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The **heritage**, tourism and **economic values** of Mount Blinaja, Kosovo

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Abstract | Each country has different heritage and tourist values, which constitute identity and generate material goods for country's economy. Blinaja Mountains (Blinaja Hunting Reserve) are one of the most beautiful and protected mountains in the Republic of Kosovo. Attractive spatial forms and landscapes of the mountains of Blinaja, created in different geological periods as special geomorphological, hydrographic, topographic forms, represent values that can be valorized in terms of heritage, tourism and economy. This paper aims to bring to a wide audience authentic data and information related to the heritage, tourist and economic values of Mount Blinaja (Blinaja Hunting Reserve). It has an area of 2115 hectares, hilly-mountainous relief and altitude from 600-850 m. The catchment area e is 21.15 km^2, the length of the hydrographic network is 49.44 km. 33 surface water accumulations are within this space, 2 objects of heritage value, and over 200 species of endemic plants. 94.16% of this study area is covered with forests divided into 70 management units. These natural and artificial values give this area unique heritage, tourism and economic importance.

Keywords | Blinaja Mountains, economic value, heritage, tourism, Kosovo

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1. Introduction

The Blinaja Mountains are characterized by a range of values; historical, cultural, educational, aesthetic, tourist, recreational, ecological, etc., which are the product of the centuries-old action of nature and man, where each of them has its role, importance and heritage, tourism and economic value. "Blinaja" is named after the type of woodbliri (tilia ssp) (Geo & Land sh.p.k., 2013). According to the World Tourism Organization statistics, mountain tourism accounts for approximately 20% of global tourism and plays an important role in international tourism development (Tian, 2020), especially considering the continuing COVID-19 pandemic. Mountainous areas account for approximately 27% of the total global land area, and 54% of the global mountainous area is located in developing countries (Romeo, 2020). Mountain-related attributes and socio-cultural environment enhance mountain tourism's attractiveness to prospective tourists (Chen, 2017, 2019). Geoheritage sites are packed with aesthetic appeal, able to promote local tourism as well as regional tourism (Jagxhiu & Çadraku, 2021). The unique natural environment of mountains (Rio-Rama, 2019), fresh air (Jiang, 2007), and landscapes (Xie, 2015) motivate tourists to "get closer to nature" and seek health-conscious tourist destinations (Tian, 2020). Heritage and tourism are important economic sectors which are showing a growing trend. This increase is seen with benefits in several areas such as: identity, health, recreation, sports, economy, etc. Heritage values and tourism is a system by which the values of heritage and natural wealth are used as functions for the general human well-being, growth and economic development of a particular area, region and country. In economic terms, heritage values and tourism are a source of income and contributors to increasing social welfare through employment, increasing family income, raising living standards and sustainable development. According to UNWTO (https://www.unwto.org/mountain-tourism, accessed on 19 December 2021), mountain tourism has the potential to stimulate local economic growth and social change due to its complementarity with other economic activities and its contribution to GDP and job creation as well as its year-round appeal (i.e., its lack of an "off-season") provides significant benefits. According to the 2021 Annual Conference of International Mountain Tourism Alliance (http://www.imtaweb.net/2022), most tourists think that the tourist flow and concentration of mountain tourism areas and the risks are low; travel restrictions and remote office work are not good for the business tourism market, but they provide development opportunities for rural tourism and mountain tourism. Valorization of the values that Blinaja Mountains have in harmony with the principles of sustainable development would be the most rational model of their use and development of activities that consider the present and future of natural resources. According to the WCED (1987) "Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" (WCED, 1987). Byrd (2009) states that; the key to the sustainable development of tourism in a community is the inclusion of stakeholders. Other researchers, such as Gursoy and Rya (2002), Andereck and Vogt (2002) and Andriotis (2005), Getz and Timur (2005), Hall and Dodds (2007), emphasize the importance of stakeholders. Money according to them without the support of interest groups it would be difficult to achieve sustainable development of tourism (Andereck & Vogt, 2000; Gursoy, et al., 2002; Andriotis, 2005; Getz & Timur, 2005; Hall, 2007). So, considering environmental, cultural, and community welfare values is essential in comprehensive development and study. Following the Rio Summit, the adoption of Agenda 21 by the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO, 1996) argues that tourism is a global economic force with a moral responsibility to work towards

