



EUROPEAN UNION'S CROSS BORDER COOPERATION PROGRAMME

ANALYSES AND STRATEGY FOR MARKETING, PROMOTION & BRANDING OF UNIQUE KRUSHEVO & ELBASAN TOURISM PACKAGE



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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

KET Project	“Krushevo and Elbasan – acknowledged cross-border tourism destination” Project
ATTA	Adventure Travel Trade Association
ATV	All-terrain vehicle
CB	Cross-border
CBC	Cross-border cooperation
CSD	Centre for Sustainable Development
B&B	Bed and Breakfast
B2B	Business to business
B2C	Business to client
COVID 19	SARS CoV 2
DMO	Destination Management Organization
DMP	Destination Management Plan
EU	European Union
FAM tour	Familiarization tour
FB	Facebook
IG	Instagram
IPA	The instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance
LED	Local Economic Development
LRCP	Local and Regional Competitiveness Project
LSG	Local Self-Government Unit
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
SEO	Search Engine Optimization
TCC	Tourism Carrying Capacity
ToR	Terms of Reference
UNWTO	United Nations World Tourism Organization
USP	Unique Sales Proposition
UVP	Unique Value Proposition
VFR	Visit friends and relatives
WSs	Workshops
WTO	World Tourism Organization
WTTC	World Travel and Tourism Council

INTRODUCTION

This paper is developed in the frame of the “Krushevo and Elbasan - acknowledged cross-border tourism destination” Project, supported by the IPA II CBC Programme North Macedonia - Albania. The project aims at long-term stable and sustainable tourism growth, which balances environmental, economic and socio-cultural aspects of tourism, to guarantee long-term benefits to communities and the countries as the cross-border area (impact level).

The “**Analyses and Strategy Directions for Promotion of the Krushevo-Elbasan Tourism Package**” aligns with the project’s efforts to set a joint strategic direction for further development of the destination of Krushevo and Elbasan as a single thematic tourism destination, focusing on active and adventure tourism products. In that respect, the analysis findings and recommendations result from extensive consultations with existing literature on the topic and primary target group which is providers of touristic services in Krushevo and Elbasan. KET Project introduced a highly participative process that included local governments and the civil and private sectors.

The KET project-specific objective (2) is devoted to: Developing an integrated touristic promotion and ready competitive tourism and hospitality services within cross-border Krushevo–Elbasan to attract domestic and foreign tourists and visitors.

To achieve the above objective, two seasoned tourism experts, Prof.Asoc.Dr. Elvira Fetahu and EMBA Emilia Geroska were engaged to investigate the existing (situation analysis) and potential assets (desk & field research) for further active tourism development of Elbasan and Krushevo, respectively. The above tasks were conducted from May through September 2022 with logistical support from all relevant actors for tourism development in Krushevo and Elbasan municipalities.

The paper comprises two major portions, the first dealing with current situation analysis based on the elaborated methodology below. The second portion presents the findings and recommendations followed by basic Strategy directions for further marketing, promotion, and branding of the destination Krushevo – Elbasan concerning one unique active tourism package.

I. METHODOLOGY

The primary goal of this document is to develop a robust understanding and elaborate possible opportunities for destination development and gain valuable insights into the actual tourism situation in Krushevo and Elbasan. This document adopts combined research methods using primary and secondary data. The preliminary data were collected using two methods; workshops and in-depth interviews.

Two cross-border joint workshops with the main tourism stakeholders were organized in Albania (18-19.05.2022) and North Macedonia (08-09.06.2022) to collect local experiences, possibilities, views, and ideas from relevant stakeholders and beneficiaries from Krushevo – Elbasan cross-border area. The main objective of these workshops was to generate and discuss ideas about tourism in two regions and develop a joint touristic product. There were 48 participants (32 men and 16 women), all representatives from tour operators, hospitality businesses, local government, non-profit organizations, cultural institutions and academia. These activities were excellent occasions to discuss face-to-face what concerned tourism stakeholders in Elbasan and Krushevo. At the same time, the workshops served as joint cross-border platforms for brainstorming sessions for analyzing the current state of tourism in Krushevo and Elbasan and generating ideas for its further development as a vibrant destination in the area, offering a joint and consistent tourism package. The main topics and themes covered included the identification of tourism potentials in the regions, designing dynamic tourism offers, diversification of tourism offers, best ways to promote and communicate Elbasan and Krushevo as one unique tourism destination, development of specific academic curricula for tourism services in universities and high schools, designing different training programs for individuals or employees related to tourism and hospitality sector, etc.

A joint exercise was conducted to design a proposal on itineraries from the perspective of the supply side of the travel market, i.e. from the point of view of the tourism providers at the destination. Proposed tourism products and packages were investigated upon the demand side of the travel market - key aspects of an adventure destination in particular, including activities, attractions, and access. Participants understood the requirements of the marketing and promotional campaign concerning further branding the cross-border an adventure and active destination.

The in-depth interviews were organized after the workshops. The participants took part in structured interviews held by the researchers in the framework of this study. The **In-depth interviews** were useful for fully understanding the opinions, experiences, and suggestions of the main actors of the tourism sector in Krushevo and Elbasan. During these interviews, the following list of themes and questions were covered:

- How can Krushevo and Elbasan be viewed as tourist attractions? What is its identity?
- What events and activities have been done about tourism in Krushevo and Elbasan and what more can be done?
- How can the marketing of Krushevo and Elbasan, as tourist destinations, be improved? How can it be promoted?
- How can the tourist infrastructure be improved?
- What can be done to improve tourism services in general?

For the secondary data, the experts conducted extensive desk research by analyzing and reviewing the documents, plans, and strategies available in both countries. Desk research was mainly employed to create a general view of Krushevo and Elbasan's local destinations and their tourism potential. Obtained official data on tourism and other related issues of interest were mirrored with official data from Statistical Bureaus and the municipalities. The general remark, as expected, is that all of the listed and consulted documents revealed isolated, strategic development directions for the local destinations of Krushevo and Elbasan on their own yet provided a solid base of information for further joint development of the touristic packages on the supply side of the common destination.

The tools employed in the research for this document were invaluable in elaborating on possible opportunities for developing one cross-border Krushevo-Elbasan tourism destination.

II. CONTEXT

The World Tourism Organization defines a local tourism destination as a physical space where a tourist stays at least one overnight. It includes tourism products such as support services, attractions, and tourist resources within one day's return travel time. It has physical and administrative boundaries defining its management and images and perceptions defining its market competitiveness. Local destinations incorporate stakeholders, including a host community, and can nest and network to form larger destinations (UNWTO 2007). Inception review of the five elements of a destination: Access, Accommodation, Attractions, Activities, and Amenities comprise a consistent set onto the territory of both Krushevo and Elbasan, thus allowing further investigation for forming the Krushevo-Elbasan single thematic destination across the borders of North Macedonia and Albania.

