

European Journal of Geography

Volume 11, Issue 3, pp. 043 - 055

Article Info:

Received: 05/09/2020; Accepted: 13/12/2020
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<https://doi.org/10.48088/ejg.i.ram.11.3.43.55>

Opportunities for the development of cross-border tourism in South-East Europe: The case of Kosovo-Albania border.

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Keywords:

border,
tourism,
green corridor,
cooperation,
sustainable
development

Abstract

This paper examines the regional and institutional opportunities for cross-border cooperation, networking and tourism development at the Kosovo- Albania border, which is one of the internal borders of the Albanian ethnic territory. Completion of the study confirms the hypothesis that closure of states within the classical boundaries causes obstacles, not only for the development of cross-border tourism, especially when viewed from the perspective of sustainable tourism development in this region. While, on the other hand, cross border cooperation enables exchanges of experiences, Ideas between communities, etc., and all this reflects on the economic prosperity of these areas. In the process of developing the countries of southern Europe, particular importance has been paid to settlements and infrastructure away from border areas, while border regions have remained underdeveloped and without prospects. Development has been challenged in many border areas, including all Balkan states, while these areas were abolished as a result of the population's departure. The idea in this case study, aims to "create" the unique tourist zone "Green Albania" between the two countries, with its unique natural characteristics, leading to economic, cultural and national integration, as well as preservation and advancing the natural and cultural values of the cross-border territory.



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1. INTRODUCTION

From many sociological studies it has been proved that the integration of communities and regions is a necessity of socio-economic development (Stewart 1996). The market, information revolution, traffic and tourism represent the basic elements of globalization as a dominant and objective feature of time, despite the adversarial and regional factors. They are important components of development, with complex economic, social and ecological impacts. According to the globalists more than 60% of the world today is considered globalized (interdependent interlocutor) and subject to its legalities (Draçi 2008). So one without the other would not work.

The purpose of this paper is firstly to scrutinize the regional, political and institutional foundations of cross-border cooperation and tourism development in the context of the two countries of Southeast Europe: Kosovo-Albania border, especially since the two countries were liberated from the concepts of unsustainable governance; Albania from communism and Kosovo from the classic Serbian occupation in 1999, meanwhile the rise of cross-border circulation also began. The two governments immediately began cross-border cooperation, which enabled the development of coastal tourism as mountain tourism in border areas.

Cross-border cooperation in border regions is one of the most popular subjects in border research. Increased discussion of national borders and their significance has followed upon the remarkable geopolitical changes that have taken place in last two decades (Houtum 2000).

Except the wide interest in the problems of state borders in political geography, state borders have not gained much attention in the literature of tourism. The theoretical and conceptual foundation for such research relies much on the works of Timothy (1999, 2001; Timothy and Teye 2004; Houtum 2000), who has been studying the relationship between tourism and borders from various perspectives, including cross-border cooperation and planning in border regions. The relationship between national borders and tourism development is complex, for borders manifest themselves in tourism and influence it in many ways. A physical border can form a barrier to tourism flows, or it can be crossed almost unnoticed. Border permeability, the barrier effects caused by the border such as regulations for the movement of people and goods, will directly influence tourism flows and the development and distribution of tourism infrastructures in a border region. Border permeability, political situations and socio-cultural cohesion also affect to the potential emergence of cross-border partnership and development (Timothy 1999, 2001). As national borders are lines of transit between political, economic and often socio-cultural entities, i.e. nation-states, it has become almost a cliché to speak of border regions as 'laboratories' where one can examine how global and supranational processes transform these structures. The issue of cross-border tourism development and cross-border regional cooperation has been updated especially in recent years. This topic was dealt with by some authors in various journals. (Anderson 1996; Leimgruber 1998; Allmendinger and Haughton 2009; Hartman 2006; Ioannides et al. 2006; Prokkola 2007). The themes of these published articles promote cooperation between peoples and communities, the construction of cross-border tourist areas and regional development, which is in harmony with the concepts of European Union development (Chang 2001; Jensen & Richardson 2004; Paasi 2008). Crossborder cooperation is manifested in linkages between tourism organizations and the authorities, in dispersed politico-economic practices, in relations between public and private organizations and actors and in global-

local interconnectedness and networking. In this case, crossborder cooperation will be developed and manifested in linkages between tourism organizations and the authorities, in dispersed politico-economic practices, in relations between public and private organizations and actors and in global-local interconnectedness and networking (Jamal and Getz 1995). These dividing lines have already become important areas of peoples' integration and a source of development (O'Dowd 2003).