sustainable development (WTO, 1996). According to UNWTO (https://www.unwto.org/mountain-tourism, accessed on 19 December 2021) mountain tourism encompasses a broad range of outdoor leisure and sports activities. In this aspect the maximization of heritage and tourism values should be managed in a model with environmentally friendly behavior, not producing problems in the ecological, social, and cultural balance, etc., Still, it should be willing to preserve and improve where needs certain environmental areas and sectors and bring them to the levels the tourists offer for the community of the area and beyond.

2. Study area

The Blinaja Mountains (Hunting Reserve) are located in the central part of the Republic of Kosovo with coordinates 42°30'00" N and 21°00'00" E (Fig.1). It has an area of 21.15 km^2 and a perimeter of 36.64 km. It was established in 1955 as an area of particular importance and was re-established in 2009 (decision No. 23/09 dt. 09.02.2009) with the same purpose (MAFRD, 2022). From the capital of Kosovo, Prishtina is located at a distance of 24 km in the direction of Blinajë-Sllatinë-Fushë Kosovë-Prishtina. In comparison, from the direction Blinajë-Lipjan-Prishtina is situated at a distance of 32 km, in which live 218 thousand inhabitants (KAS, 2020). Also at a distance of 15 km from the study area is the city of Lipjan in which 58 thousand inhabitants live (KAS, 2020), while in the nearby area a radius of 1 to 4 km are over 10 villages with over 8000 thousand inhabitants. Tasisa, et al., (2022) emphasize that intangible heritage should be explored and used for the benefit of the community. Therefore the heritage and tourist potential of the Blinaja Mountains can benefit the community living in the vicinity of this area. The number of about 300 thousand inhabitants in a radius of 30 km from the study area represents the potential of visitors who can visit the mountains of Blinaja. From the socio-economic aspect, this area represents a significant source of income for the country's economy and the community in the vicinity of the region through employment and provision of services by the rural community of the area. The climate of the study area is continental (Pllana, 2015), with average annual air temperatures ranging from -0.24°C to 22.14°C, while the average annual rainfall is 656.4 mm (HIK, 2019). Three rock complexes characterize the study area. The western and southwestern part is composed of Paleozoic rocks, represented by quartzite, quartzite-conglomerate, sandstone, sericitic shale, quartz-sericite, limestone quartz, biotitic, gneiss and marble (Loncarevic, 1971; Pavic, et al., 1980; Meshi, et al., 2012; Çadraku, et al., 2016). The northwestern part consists of Jurassic ultrabasic rocks represented by serpentinites, peridotites, harzburgites, etc. Neogene formations are widespread mainly on the eastern side (Fushë Kosovë) of the basin and are represented by clays, partly by lignite, etc. Quaternary formations spread out along both sides of the river Blinaja and its eastern tributaries and are characterized by prolluvium, alluvium and vegetable soils (Meshi, et al., 2012; Çadraku, 2021).

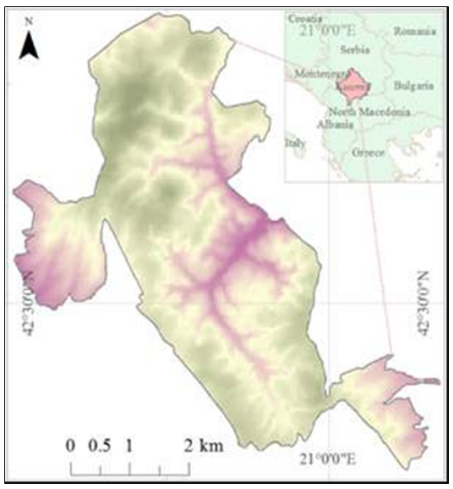

Figure 1 | Location of the study area (map: Çadraku, 2022)