To date, no definition of adventure tourism exists in UNWTO literature. We follow the Adventure Travel Trade Association (ATTA), which defines adventure tourism as a trip that **includes at least two of this elements: physical activity, natural environment, and cultural immersion.**

Following the tourism product audit presented below in section II: Situation analysis, the most powerful theme underpinning local destinations as one single thematic destination is an **adventure/active travel.**

In that respect, Krushevo and Elbasan **are two touristic hubs of one thematic destination.**

II.1 TOURISM SECTOR AND THE POTENTIAL FOR ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Tourism plays an important role in the economic development of a country. Many governments see tourism as a suitable tool for improving the balance of payments, attracting foreign investments, and mitigating unemployment. Besides the direct effects of tourism, like increased income and growth of working places, the "multiplier effect of tourism" exists. This means that the right way to measure the overall impact of tourism on a country's economy must consider not only the direct beneficiaries of tourism income but also indirect beneficiaries. These may be field produce farmers, factories producing food and beverages, manufacturers and distributors of appliances or industrial equipment, retail stores, banks and many other businesses or individuals who benefit from tourism development.

UNWTO forecasted that international arrivals or outbound travellers worldwide will reach up to 1.8 billion by 2030, thus securing tourism as one of the fastest-growing economic activities fostering overall development, introducing new investments, and generating income and new employment.

In terms of figures, WTTC's latest annual research shows:

Following a loss of almost US\$4.9 trillion in 2020 (-50.4% decline), Travel & Tourism's contribution to GDP increased by US\$1 trillion (+21.7% rise) in 2021. In 2019, the Travel & Tourism sector contributed 10.3% to the global GDP, which decreased to 5.3% in 2020 due to ongoing restrictions on mobility. 2021 saw the share increase to 6.1%.

In 2020, 62 million jobs were lost, representing a drop of 18.6%, leaving just 271 million employed across the sector globally, compared to 333 million in 2019; 18.2 million jobs were recovered in 2021, representing an increase of 6.7% year-on-year. Following a decrease of 47.4% in 2020, domestic visitor spending increased by 31.4% in 2021, whereas following a decline of 69.7% in 2020, international visitor spending rose only by 3.8% in 2021.

The above striking figures reflect the COVID-19 consequences on travel, stressing the extreme decline of foreign tourists to destinations while showing the increase of domestic travellers exploring their countryside and greener touristic hubs.

Before COVID-19 travel restrictions, anecdotal evidence from Krushevo ([LRCP Volume II – Destination Development Plans – Plan No.3: Tourism Development Plan for Pelagonija](#)) suggested the growing popularity of Krushevo and Prilep as destinations, because paragliding has visibly increased visitation in the area of Pelagonija. According to local providers' estimation in 2017, outside of paragliding championships, Krushevo welcomed at least 1.000 international guests who visited for leisure paragliding activities or to prepare for upcoming competitions. Some top source markets are Slovenia, the UK, Bulgaria and Serbia. The minimum stay for this segment is five days, the most common length of stay is seven, and around

competitions and championships, participants stay 14 days. The average spending of leisure paragliders on training packages is around 70 Euros daily. The package for leisure paragliders coming to train with local clubs is 50 Euro daily for board and breakfast, including trainers and local support (transportation, for example). This does not include food and beverage spending or other services tourists may consume.

However, the current inbound market to the destination of Krushevo cannot be assessed because of trends or predictions, setting indicators for arrivals growth or destination demand solely because the major travel disruption is uncertainty. In addition to COVID-19, the war in Ukraine, and the global energy crisis, most likely, the trend of domestic arrivals will continue in the following 2023.

Based on the interviews with the providers of accommodation in Krushevo (2022, KET Project), which is supported by the official statistics as well, the greatest portion (up to 90%) of the total arrivals in 2021 count to the domestic tourism encompassing all market segments within the national economy: families, couples, friends, private groups, small organized groups, travelling per one day visits, long weekends, holiday, event attending. Most visits included at least one physical activity like walking in nature, hiking, biking and horseback riding.

Table 1: number of visitors, per year, in Krushevo

Year	No. of domestic visitors	No. of foreign visitors	total
2018	15038	2465	17503
2019	19876	2366	22242
2020	17561	343	17904
2021	18341	1318	19659

Source: MakStat database, august 2022

Elementary, tourism is about numbers – numbers of visitors, cars, flights, hotels, apartments and campsites, restaurants, clubs and cafés and how those numbers impact the destination growth. In the case of Krushevo, the volume of tourism can be measured by the number of overnights as those indicators are directly related to job increase, generating revenue and overall improvement of the local economy.

The table shows that the economic impact on Krushevo from tourism has great potential. Namely, at the Krushevo destination, there are 1.250 available beds (please see III.3 ACCOMMODATION), where the total occupation of accommodation in 2021 was measured at 52.454 overnights. This means that Krushevo was visited in full capacity for only 42 days throughout the whole of the 2021 year.

The above calculation (in its simplest form, seasonality not considered) implies that Krushevo can increase the total number of overnights annually. Joining CB projects that offer unique active touristic packages can be one of the ways to diversify and uplift the current offer and fill in the available accommodation capacity in great numbers.

Table 2: number of overnights per year, Krushevo

Year	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Number of overnights	46741	51526	56660	44273	52454
Increase in the number of overnights compared to the previous year		4785	5134	-12387	8181
% of Increase in the number of overnights compared to the previous year		10.24	9.96	-123.87	81.81

Source: MakStat database, august 2022

In comparison, the destinations within the CBC area from the Macedonian side offering similar experiences (villages around Prespa Lake, around Ohrid Lake, towns in the foothills of national parks, and mountainous villages) also counted a great increase in domestic visitors in 2021 due to the travel restrictions abroad.

Thus, even the trend forecast cannot be based upon extraordinarily uncertain external influences, yet the latest tendencies can be employed in developing strategic direction for destination development due to the great promotion and re-discovering of the local destination of Krushevo by national visitors. In addition, according to the [Tourism Development Strategy of Municipality of Krushevo 2020-2025](#), Millennials and Generation Z will become key forces in mobility, and their travel could lead to significant changes in the tourist market (related to new technologies and adventure travel).

Due to its geographical position, Elbasan must rely upon specific types of tourism, mainly adventure, historical and health-related. Within Albania, Elbasan must compete with other regions with coastlines and already popular areas as mountainous destinations. Besides these, Elbasan has created the image of a polluted city for many years, where the main business activities focus on industrial production, not services or tourism. But not everything is grey from the perspective of Elbasan as a tourist destination. Being situated at the very center of Albania makes it easily accessible from the main entry points in Albania. It is also rich with potential tourism resources and has a long tradition of hospitality, which form a solid base to turn Elbasan into a distinctive tourism destination.