Many border areas now have become attractive to visitors because they want to experience the nature and cultural traditions between different countries. Related to this issue, the author Dallen J. Timothy gives some examples: "For some people, political boundaries invoke a unique type of fascination. Some tourist attractions have even been developed simply because they are a border, such as the Four Corners Monument in the United States, where Colorado, Utah, Arizona and New Mexico meet. The Navajo Nation has begun capitalising on this notion by charging an entry fee into the monument and establishing souvenir stands and food vendors. Dozens of other examples exist where frontier markers have become significant objects of tourist attention, such as the border gate between Macau and China, an interesting monument at the point where Finland, Norway and Sweden meet, and the Peace Arch, which straddles the border between the United States and Canada in Washington and British Columbia" (Timothy D. J. 2000).

Many of the world's border areas which were once an artificial barrier, strictly forbidden, and taboo topics for peoples, have now become attractive and popular places for millions of visitors that bring great social, cultural, and economic benefits. Related to this issue, the author Dallen J. Timothy gives some examples: "Several relict boundaries, or former boundaries that no longer function in their original political capacity but are still visible in the cultural landscape, have also become significant attractions. Probably the most well-known example of this is the Great Wall of China, which was built as a fortification between China and Mongolia between 246 and 209 BC. The wall is one of China's most important tourist attractions, and few visitors to Beijing leave the area without having spent a day there. Hadrian's Wall is another example of an ancient relict boundary that has become a major tourist attraction. The wall, which is considered to be the finest vestige of Roman rule in Britain, was designated a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1987, and much work has recently been done to map, delimit, manage and conserve the site. A more recent example is the Berlin Wall. Soon after its demise in 1989, the wall became the focus of strenuous preservation efforts. While its downfall was a welcome event on both sides of the border, preservation enthusiasts immediately recognized the need to save the structure in some form for heritage purposes; to tell the story of the rise and fall of the Eastern regime. However, some hostile and less-crossable borders also function as primary attractions. The DMZ between North and South Korea and the former Berlin Wall are just two examples. These borderlines, which are/were arduous to cross, are/were popular attractions for southern and western tourists respectively. The rain forests adjacent to the Democratic Republic of Congo-Uganda and Costa Rica-Panama borders, for example, are recognised globally as some of the best ecotour regions in the world" (Timothy D. J. 2000).

Most of the visitors, borders areas experience emotionally. Below we present the experiences and the words of some tourists who visited different border areas in the world: "In the words of one traveller, I love border crossings. They somehow make me feel as though I'm in a black-and-white movie with subtitles". Another commentator reminisces as follows: Borders have fascinated me since childhood. As a kid, I used to

imagine border landscapes: dark rivers, watchtowers, and unknown lands lying beyond them... Over the years, as I started travelling, borders have been somewhat demystified, but now again, approaching the Finnish-Russian boundary, I was feeling that boyish excitement, an anticipation of mystery". "In a subtle and totally subjective way, each side of the border feels different; in the space of a few feet we pass from one geographical entity to another which looks exactly the same but is unique, has a different name, is in many ways a completely separate world from the one we just left... this sense of passing from one world to another, of encompassing within a few steps two realms of experience, enchants and fascinates" (Harris 1997, Medvedev 1999, Ryden's 1993, according to the author Timothy D. J. 2000).

So, based on this experience we can conclude that border areas now no longer present development barriers, but they become an integrating space of peoples and communities that bring prosperity.

The idea in this case study, aims to "create" the unique tourist zone "*Green Albania*" between the two countries, with its unique natural characteristics, leading to economic, cultural and national integration, as well as preservation and advancing the natural and cultural values of the cross-border territory.

2. DATA & METHODS

To achieve the aims of the study, we used GIS techniques, statistical data, soil capability maps and ancillary literature. Some data were collected by municipalities. By conducting case studies, using aerial images and maps, as well as our calculations, always in the context of the exploitation and use of the cross-border areas.

