surrounding businesses, maps and brochures (Komuna Istog 2022). The characteristic spatial entities of the municipality of Istog: hills, valleys and plains, as well as natural resources under protection, help to define the tourist and recreational area within the territory. The economy and the activity of the tourism sector has been further deteriorated by the non-arrival of our compatriots from the diaspora, due to the Pandemic, thus causing great losses in the tourism industry (Kuqi et al, 2022). According to the MDP, the development of natural tourism, speleotourism is foreseen in the area of the mountain, in the area of the foothills, rural, cultural and natural tourism, while in the plain part: health tourism (Banja), natural, cultural, etc.(VSM 2021). The economic development of a country depends a lot on the natural resources (Kuqi et al, 2022). The most developed tourism is in Pristina, there is also the airport from where tourists come (Sogojeva 2016) The source of the Istog River, located near the city of Istog, flows 3 m3 per second, how much of this water also originates from the source of the Vrella River. In addition to these rivers, during the rainy season the smaller rivers, such as Bujena, Kujafçi, Shushica, Pröroni i Sudenica and any other stream with a karstic source, are rich in water. The vast plain that lies between these rivers is quite fertile and has a vigorous flora and fauna and a pleasant, mesocontinental climate that is suitable for the cultivation of cereals, vegetables and trees. The field is located at the lowest altitude in Kosovo, only close to 350-400 meters. The warm currents of the Mediterranean climate beat through the valley of

Drini Bardhë here as well. The encounter of these air currents with the ridges of the high mountains of Mokna probably caused the strongest north wind in the Balkans to blow in Burim. This wind can sometimes blow up to 150 km per hour, in which case even the roofs of houses collapse. The characteristic of this strong wind is that it blows only along the foothills and does not penetrate more than ten kilometers deep into the field. They blow along all the mountains, so to speak, from Runik to Radavc, and the strongest is in Burim and its nearest villages. Temperature measurements from 1925 to 1940 have proven that in Burim the coldest month, with an average temperature of 0.1 °C, was January, while the warmest month was June, with an average temperature of 22.2°. What is more important is that in Kosovo the climate is very favourable for tourists because four seasons are adjusted in accordance with official calendar and in rare cases the climate happens to be different, for instance, the winter season is snowy each year (Kuqi, 2018) The water source is mainly used for drinking as it is very good. The source is one of the most frequented places both by local residents and by all other guests who come either for tourism or health purposes, such as people suffering from asthma because the freshness of this place affects them in terms of healer. With a little good will and a lot of love for nature, you can easily visit this destination (Hasanaj, P., Kuqi, B. (2022). Zyrta i Cultural Heritage in the municipality of Istog, says that this spring has a capacity of 2,500 liters per second and that the spectrum of bacteria in the water that comes out of there "is almost zero". Istog has a lot of potential for the development of tourism, near the source there are several high-level restaurants that offer excellent services.

Burim is located in the vicinity of the city in Istog and from it springs an average of 2500 liters of water per second, while its capacity in certain periods reaches up to 5000 liters per second. Where the source is located in a very picturesque place. While the other source of water is in the village of Vrelle near the Municipality of Istog. On average, 1000

liters of water per second come out of this source, the water is clean and used for drinking.

Hotel Restaurant Troja is located near the source of Istog, which has an amazing view and is very visited by tourists, there are also several beautiful restaurants, Freskia, Natyra, Morea, etc., where they all offer adequate services for customers. In tourism Hotel marketing should be done (Kadiu 2017).

If you really want to experience the world of mountains by walking, running or camping, the mountains of Istog offer you this opportunity where all the paths are marked, marked and digitized according to international mountaineering standards. During the pandemic, tourism has been one of the most affected sectors, it was not even possible to stay in nature (Kuqi et al, 2021). In recent years, the awareness of nature has increased significantly ( Ramandani 2013). If the activities are not well managed then the environment cannot be clean ( Shallari 2018).

Radushes is a mountain with great tourist potential where, in addition to its beauty, it is known for the variety of plants, many of them with healing effects, the trails suitable for skiing, and for other sports such as hang gliding, thanks to the relief and the altitude it has. In order to put these potentials into operation, investment in infrastructure is needed. Radusha has beautiful scenery for tourism, as well as herbaceous plants, which are in great demand by the local and wider community. In recent years, many villas have started to be built there, which will affect the development of tourism. Many places have changed the physiognomy of the landscape, giving importance to the development of this activity (Millaku et al, 2021).

#### IV. CONCLUSION

As a result of this analysis of tourism aspects in Istoga, it is in the direct interest of the area and local authorities that natural resources are used in the most careful and far-sighted way for the development of tourism, creating well-being and long-term development. From the strategic development plans, it can be concluded that important steps are being taken in raising the

necessary capacities for sustainable tourism development.

Awareness and the development of a tourist culture are aspects that will bring Istog and its surroundings the possibility of developing sustainable tourism. Such an approach promotes local identity and self-identification of citizens with the territory and local resources. To invest so that the Infrastructure is better, to enable tourists to enjoy these natural beauties which can influence the development of the local community and beyond. The local community should raise to the next level the cooperation for investments from the government, so that investors have easier measures and have better opportunities to invest in projects that prioritize tourism, especially the mountain one.

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