Most tourist visits to Elbasan are related to thermal spas in Llixha (Tregan), about 7-to-10-night stays. These visits are active during spring and autumn when the weather is favourable for thermal-related health treatments. Most visitors are from Albania, Kosovo, and North Macedonia. Unfortunately, there are no statistics about the accurate number of accommodation facilities in Llixha (Tregan), the number of tourists visiting the area, and the number of overnight stays.

Another destination involving overnight stays is Gjinar, a mountainous destination about 24 km from Elbasan. Although it is well known as a beautiful tourist destination, few activities are offered there, resulting in tourists staying no more than 1-2 nights. Most visit daily, enjoying traditional food, clean air and wonderful nature.

Elbasan is known for organizing the "Summer Day" feast every year on March 14, also a national holiday. Thousands of visitors come that day or a day before to enjoy traditional food and outdoor picnics, creating a festive atmosphere in Elbasan and nearby surroundings. But the duration of the stays is not more than one night, and most are one-day visitors.

Elbasan has many other tourist attractions, which agencies or operators can include in touristic offers. But its potential as a touristy destination has not been fully exploited, leaving much room for efforts and improvements. In 2007 the Council of Region of Elbasan prepared the "Action Plan for Tourism in Elbasan Region", which was thought to serve as a general guide for developing the tourism sector in Elbasan. There is no information about the impact of the Action Plan on the development of tourism in Elbasan.

One of the strategic objectives stated in the Territory Development Strategy of the Municipality of Elbasan (2015) is "*...protecting and recovering of natural resources as a fundamental element of social welfare and economic improvement, through natural and cultural tourism*". Thus, local governments and other governmental bodies know the importance of tourism and its development. Nevertheless, no Strategies or Action Plans for developing tourism in Elbasan are available, leaving it mainly to private initiatives and sporadic events. Municipality officials cannot provide accurate data on hospitality capacities and the number of visitors during each month or season of the year. Neither does the central government or other institutions.

Because of its interdependence with other sectors of the economy, on the one hand, tourism triggers development across the local economy. On the other hand, it is quite challenging to determine the exact economic impact tourism, as a sector, has on the local economy. In addition, it is also a complex exercise to determine which investment is purely touristic related when once investing in road or health infrastructure, the destination benefits as well, regarding more accessible and safer tourist areas.

KET Project infrastructural investments in Krushevo and Elbasan highly contribute to the attractiveness of the local destinations regarding accessibility to sites for adventure, fostering the overall economic development in the cross-border area, which leads to more job openings and higher export of services.

II.2 ANALYSIS OF THE CURRENT SITUATION REGARDING STRATEGIES AND POLICIES AT LOCAL, REGIONAL AND NATIONAL LEVELS

The consulted literature (presented in table 3 below) sets the foundation for further development of the local destinations of Krushevo and Elbasan. It comprises an in-depth presentation of the local destination potential and their development directions from a strategic point of view. Both national and local level strategic documents align with current EU trends in tourism development in general. Several aspects specific to the local destination (active tourism, wellness tourism, rural tourism) are highlighted as the most potent touristic features for further destination development. Below is a summary of the already strategic planning for the destination development of Krushevo and Elbasan, respectively.

Table 3: consulted literature

	Organization	Strategies/Plans/Research documents
1	Municipality of Krushevo	Tourism Development Strategy of Municipality of Krushevo 2020-2025
2	Municipality of Krushevo	An integrated plan for local development of the municipality of Krushevo, 2019-2022
3	Centre for development of Pelagonija region	Program for development of Pelagonija region 2021 -2026
4	Centre for development of Pelagonija region	Study for the development of Pelagonija as a destination for adventure tourism "Pelagonija - Shaped for adventure"
5	Bureau for regional development of North Macedonia	National strategy for regional development 2021-2031
6	Ministry of Economy of North Macedonia, sector Tourism	National Tourism Strategy Republic Of Macedonia The Final Version Of Kohl & Partner, 2016-2021
7	Ministry of Economy of North Macedonia, sector Tourism Agency for Promotion and Support of Tourism in the Republic of Northern Macedonia	National Strategy for rural tourism 2012-2017
8	LRCP	Tourism Development Plans for Ten Destinations across North Macedonia Volume 1 – Methodology, Background, and Market Analysis 2016
9	LRCP	Tourism Development Plans For Ten Destinations Across North Macedonia Volume II – Destination Development Plans November 2016
10	LRCP	Destination Development plan No.3 Pelagonija, 2017
11	Ministry for local-self-government, North Macedonia	IPA CBC Programme the republic of North Macedonia - Republic of Albania 2014-2020 IPA III CBC 2021-2027 Programming between North Macedonia and Albania
12	Municipality of Elbasan	Territory Development Strategy for Municipality of Elbasan
13	Municipality of Elbasan	Strategic Development Plan of the City of Elbasan 2010 – 2020
14	The Republic of Albania, Council of Ministers	National Strategy for Development and Integration (NSDI II) 2015-2020
15	Ministry of Tourism, Albania	The Strategy for Tourism Development in Albania for 2019-2023

16	Ministry of Tourism, Albania	Integrated Program for Rural Development (IPRD) - The program of 100 Villages
17	Law on Tourism	The Agency for Promotion and Support of Tourism in the Republic of North Macedonia Ministry of Economy, Republic of North Macedonia
18	Law on tourism	Albania
19	Legal and Institutional Framework on Tourism, Albania 2018	Investment Council Secretariat, Albania
20	Beyond Borders – Introducing Smart Tourism and Sharing Economy, an EU-funded project	Study of the natural and cultural heritage of the CBC region
21		Study of Sustainable Tourism in Cross-Border Region
22	Beyond Borders – Introducing Smart Tourism and Sharing Economy, IPA II CBC MK-AL funded project	Study on Supply of Available Tourist Services and Tourist Potential in Cross-Border Region

Krushevo is a unique destination by default as it has an amazing set of five tourism elements: Access, Accommodation, Attractions, Activities, and Amenities (elaborated in detail, section II: Situation analysis). As cited in the current [Tourism Development Strategy of Municipality of Krushevo 2020-2025](#), "Krushevo claims to become one of the most visited tourist destination centers in North Macedonia and more widely in the Balkans and Europe. The municipality was involved in a series of tourism projects. **The ultimate goal is the development of adventure tourism** with which the city can grow into a destination visited throughout the year." For Krushevo to achieve this goal, the local self-government undertook a participatory process to determine the greatest potential and to set specific actions and steps for destination development, working jointly with the private and civil sectors.