This research has used different sources for data collecting and scientific methods. It used satellite images, various maps, and the census for land cover to better understand the impact of the human activity in these territory. Furthermore, the gathered data were structured, processed and analysed to produce the final results of the paper. The statistical methods used in the GIS program also helped to increase the role of applied geography in spatial planning and spatial analysis (Bartzokas-Tsiompras & Photis 2017, 2019, 2020b; Bartzokas-Tsiompras et al. 2020a, 2021) processes for the land use patterns in the Republic of Kosovo. Statistical methods have been used to collect and analyze statistical sources by different entities, which are then processed and yielded valuable results. GIS method was used to compile maps attached to the text for which certain GIS software was used. For this paper, it was necessary to prepare vector layers and a base map from aerial images and data gathered in the field. The data gathered through digital surveys give information on the families, settlements, traffic infrastructure, operators and social activities. The gathered data were then systemized and structured to fit and be used in the appropriate programs for further analyses, including the GIS application. Lastly, the correlations between the socio-economic structure and land use were analysed, the data was systematised and processed, the legal framework was reviewed, analysis was carried out, and causes were interpreted, which led to the results of the research.

3. STUDY AREA

The "Green Corridor" area is a peripheral part of the southwestern part of Kosovo and northeast of Albania. It is a cross-border area between Prizren and Kukës, with a total area of 43.821 hectares, with the share of, Kosovo being 22.523 hectares, while the part of Albania is 21.298 hectares. This area of the Green Corridor from the aspect of the geographical position is a tectonic relief form found towards Vermica, in the flow of the Drini i Bardhe River, which is distinguished as a morphological part with particular physical-geographic elements. Geology of the terrain consists of the rock layers of the period of the Tertiary, while the most recent deposits cover the bottom of the basin and the main river valley (Drini Bardhë). The highest peak of this area is Pashtrik peak at 1986 m, while the lowest point is Vermica with 275 meters of altitude (MMPH 2010). The main model of the relief of this area is the flow of the Drini i Bardhe River, which through the river erosion has created the spectacular canyon (Drini Bardhe Canyon), which adds even more importance and beauty to the landscape of this area. An important place in the hydrography of this area is also, many springs that are characterized by a small water flow. The Green Corridor is under the influence of the Mediterranean paramount and mountainous climate, and is quite suitable for economic, social and tourist development, especially in the development of winter sports. The transition from Mediterranean to mountainous climate enables the distribution of precipitation, quantity and change of precipitation, the expansion of snow layer, wind and solar radiation, etc.



Figure 1. *The geographic position of the project zone*



Figure 2. *Drini Bardhe Canyon*

For the purpose of this paper, a wide range of literature, including books, journals, reports, aerial photography, and spatial plans, tourism projects in the Municipality of Prizren and Kukës and web resources were considered. In addition, the graphical method presents the territorial development plans of the Prizren-Kukës area. Finally, the method of information and analysis has to do with field visit, collection of various information and analysis of certain territorial occurrences.

4. RESULTS

The project idea, in this case, aims to "form" a separate zone "Green Albania Tourist Area" between the two countries. With the special natural features it possesses, leading to economic, cultural and national integration and conservation it leads the natural and cultural values of the territory in question. Given the diversity heterogeneity and the rich biodiversity of flora and fauna, the project concept aims at preserving, revitalizing and rational use of this geographic area.

The idea, or application of the idea, would include all the functional details of suitability and scope for the broader recreational development and development promotion in its direction. Hence, the realization of this idea would be in full harmony with the guidance given in cooperation by two spatial planning ministries (Kosovo-Albania) (Strategjia e Zhvillimit rajonal, 2012).



Figure 4. Geographical position of the Green Corridor

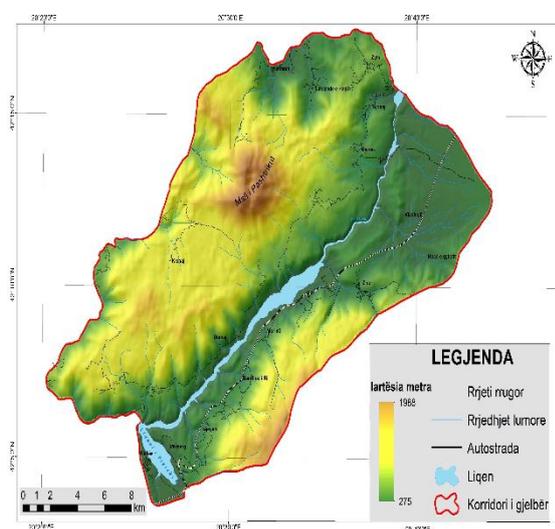


Figure 5. The Green Corridor Microposition

The aim of the paper is to achieve a satisfactory level of economic development of the territory through existing tourism and human resources such as:

- Promotion of tourist resources;
- Investments to increase the sustainability of the natural environment by treating those sites with high natural attractiveness and high sensitivity, such as those with rare biodiversity, as well as promoting cultural sites;
- Infrastructure investments, creating business centers, parks, separate services, innovations, etc;
- Ensure a proper level of access and connectivity of this area with other regions and units within the area for the purpose of economic and social development (Bashkia e Kukësit , 2012).