3. Methods

The materials used to achieve the purpose of this paper were: field car, notes for field record keeping, GPS-handheld, meter, camera, topographic map (1:25000), geological (1:25000, 1:50 000 and 1:100000), hydrogeological (1:200000), stopwatch, graduated container with a volume of 10 litres, field refrigerator for storing water samples. The ALOS digital height model with a spatial resolution of 20 m was used to construct the maps. ArcGIS 10.6 program was used to analyse and construct the graphic part. To achieve the objective of this study, a working methodology was followed in two main phases: data collection and information, fieldwork to identify heritage sites, potential areas for tourism, water sources and reservoirs, etc. Being a qualitative study, information on the main characteristics of Mount Blinaja was gathered from field observations, and conversations with the guards of Mount Blinaja, with the local community. The coordinates were measured at this stage, and water samples were taken for more detailed physicochemical analyses. The research questions were as follows: Does Mount Blinaja have heritage, tourist and economic values? Could they be a factor in the development of tourism in this area? Do they bring economic benefits to the community living near Mount Blinaja?. The analysis method is mainly quantitative, but we have made every effort to use accurate qualitative data. Also, "fresher"and more authentic data was generated and used in order for the paper to have its informative function.

4. Results

The environment has an essential character for the man. Mountain tourism may be safer than other forms of tourism because it has the potential to minimize the spread of COVID-19 (Zeng, et al., 2022). Discussions on tourism sustainability have had a substantial expansion over recent decades for many reasons, where sustainability explicates the interconnection of three pillars "environment, economy, and society" (Giddings, et al., 2006). In recent years, studies conducted on sustainable tourism have shown theoretical progress but limited practices (Mihalic, 2016). Geographical individuality and good traffic connections of the Blinaja mountains within the territory of the Republic of Kosovo characterise this area and give it special importance from the tourist and recreational aspects. Spatial values require special care both from the point of view of preservation and protection and the form and manner of their use. The protection of heritage values and the development of tourist activities is one of the main functions of any space that has them. This research yielded the following results:

Relief - the primary forms of relief in the study area are hills, mountain passes, river valleys, etc., which intertwine in a complex way creating a relief structure. Relief as a physical-geographical feature is the leading local factor that influences the modification of climatic conditions (Pllana, 2015). Based on the morphological characteristics and altitude in the relief of the Blinaja Mountains, two central units have been distinguished: mountains and valleys which are of interest for the development of tourism, sports and recreation in this study area.

Climatic conditions - of any area or country have a dominant role in the vital activity of the community. In the study area, the average annual air temperatures ranging from -0.24°C to 22.14°C, while the average annual rainfall is 656.4 mm, provide opportunities for developing tourist-recreational activities during the seasons.

Topographic anomalies - topographic anomalies were delineated in fourth different sites, such as A-B and C-D, (Fig. 2). The profile maps illustrate the shape of the terrain in the study area.

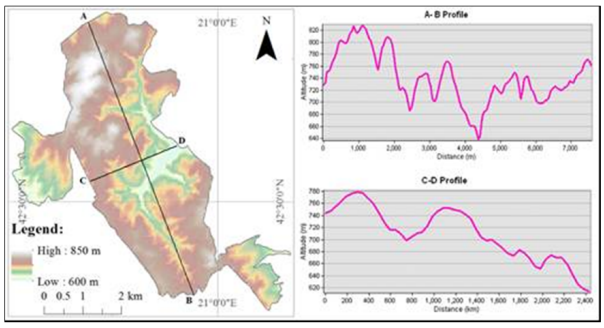

Figure 2 | Topographic anomalies and profile (map and profile: Çadraku, 2022)

Slope - the lithological settings control Slope- in general, the variatio. Higher slope results in rapid runoff and increased erosion rate (potential soil loss) with less groundwater recharge potential. The slope in study area (Fig.3.) varied from low 10%, very gentle 10.1-17%, gentle 17.1.1-24%, moderate 24.1-34%, moderately steep 34.1-53% (Fig. 3.).