Furthermore, Krushevo is recognized as a **hard adventure destination** (Krushevo, Prilep, and the surrounding areas) with sufficient market proof for the international competitiveness of the assets for paragliding. As per the analysis in-depth, concerning the LRCP project funded by the EU and implemented by the World Bank, "growth in this segment, as well as diversification of the hard adventure offering with other activities such as rock climbing, bouldering, and others, has very strong potential to create new business opportunities and new high-skilled jobs" ([Tourism Development Plans for Ten Destinations across North Macedonia Volume II – Destination Development Plans, November 2016](#)). The above analysis concludes that strategically, Krushevo should simultaneously focus on developing additional offerings that are not directly linked to the hard adventure activity. The destination can also increase its attractiveness with cultural, heritage, and soft adventure activities introducing local experiences and presenting the city's authenticity and higher interaction with locals, thus tickling all three aspects of adventure travel per ATTA definition (physical activity, natural environment, and cultural immersion).

The national strategy for tourism development of North Macedonia states that **the greatest market for the country as a destination is national visitors**, comprising more than 50% of arrivals with an average stay of 5+ days. These numbers are yet to be reviewed in the light of COVID 19 aftermath as the travel preferences shifted to more outdoor, greener, and nature-related trips as in the evidence from the field. Krushevo offers all of the above, adding top adventure activities and theme activities for the whole family, such as the newly opened Adventure Park at Stanich and 40+ km of biking trails, securing multi-season adventure offer (elaborated in section II.5 ACTIVITIES). The Strategy suggests specific steps towards destination promotion, the country as a whole, inclusive of setting up regional DMOs (Destination Management Organizations) responsible for local destination development along with continuous capacity building for tourism providers and policy-level organizations. Transfer of knowledge is stressed as a key precondition for further destination development.

The [Program for development of Pelagonija region 2021 -2026](#) indicates there is a very rich cultural and historical heritage of various kinds, such as the archaeological site of Heraclea, the city architecture of Bitola, and the **traditional architecture of Krushevo**, as well as numerous churches, monasteries, museums, urban and rural memorial units, etc., numerous natural sites, which represent a huge potential for developing different types of tourism (lake, mountain, monastery, village, etc.), and improving the economy in the region.

Pelagonija's portion of the **foreign arrivals in terms of overnights in the country falls between 3-4%** calculating the first six months of 2022, which proves the global trends of decrease in the outbound travel as Pelagonija marked up to 7% foreign arrivals up to 2019. For example, in June 2022, North Macedonia counted 115 351 overnights by foreign visitors, while Pelagonija a modest number of only 4366.

Table 4: number of foreign tourists overnight stays in Pelagonija region, North Macedonia

2022M01	2022M02	2022M03	2022M04	2022M05	2022M06
1 301	1 298	2 158	2 033	4 082	4 366

Source: MAKSTAT database, August 2022

Albania is appreciated by many international operators and visitors for its beautiful nature and landscapes. Natural and rural areas in Albania offer opportunities for developing rural tourism, mountain tourism, ecotourism, and outdoor activities (rafting, paragliding, hang gliding, mountain biking, fishing, trekking, mountaineering, hiking, horseback riding, study tours, etc.).

Development of mountain tourism resulted in the stabilization of a considerable number of tours organized in Theth, Vermosh-Lepusha, Valbona, and Tropoja, in the Albanian Alps, Diber and Bulqiza area, in the mountainous area of Tirana, the mountainous area of Elbasan and Librazhd, the mountainous area of Korça, the mountain of Tomor, Llogara and Karaburun and the mountainous region of Gjirokastra and Permet. On the other hand, tourism in environmentally protected areas is also added to the category. This category includes several forms of tourism: agro-tourism, event and business tourism, cultural tourism (heritage, history, religion, etc.), enogastronomic experiences and health tourism (thermal, welfare, and medical). However, even though they are not the main purpose of the visits to Albania, archaeology, heritage, and culture are identified as Albania's strengths in various studies conducted with visitors and the travel industry from foreign markets. The main destinations visited by organized cultural tours are Shkodra, Lezha, Kruja, Durres, Tirana, Fier, Berat, Elbasan, Korça, Përmet, Gjirokastra, Saranda and Vlora.

The Albanian government implemented an ambitious project named "100 villages" to boost rural development, which positively impacted the tourism development in these regions. This project aimed to coordinate the development efforts in rural areas of 100 villages in Albania, leaving behind partial interventions and narrowly focused sectorial approaches. The main objectives were to improve public infrastructure, diversify economic activities (including improvement of touristic potential in rural areas) and develop social and human capital. Two villages of Elbasan Municipality, namely Shushice and Gjinar, were part of this project. Although there is a generally positive opinion about this project's impact on rural tourism development in two qualified Elbasan villages, there is no official data to support this. No database indicates all the interested stakeholders of this project, and the impact of investments has not been measured (["Monitor" journal on Albanian Supreme Audit Institution report about the "100 villages" project](#)).

The municipality of Elbasan is the main actor that coordinates and pushes tourism policies locally, in concordance with [National Strategy for Sustainable Tourism Development](#). There are efforts to promote Elbasan as a tourist destination, evidencing its main attractions and organizing several events and feasts during the year. There is no dedicated directory for tourism in the municipality; there is a "Directory for Politics in Cultural Heritage, Tourism, Arts and Sports", which includes tourism as its name implies. Promoting tourism activities to increase the number of visitors and designing and implementing policies towards tourism is assigned to another directory, namely "General Directory of Social and Strategic Policies, Community Services and Innovation".

According to the Territory Development Strategy for the Municipality of Elbasan, Elbasan has good potential for developing ecological, natural, agricultural, health, mountainous, and historical/cultural tourism. Some of the projects planned to be prepared are (i) a complete map with historical assets of the Municipality of Elbasan; (ii) identification of needs for restoration interventions in historical assets and designing of respective technical projects; (iii) improvement of road infrastructure for main touristic destinations in Elbasan.

The Municipality of Elbasan has promoted and supported every tourism-related activity, especially those related to specific destinations, like traditional feasts organized in Funar, Byshek and Gjinar.

III. SITUATION ANALYSIS

III.1 KEY DESTINATION FOOTPRINT

Krushevo is the highest human settlement in the Balkans, settled at the altitude of 1.350m, overlooking the Pelagonija plain from one side and the mountainous Demir Hisar area from the southwest. It is moderately close to the bigger cities in the region, 32 kilometres west of Prilep and 52.5 kilometres north of Bitola. It is located in the southwestern part of the country in the administrative area of Pelagonija, counting 8.385 inhabitants in the municipality's territory.

Due to its multicultural composition, in Krushevo, two languages are official: Macedonian and Aromanian, spoken by 20+ percent of the inhabitants of Krushevo, the ethnic population of the Vlachs.