To develop the Green Corridor area, according to our perception the easiest, fastest and best way is to valorize the tourism potential of the territory on both sides of the

border, between Prizren and Kukës municipalities that blend two states with the same genesis and culture.

Project interventions, with theoretical research, are the basic part that send us to the application of the concept in choosing the easiest, fastest and most appropriate form for the conservation, exploitation and development of tourist resources of this area. Interventions, based on the conceptual concept of the project, may be:

- political,
 - economical,
 - ecological,
 - tourism promotion.
- Political- drafting of interstate policies for the cooperation and management of the border area.
 - Economical - economic intervention implies the application of appropriate measures, for improving the infrastructure, improving living standards for the population of the area, and beyond, reduction of unemployment in the tourist season, innovative and cultural activities, improving and building tourist resources in educational, health and recreational form, as well as the rational management of nature by the inhabitants of the area.
 - Ecological - conservation of nature and its rational utilization.
 - Tourism promotion, presents the marketing of bids and tourist functions, such as appearing within this area. The tourism offer includes natural and cultural values, with recreational, health, cultural, entertainment, political, social and economic functions.

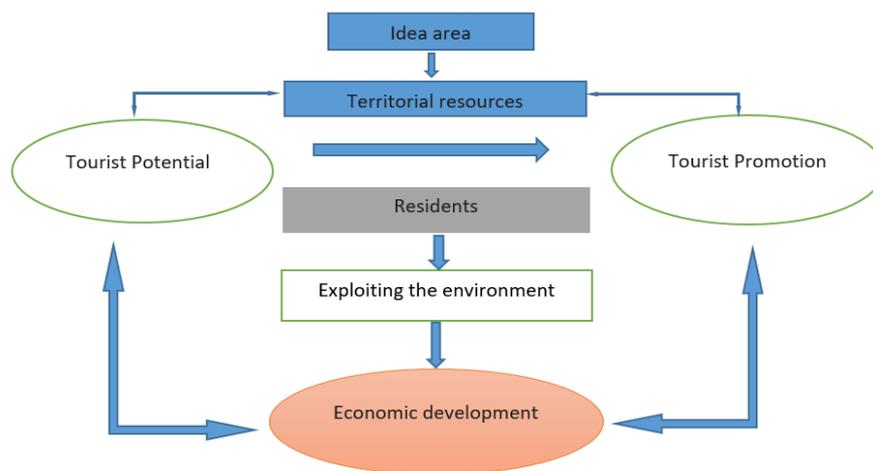


Figure 3. Schematic presentation of territorial development from existing resources
Source: Spatial Planning, 2005

All of these brand interventions conceptualize a strong bond with each other, because each one precedes the development of the other. Sustainable development envisages strong tourist propaganda, through joint management, tourist offices and regional media. The best regional promotion includes a wide range of activities that would

determine the flow, spatial reorganization and economic effects of tourist, local, regional and continental mass consumption (Gashi 1986).

During field work and requests for wider information from the Municipality of Kukës and Prizren, potential locations for the following points have been identified:

- It is defined the old road (pedestrian / horses / bicycles, as well as the itinerary of boat riding was determined;
- The areas where hotels/ restaurants can be developed;
- The position of the passenger terminal;
- Rented bicycle houses, which can be located in the centers of Kukes/ Vermica or along the itinerary;
- Positioning of farms; minimum two farms, one in the territory of Albania and one in the territory of Kosovo, which may be part of the hostel's accommodation.

The itinerary is conceptualized as a return to the past, in order to experience the historical journey from the distant past such as:

- Regulation of the ports location of the boat for tourist drives, minimum two ports (one in the territory of Albania, one in the territory of Kosovo);
- Regulation of camping and picnic areas;
- Regulation of areas for afforestation along the road;
- Regulation of picnic areas along the street, their urban furnishing, i.e. benches, tents, panoramic or observation points, etc., as well as their illumination;
- Evidence of natural and heritage attractions;
- Determining the paths of walking in nature or climbing on the mountain;
- The necessary-adequate signaling of the road.