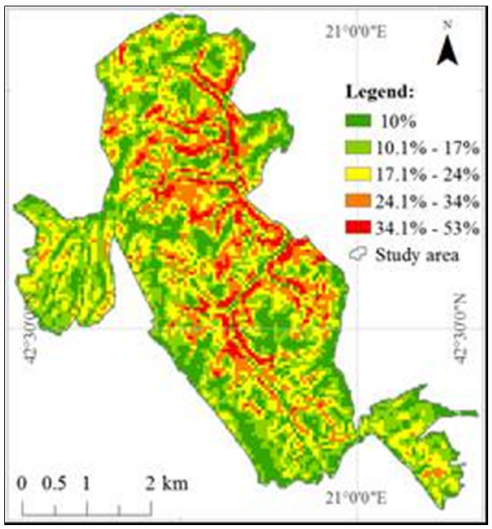

Figure 3 | Slope map (map: Çadraku, 2022)

Geology - in geological aspect the study area is covered by: biotitic schist, biotitic gneiss covers an area of 16.73 km^2 or 79.08% of the total area. Then, sericitic, quartz-sericitic schist 1.51 km^2 or 7.13%, Amphibolic schist 0.42 km^2 or 2.00%, Marble, (marbled limestone) 0.91 km^2 or 4.29%, Gravel, sand 0.61 km^2 or 2.86 %, Metaranor, phyllite 0.08 km^2 or 0.36 %, Serpentine 0.13 km^2 or 0.62 % and Granite 0.77 km^2 or 3.64 %.

The surface water - is generally of the character of streams fed by water mainly from atmospheric precipitation (rain, snow, etc.). Water is drained from the study area in three directions. On the east side they discharge into the river Blinaja, on the southeast and discharge into the river Godanca and to the southwest and northwest, they discharge into the river Drenica. All these waters belong to the catchment area of the river Sitnica. The catchment area has an area of 21.15 km^2 in this study area, four water sub-basins are divided. The largest area has the Blinaja sub-basin with 14.54 km^2 or 68.72%, then the Pojata sub-basin

with 4.03 km^2 or 19.04%, the Zllakuqan sub-basin with 1.53 km^2 or 7.25%, while the sub-basin with the smallest area is the Fushtica sub-basin with 1.05 km^2 or 4.99%. The length of the stream within it is 49.44 km.

Dams (accumulation) - there are 33 surface water dams (figure 4). From the hydric aspect, this area is given an attraction by 33 surface water dams (accumulations) which are of added tourist-recreational value. Dams are built with circumstantial material (soil, stones). The dimensions of surface water accumulations are the width of 60 m, the length 120 m. Depth is estimated from 0.5 m to over 5 m.

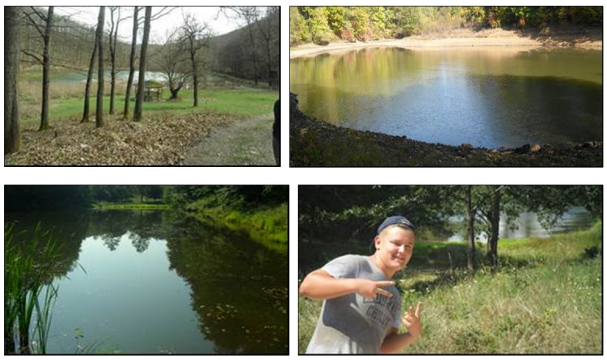

Figure 4 | Dams-surface water accumulations (photo: Çadraku, 2021)

Flora and Vegetation - in terms of vertical spread are in harmony, respectively in accordance with the general laws of relief. The flora of the Blinaja Mountains is distinguished by a pronounced "mosaic of ecosystems". In the period of the '80-s, the mountains of Blinaja were a laboratory for pupils, students and professors in the field of Biology, Botany, etc. According to information gathered from field research, it is estimated that there are over 200 species of endemic plants in the Blinaja Mountains (it remains a topic for more detailed research). The most attractive landscape is made up of forests, grasslands, meadows and other plant formations.