The destination of Krushevo and its surroundings has a rich portfolio of assets based on diverse and well-preserved nature and distinctive tangible and intangible cultural heritage. The main attractions in the area include both man-made attractions as well as naturally created such as Makedonium Ilinden Memorial, Tose Proeski Memorial House, paragliding and hang gliding sites, bouldering and rock climbing sites, authentic and well-preserved architecture, adventure park, winter ski site, biking trails, hiking and trekking trails, local cuisine and specific scenery due to its unique location.

Krushevo most recognized attraction factors are the preserved and pure nature, the adventure activity of paragliding and its unique role in the history of the Macedonian people being the place of the Ilinden Republic in 1903 (during the Ilinden uprising against the Ottoman empire).

Apart from a weekend destination for domestic visitors who enjoy the clean air and cooler summers due to the higher position of Krushevo, many companies are visiting the destination for team-building activities due to the offer of soft and hard adrenaline outdoor activities. The local government, with close cooperation with the private sector and foreign donor community in the past four years, developed 40+ km of biking trails revealing the Krushevo woods to the tourists; private investors, following the strategic approach of Krushevo to become an adventure destination, were engaged into developing the adventure and adrenaline park, suitable for families and groups, thus contributing to the destination overall attractiveness.

The government and private investors made various investments to re-introduce Krushevo as a winter destination, offering beginner to moderate-level ski runs, capitalizing on the favourable climate that Krushevo has and can guarantee skiing every season.



In the past 5+ years, the synonym for Krushevo has been paragliding. Whether you know the destination due to professional engagements in paragliding or the level of awareness of the paragliding destinations, Krushevo has become the top paragliding site. Namely, several CUPs and Championships are organized and held with paragliders worldwide, putting Krushevo in the top locations worldwide for this particular hard adventure. Tourism-wise, paragliding has become the most attractive tourism product of the destination as the paragliding clubs have shifted from passion to business. They are now offering tandem paragliding for all types of visitors.

The city of Elbasan is situated in the Field of Elbasan, at the height of 120 m above sea level. The town is surrounded by olive groves and is bordered by the Shkumbin river and Zaranika and Manazdere streams. The city occupies about 793 hectares and is about 57 km from Tirana Airport "Mother Tereza", 76 km from the Port of Durrës, 61 km from the Qafe Thane border with the Republic of North Macedonia, and 148 km from the Kapshtice border point, with Greece. Elbasan has a very favourable geographical location, facilitating economic exchanges with other regions in Albania and neighbouring countries.

The city's elevation above the sea level decreases from North to South at about 35 m. Elbasan is part of the Mediterranean hilly zone, and the variety of its relief forms and North-South spread contribute to the regime of climatic elements. The average temperature varies from 6.7°C in January to 23.4°C in July. The wind is a distinguishing climatic element of Elbasan, with an average speed from 1.2 m/s during summer to 2.4 m/s in winter. The annual average rainfall is 1148 mm, out of which about 66% falls during the year's second half. Snowfalls are rare in Elbasan and, on average, do not last more than 1-2 days per year.

Elbasan municipality comprises Elbasan city, which has six administrative regions (labelled from 1 to 6) and 12 administrative units (i.e., rural areas): Bradashesh, Gracen, Gjinar, Zavaline, Shushice, Shirgjan, Paper, Gjergjan, Labinot-Fushe, Labinot-Mal, Tregan and Funar.

According to 2020 data of the Municipality of Elbasan, its total population is 214,361: 61.5%, or 131 749, live in the six administrative regions of Elbasan city, and 38.5, % or 82 612 live in the 12 administrative units of Elbasan Municipality.

The Elbasan district is already identified as an important tourist destination thanks to the diverse tourist values spread throughout the region. About 100 destinations of historical-cultural heritage, about 80 natural monuments, 37 types of folk costumes, and a variety of folklore, with organic products which are the most sought after nowadays, with the typical cuisine of the region and especially with the traditional hospitality, constitute a tourist destination for local and foreign visitors, influencing the development of this sector of regional and national importance.



The diversity of historical, cultural, archaeological, natural, and mountainous values makes the spectrum of types of tourism in the Elbasan Region very wide.

In terms of quality, the **experiences - attractions - products - services** offered in the thematic destination are of variant quality according to the analysis of the current situation after field research with local stakeholders related to tourism. In particular, evaluating the level of quality according to **the 5 A's: access, accommodation, attractions, activities, and amenities** of a destination cannot be equated to a common label because both areas differ quite widely regarding the elements of the destination.

In particular, Krushevo is measured as moderately affordable, with authentic accommodations, unique attractions, new activities, and modern amenities. At the same time, Elbasan is also easily accessible, modern rather than authentic accommodation, typical basic active and adventure activities, and modern amenities.

Below, these five destination elements are analyzed separately, offering the situation in the current tourism development process in the thematic destination of Krushevo and Elbasan.