These points represent the basis of health, cultural and recreational activities of the area projectile. The Green Corridor would start with free hiking trails, which include the spacious, beautiful natural landscape. Tourists can then choose to ride, since the trails have a length of 111 km. They can be equipped with nearby farm horses, to continue the recreation along the rides, or bicycles which can be rented in a special mountain park projected only for this purpose.

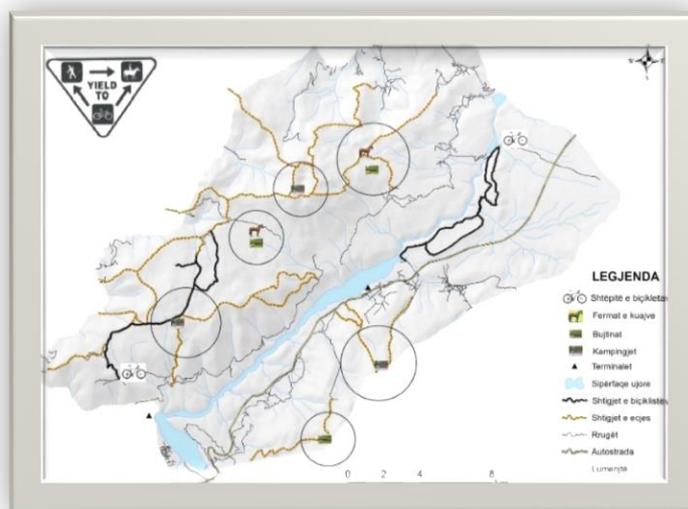


Figure 6. The schematic representation of the interconnection of tourist gravitational activities

This park, besides the free cycling experience, can also serve for certain competitions. Along all these paths the relief has a marked slope, which possesses a risk to tourists, but also a real attraction, in addition protective panels should be placed in some spots.

All these activities will be equipped with information tools, such as information boards, maps, plans, etc. The Green Corridor has the potential to develop a variety of tourist activities as other forms of experiencing natural values. Sailing along the Drini i Bardhë River is a special form of experience. The whole area can be experienced by cruise ships that are located along the ports. Ports connect land masses on both sides of the river, connecting Prizren with Kukes.

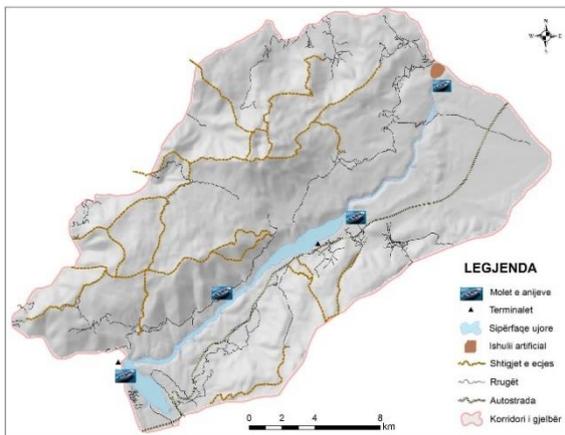


Figure 7. Schematic presentation of the interconnection of educational and touristic activities

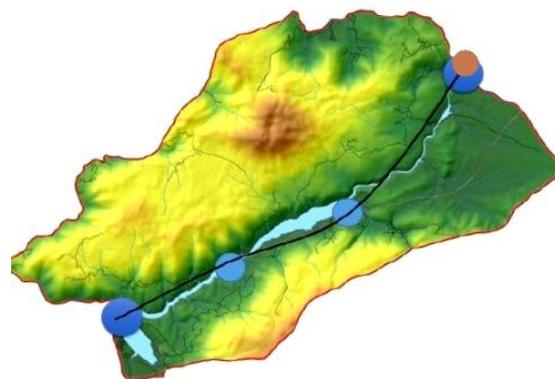


Figure 8. The connection of ports

The first port appears at the beginning of the entrance to the Drini i Bardhë river basin, namely on the improvised "artificial" island. A view that can be experienced during a vacation in the existing restaurants. Then it continues with the other ports at Lake Vermica and Lake Fierzë, where it ends in the center of Kukes.