Management units - according to The Forest Management Plan (2014-2023) the Blinaja Mountains (Hunting Reserve) is divided into 70 management units. The unit with the largest area of 67.60 hectares is the one with the number 047, while the unit with the smallest area of 14.05 hectares is the one with the number 09.

Wildlife - there are a considerable number of wild fauna in Blinaja Mountain. The most representative species are Capreolus Capreolus, Dama Dama, Cervus Elaphus, Sus Scrofa, Canis Lupus, Canis Vulpes, Meles Meles, Felis Sylvestris, Rabbit, Squirrel, etc. According to conversations with the guards of the mountains of Blinaja (Blinaja Hunting Reserve) it is estimated that there are about: 145 red deer (Cervus elaphus), 95 deer named Dama Dama, 95 red deer (capreolus) then several hundred pigs, rabbits, foxes, etc.

Birds - the birds present are Aquilla Heliaca, Aquilla Chrysaetos, Falco Naummani, Alectoris Graeca, Accepiter Gentilis, Caprimulugus Europeus Lullula Arborea. From time to time, this space is also visited by migratory birds, which add value to this space in those periods of stay. Geographical position and general natural conditions create opportunities for the cultivation of other species of wild fauna which would make this area even more interesting and attractive, especially in the development of tourism, hunting, sports and recreation, etc.

Historical heritage - are places of significance to people on account of historical, physical and

cultural values. Historic heritage is often referred to as cultural and historical heritage or simply "historic places" (Newzealand.govt.ze, 2017). Two objects of historical importance were identified in the study area (figure 5), which are also considered heritage values in this area.

Figure 5 | The frame of the military vehicle and Monument from the second World War (1997-1999) (photo: Çadraku, 2020)

Figures 5 shows that war has taken place over two periods of time in these mountains. These two monuments should be preserved and protected as monuments of historical value and be available to the visitor (tourist).

Buildings - in the study area present several buildings (figure 6) with different functions built in different periods. Of interest is the forest house which should be preserved and protected as a heritage value and be available to the visitor (tourist).

Figure 6 | Forester house and Administration building (1974 and 2019) (photo: Çadraku, 2018, 2019, 2020)

Observatories - in the study area, there are about 80 observation objects (Figure 7) built of environmental material (wood), mainly from the ground are, at the height of 3 m and serve to observe wild animals.

Wildlife feed facilities - estimated to be over 200 wildlife conservation and feed facilities in this study area (Figure 8). These objects are of different types and sizes. For their construction, environmental materials, mainly wood, stone and concrete was used. From a tourist point of view they are of interest to be seen by visitors.

Figure 7 | Wildlife observation facilities (photo: Çadraku, 2020)

Figure 8 | Wildlife food storage facilities (photo: Çadraku, 2019)

The mountain - valleys of Blinaja are very rich in mountain valleys. Research showed that all valleys offer opportunities for tourists and economic valorization. Figure 9 shows the mountain valleys located within the proposed space for tourism, sports and recreation.

Figure 9 | Mountain valleys (photo: Çadraku, 2021)

This research highlights that in the Blinaja Mountains (Blinaja Hunting Reserve) there are real opportunities for developing tourism, sports and recreation in an area of 44 hectares or 2% of the total area of the Blinaja Mountains (Figure 10). The area on the southwest side has an area of 17 hectares, while the one on the northwest side has 27 hectares. Within the proposed area are four surface water accumulations, three water sources and an object of historical value.