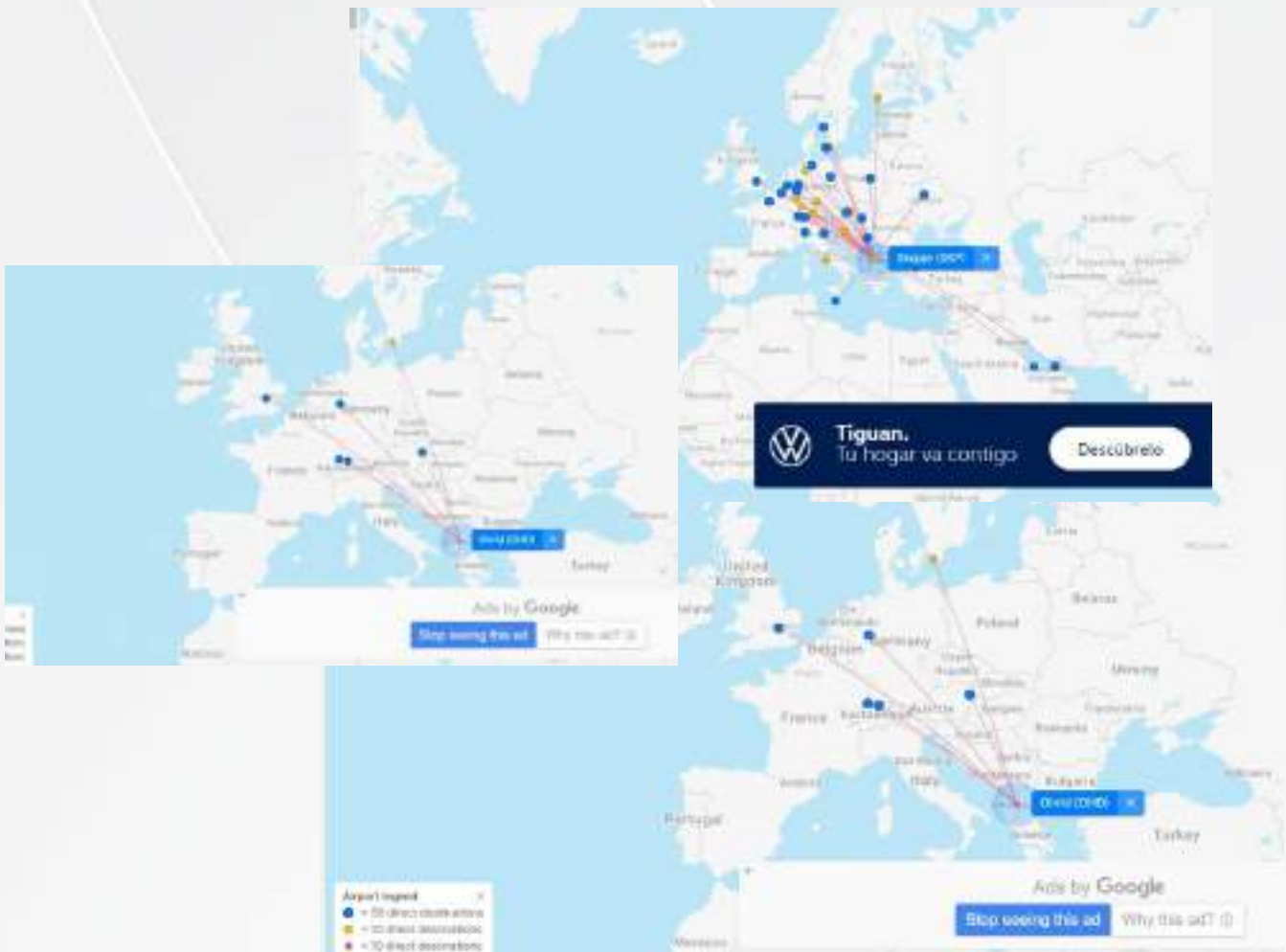
III.2 KEY INFRASTRUCTURE/ACCESS

Table 5: access points to the destination

	Product/Service	Why is it a key?	Description
1	International Airport in Skopje, North Macedonia	Provides 12+ flights a day from more than ten different airlines	Primary gateway for international arrivals to enter North Macedonia, 2.300.000+ passengers in 2019.
2	International Airport in Ohrid, St. Paul, North Macedonia	Provides 5+ flights a day	The entry point for international travellers to the coastal towns of North Macedonia, 317.000 + passengers in 2019, and of high importance for arrivals to northern parts of Albania due to its proximity to both border-crossing points between Albania and N Macedonia.
3	International Airport in Tirana, Nene Theresa, Albania	Provides 15 + Flights a day	It is the only airport in Albania and the 8 th busiest in the Balkans, providing air travel for more than 3.350.000 passengers in 2019 Gateway for all international tourists visiting the destination.
4	Motorway Skopje-Kichevo E65-R1306 Krushevo	The primary route of choice when traveling from the capital Skopje to the Krushevo area	Important both for domestic and international visitors, it connects the Airport of Skopje to Krushevo and the capital of Skopje (600.000 + population) to Krushevo.
5	Motorway Skopje-Veles E75- A1;A3; R1001;R1306 – Krushevo	The second route of choice for arriving at the Krushevo area, especially if the visit is part of the trip to other hubs in the Pelagonija region like Bitola or Prilep	It connects the capital city Skopje and the central towns of North Macedonia, Veles, Prilep and Bitola, to the area of Krushevo.

6	Elbasan- Struga - Ohrid-Krushevo	The round route, also the entry point from Albania / Qafe Tane crossing point	<p>Important both for domestic and international travellers as it connects Krushevo and Elbasan to St.Paul airport and the coastal towns of Ohrid and Struga to Krushevo and Elbasan. It is also a road that connects the destination through the border-crossing point between North Macedonia and Albania (Qafe Tane).</p> <p>Also, the shortest possible drive from Krushevo to Elbasan and vice versa, with a four-hour-drive of the 200 km.</p>
7	Tirana-Elbasan-Struga-Krushevo	The round route, also the entry point from Albania / Qafe Tane crossing point	<p>One of the main road connections between Elbasan and Krushevo provides access to the destination for international and domestic travellers due to the airport in Tirana. It is the longer option for driving hours from Albania to North Macedonia and VV, 6h +.</p>

The airport infrastructure in all three airports is new and well-maintained, with an increasing number of airline operators and destinations to/from every year. Also, all airports are working with low-cost airline companies to provide easy and affordable destination access. Key destinations served by TAV Airports in North Macedonia, Skopje International Airport and St. Paul in Ohrid include all major cities within the EU, Turkey and the Middle east. As presented below in figure 1, all those are operated with direct flights.



Besides the Nene Tereza International Airport in Tirana, Albania, a second airport opened in Kukes, in the northern part of the country, near the border with Kosovo. The new airport location will serve non-coastal towns and the mainland of Albania. It is at a less favourable distance to Elbasan and Krushevo; thus, it is not considered a key access point to the destinations.

Apart from sections of the roads that are motorways, the road infrastructural level is classified as regional or local roads (please see the roads marked in table 5 below where the prefix E stands for motorway, R for restricted, and other national marks stand for local infrastructure).

Figure 2: road connections to the hubs at the Krushevo-Elbasan Destination

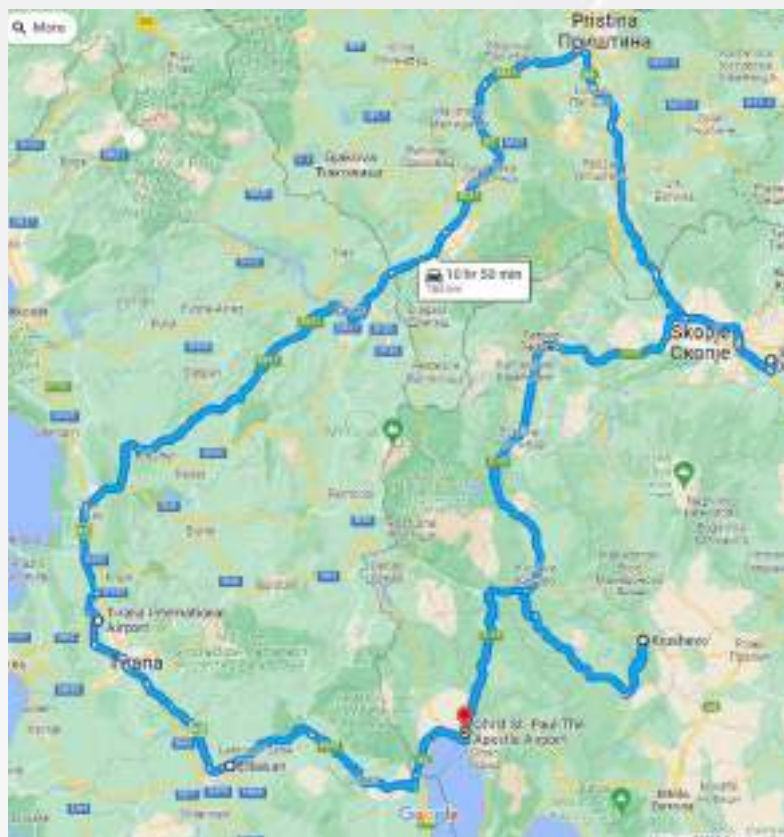


In that respect, the maintenance and quality of roads to/from Krushevo and Elbasan are of moderate quality. Sections of the road that carry the mark of the highway are of better quality as per the obligation of the national public authority for road infrastructure to maintain the roads to a certain level of quality.