Figure 9. Hunting in the Pashtriku Mountains



Figure 10. Fishing in the Drini i Bardhë River

Based on the overall geographic-natural analysis of this cross-border area it has been proved that this area presents a number of recreational, economics and educational activities that make it a desirable place to visit not only in the region but also wider with some of the activities following:

- *The natural amphitheater.* An improvised amphitheater under the motive of nature in the border area for the purpose of education, sports, recreation etc., where numerous cultural activities such as festivals, cinemas, paintings, theatrical performances etc. would be held.
- *Windmills,* which would serve to lighten pedestrian paths, cycling etc. Additionally, these facilities would play the educational role to schools, as well as a way of energy-saving from nature, or from regenerative resources.
- *Aeronautism.* Vertically heterogeneous terrain, which is Pashtriku's peak, 1988 meters high down to 275 meters Drini i Bardhë river, meets the technical conditions for practicing this activity.
- *Diving* on improvised beaches along the Drini Bardhë River and Fierza Lake (artificial beaches in Vërmicë and Kukës).
- *The creation of an improvised area serving as a sanctuary for animals,* an area that can show the recognition and love of wildlife such as: Common deer (*Cervus elaphus* L.), Deer Lobster (Lady L), Squirrel (*Lepus europaeus* Pall), Wild goat - (*Ripicarpa rupicarpa* L), Wild goat - (*Sus scrofa* L), Jackal (*Canis aureus* L), Wild cat(*Felis silvestris* Schr), Big wild chicken (*Tetrao urogallus* L), Fox (*Vulpes vulpes* L)), etc.
- Fishing in the Drini i Bardhë River does not have the desired potential for the development of this activity, but the creation of special spaces for the accumulation and cultivation of carp, trout and others would create a fishing industry.
- *Hunting.* It is very limited and is done with special criteria.
- *Establishment of a traditional trade facility,* designed under Albanian cultural motivation, with a view to promoting culture (clothing, traditions, customs) and Albanian gastronomy.

5. CONCLUSIONS

The decade that we are living in, will be remembered as decades in which tourism has emerged as one of the most promising sectors and important human activity, contributing to economic growth and better life. (T. Rifai).

Looking at the geographic and architectural elements, of the Kosovo-Albania border area, and its natural attractiveness; the imagination and the initiative for the formation and promotion of a common territorial tourist as well as recreational and cultural space; for the population of these areas, on one hand there are many values and socio-economic benefits. On the other hand, the values of sustainability of the natural environment, especially the conservation of attractive natural facilities, as well as the conservation of rare biodiversity are immense. This territory along with the border-line, would turn into a gravitational area, which would attract tourists and many investors who, with their economic potentials, would create a favorite and pleasant cross-border environment between the two countries through numerous tourist services, but also enjoyment of nature attractions. The architectural design process of such areas requires a special commitment of the knowledge and presentation of the existing situation (natural environment, human resources, infrastructure, economic and social links throughout the

border), not to overlook the spirit and the artistic taste of national values through historical focus, as a potential tourist and cultural design concept. These two design concepts (natural and social) would stimulate movements of the Albanian population from all over, towards this area, because of the need for inter-regional meetings and communication, but also from the desire to experience a comfortable recreational, healthy and cultural environment. This form of organization will also lead to the elimination of the classic boundaries and the modernization of the nations.

This area offers natural and cultural tourism resources with many educational, recreational and other effects. Furthermore, it offers holidays and excursions that can be developed at different seasonal periods, dominating the spring and summer season, and less during autumn and winter. In addition, this would reflect on a new form of cooperation between countries, systems and different levels of governance through these actions:

- A commitment to contribute to a higher degree of economic performance, and in particular the growth of well-being;
- A commitment to reviewing and harmonizing administrative regulations that are in conflict with the vision of this strategy;
- A call to central governments, which are responsible for various aspects within this strategy, to harmonize their policies and practices with this strategy and to accept the call to engage in regional partnership;
- A call to donor organizations to support this vision and strategy, and to identify the specific actions that they would support.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This work is the result of a long commitment by the authors in the preparation of the draft for the development plans in Kosovo. The authors would like to thank their colleague, Bajram Kafexholli, Senior official in Spatial Planning Sector in Pristina and then Director of the National Park of Bjeshkët e Nemuna, for his helpful comments and suggestions, which contributed greatly to this paper.

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