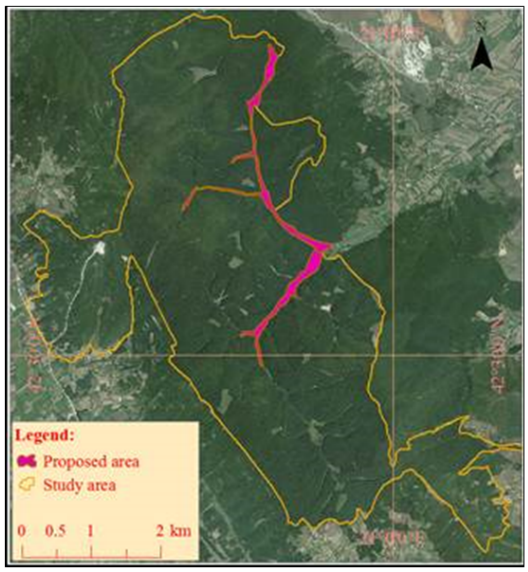

Figure 10 | The proposed area for tourism development (map: Çadraku, 2022)

5. Conclusion

This mountain complex is located in the central part of the Republic of Kosovo. It represents a unique natural whole with diverse natural values uniformly distributed throughout its space. The heritage, tourist, recreational and economic attractiveness of the Blinaja Mountains stems from its natural and artificial values. Based on the research work, its values according to the function are grouped into protective function, ecological, tourist-recreational, scientific, cultural and economic. The protection function aims to consider the preservation and protection of this space in harmony with the conception and principles of sustainable management. The tourist-recreational function seeks to define the areas by the principles of sustainable development so that these areas can be used rationally for tourist and recreational purposes. The scientific-cultural and educational function allows recognising values and characteristics; geomorphological, historical, cultural, ethnic, social, endemic, etc.

The results from this paper showed that there is an opportunity to organize transit tourism in this area because this area is close to cities, no special construction is required, and the road network is relatively developed and allows visitors to move throughout the region. The study further showed that according to its condition, the road network is grouped with: good condition, average and not good. The study further revealed that the road network is grouped with good condition, moderate and not reasonable according to its condition. In the first group, the movement can be done by car, etc.; in those with the average condition, the movement through them is done by truck, tractor, etc. In contrast, those in poor condition are mainly forest paths where the movement can be done on foot and in some segments with motorcycles. The study also highlights that some surface water reservoirs create opportunities for the development of water sports (swimming, fishing, etc.), training and exercises for professionals and fans of diving and water research. Hunting as a function in this area has the opportunity to develop in terms of sports and recreation, then also in terms of management and control of the optimal number of wild fauna (ecological balance). Mountain tourism destinations should consider their responses to the changing market, environmental, and social conditions when expanding and enhancing their offerings. The tourist offer in Blinaja should be flexible and modified according to the requirements of the tourist community. Cultural-recreational activities with a wide range can be developed here, which meet the ethnosocial, artistic, manifesto, environmental, etc., requirements. Mountain valleys and meadows offer opportunities for sports activities, recreation, several-day camping for certain groups, then holding motorcycle races, horse racing sports, etc.

Another possibility of economic valorization in this area would be the construction of a hospital centre that would focus on treating and curing diseases related to the respiratory system and the like. The Blinaja Mountains are of particular importance for strategic military planning. Blinaja Mountains (Blinaja Hunting Reserve) represents a tourist and economic potential that should be transformed from a functional space into a multifunctional space where certain areas within it can become attractive areas for tourism, sports and recreation, etc. This research highlights that in the Blinaja Mountains (Blinaja Hunting Reserve) there are real opportunities for developing tourism, sports and recreation in an area of 44 hectares or 2% of the total area of the Blinaja Mountains. The implementation of these three proposed spaces with an area of hectares for the development of tourism and economic valorization presented in this paper can be realized through a legal and political regulation by the competent institutions of the Republic of Kosovo. Developments should support the concept of integrated natural resource management by adapting tourism, economic, etc.

activities, which would be based on ecological natural resources with environmentally friendly activities.

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