Namely, domestic and international arrivals from Tirana Airport or the mainland of Albania and Skopje will enjoy high-quality road access, motorway level up to Elbasan in Albania, and Gradsko/Ohrid in North Macedonia,

respectively. Entering North Macedonia towards Struga or entering Albania towards Elbasan at the border crossing point at Qafe Tane, the travellers will continue the journey via regional roads providing moderate quality.

Figure (left) 3: possible road route for a round trip, connecting Krushevo and Elbasan as part of a larger Balkan trip



Regarding the round trip, visiting both hubs of the destination via the same entry/end point of the journey, Skopje or Tirana and even Ohrid, for international tourists or visitors from the country capitals, tourists can undertake a Balkan tour still enjoying the consistent tourism package of adventure travel.

A very important advantage of the accessibility to the destination is the possibility to cross the border between the two countries via two different points and visit three countries per trip, including Kosovo. It extends the territory seen along the road between the two hubs of the destination and adds value to the trip providing the tourist with an exploration of the two countries as a whole. At the same time, the sightseeing along is consistent with the imagery of the destination in terms of nature, green and blue, i.e., nature and lakes.

In Krushevo, there is no organized local transportation. The accommodation facilities can easily be arranged as many private transport services are accessible. Most transport services are advertised at the accommodation places and can be reached via phone or online. The cost of local transport is very low.

III.3 ACCOMMODATION

A moderate accommodation portfolio characterizes Krushevo with two larger hotels, [Montana](#) and [Panorama SPA](#) as well the newly expanded [Villa Gora](#) and many small family-owned bed & breakfast facilities, as well as many opportunities for homestays (a significant share of which are informal and cannot be booked online) totalling at 1 250 beds, varying in the level of quality. The above is also a great asset enabling the destination for various types of tourism per guest's preferences, including corporate, leisure, cultural and adventure travel.

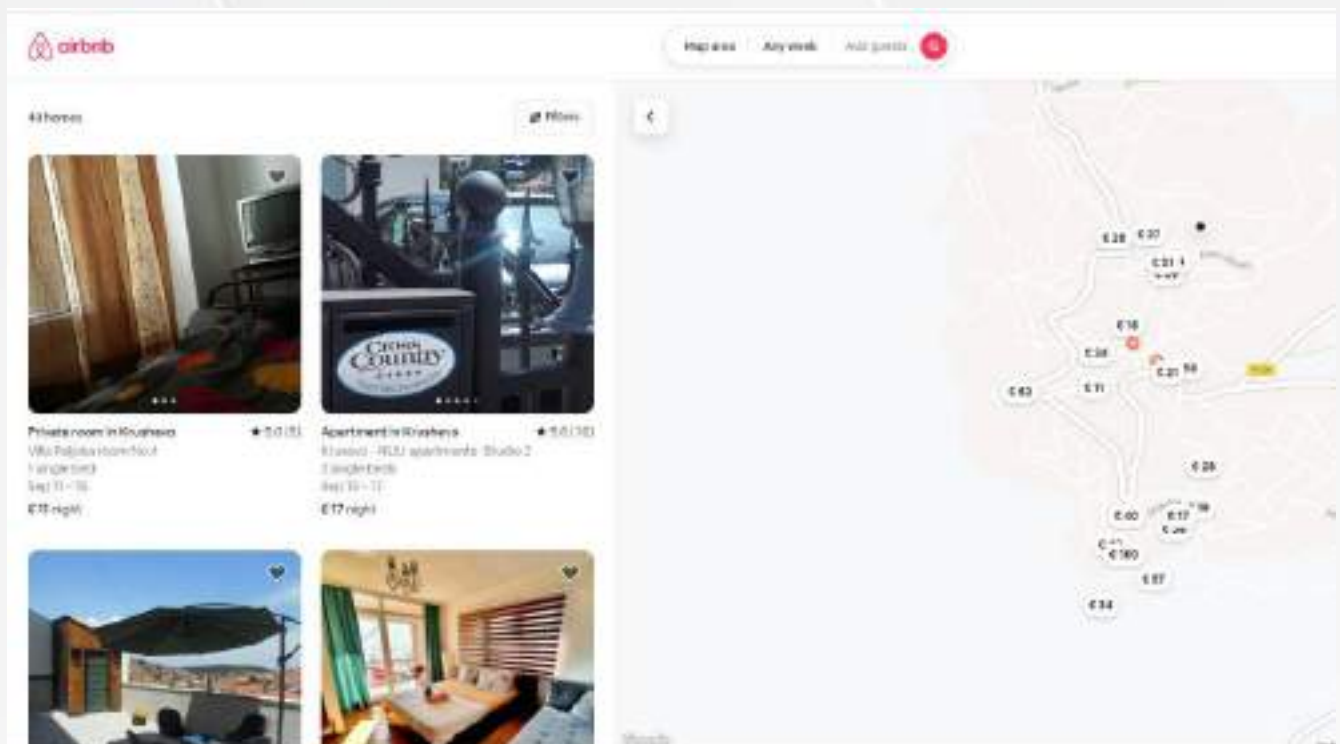
Table 6: availability of beds, Krushevo

Hotel/Accommodation	No. of beds
Hotel Montana	220
Hotel Panorama SPA	70
Hotel Ilinden – under reconstruction	150
Children's resort Begova Korija (Shula Mina)	150
Private accommodation facilities	580
Monastery lodgings	80
Total at destination	1 250

The field research provided the above figures for accommodation facilities, with the remark that private accommodation facilities are constantly growing in size following the demand side of the travel market. However, many home-type accommodations remain unregistered with the municipality, thus concluding the estimation of the total beds available in Krushevo rather than the exact number.

All types of accommodations can be found in style, from traditional to modern, with overall aesthetics that predominate the authentic architecture of Krushevo. The same style is translated into the contemporary architecture of the two main Hotels in Krushevo, Montana, and Panorama. Both room types of accommodation and apartments are offered to provide individual to group accommodation per facility. With the rise of Booking.com and Airbnb.com online accommodation platforms, Krushevo enabled easier sales of beds, with the continuous presence of over 20 facilities offered via the sites, figure 4 below. Average accommodation per night per person on a BB basis varies from 11 euros in a private room to 70 euros for a single room in Hotel Panorama & SPA.

Figure 4: Airbnb presence in Krushevo accommodation facilities



Elbasan has a long tradition of providing hospitality services due to its specific position in the center of Albania, which is part of several national and international routes. According to official data of the Municipality of Elbasan (the year 2019), there are 70 businesses offering accommodation services in Elbasan. Thirty-nine of these, or 56%, are hotels situated in Tregan administrative unit, with famous thermal water sources. These hotels serve mostly older adults who come for therapeutical purposes and are not preferred by other types of tourists (due also to the smell of sulfur dioxide associated with geothermal activity). Other hotels, located mainly in Elbasan city and surroundings, offer only accommodation and bar services. Only a few of them also provide restaurant or food-related services.

Concerning nearby destinations, accommodation services are found only in Gjinar (11), Shirgjan (1), Labinot (4), Qerret (1) and Funar (1).

Several businesses also offer accommodation services, based on a search of internet sites. Thus, in the Elbasan region, these types of accommodation services are listed: 14 apartments, 12 hotels, 5 guesthouses, 4 vacation homes, 2 villas, 1 hostel and 1 bed and breakfast.

Here is a list of accommodation facilities in the Municipality of Elbasan (not including those in Llixhe and Tregan, which are used mainly for health-related purposes).

Table 7: availability of accommodation in Elbasan

Hotel/Accommodation	No.of beds
Hotel Univers	60
Hotel Imperial	100
Hotel Grand	30
Balkan	50
Villa Imperial	20
Hotel Monarch	20
Hotel Guri	30
Real Scampis Hotel	20
Hotel Le Olive	30
Kriva Resort	110
Hotel Colombo	40
Private accommodation facilities	300
Deliu Family Tourism (Funar)	8
Private accommodation facilities (Funar)	15
Tre Bujtinat (Gjinar)	20
Seven (7)guesthouses (Gjinar)	75
Four (4)small hotels (Gjinar)	50
Private accommodation facilities (Gjinar)	20
Total at destination Elbasan	998

As presented above, both local destinations can simultaneously accommodate up to 2 250 guests in various types and levels of quality accommodation facilities.

III.4 ATTRACTIONS

The most influential **factors of attraction concerning adventure travel are the attractions and activities** of the destination. Krushevo - Elbasan destination is tied up by a theme of active and adventure tourism attractions, which motivate tourists to visit the local destinations consisting of non-natural as well as natural features or events in the territory of both municipalities or simultaneously in both regions.

Krushevo's uniqueness is the mix of attraction factors, comprising a unique set of various attractions, from cultural to adventure. It is not that often that destination can offer this all year round and for every kind of tourist. Fortunately, Krushevo's unique position in nature and history secured various attractions offered at the destination. Below are presented the top Krushevo attractions, man-made or natural.



Makedonium - The monument is composed of several parts, but the most striking is the white dome, which is the eternal resting place of the president of Krushevska Republic, Nikola Karev. The Ilinden monument stretches over 12 hectares and the shape begins with broken chains, continues through the crypt and the colorful - mosaic ceramic scene, and ends with the dome raised at 1,320 meters above sea level, from where an outward view extends to the city of Krushevo. The interior of the dome impresses with its reliefs, stained glass windows with an eternal flame and the sounds of the oratorio "Sun of the Ancient Earth."

This monument symbolizes endurance, perseverance, and the quest for freedom and an independent state of the Macedonian people.



Ten days Krushevska Republic - This event starts at the very beginning of August each year by reading the Krushevo manifesto to celebrate the Ilinden uprising. During the event, the town changes completely in the spirit of 1903. The event begins with the ceremonial welcome of the horseback riders who traditionally arrive in Krushevo before the biggest Macedonian holiday Ilinden, in honour of the people who lost their lives fighting for the independent Republic of Macedonia. The event includes a ceremony of bringing out and raising the flag of the pillar of the Krushevo Republic, a cultural and artistic program, fireworks, and improvisation on the firing from the cherry cannon.



Memorial House of Todor Proeski (left) - Built posthumously in honour of the great musician star, the Centre which talks about the life and work of the artist is one of the city's main attractions.



Bullet foundry (right) - The foundry is a kind of museum memorialising the Ilinden Uprising. It is the original place where bullets were made for the insurgents during the Ilinden Uprising.



Paragliding run - Near Meckin Kamen is one of the most famous sites in the Balkans for taking off with a paraglider. There are clubs and paragliding instructors in Krushevo and Prilep, who you can arrange a tandem flight with, over Pelagonija.



Krushevo Lake - also called Gummenje, is an artificial reservoir near the town of Krushevo, from which the Krushevo - Norovska River runs. This lake represents a wonderful place for recreation, fishing or simply enjoying nature, complementing the town's tourist potential. It is a place to have outdoor activities, run or walk around the lake. It is a very quiet place surrounded by pine trees. A swimming marathon in 2018 in honour of Toshe Proeski was also held here.



Meckin Kamen - A few kilometers from the town, the road leads to this site where the Ilinden fierce battles were fought during the Uprising. On the spot, there is a monument of the Leader Pitu Guli, and on it, the words "liberty or death" are written.



Monastery "St. Preobrazenie" - The monastery was built on the personal initiative and participation of one of the biggest music stars in the Balkans, Toše Proeski, who used to stay in the lodgings before his death. There is a nearby beautiful panorama of the surroundings.



Winter sports - Krushevo ski center is one of the most popular places for skiing and, in general, for winter tourism in North Macedonia. Part of the ski center is the place called Stanich, where there are several ski slopes for amateurs along with two ski lifts. It is specific that the cable car starts from the center of the city of Krushevo.



Gallery of Nikola Martinovski - Art lovers will find real rest among the works of the contemporary painter Nikola Martinovski in the gallery located in one of the Krushevo houses with authentic style.



Adventure Park – the adventure park suitable for children and adults, offering three levels of difficulty in climbing and walking on ropes among the trees, zip lines and bouldering rock.



Old Bazar/Charshija of Krushevo - town center area composed of traditional shops and authentic architecture of houses and shops and restaurants in narrow streets offering relaxing time with a cup of coffee or cultural sightseeing.



Outdoor festival "When in Krushevo" - The festival's purpose is to promote the beauties of Krushevo and its surroundings, the opportunity offered for adrenaline sports, and the potential of Krushevsko Lake. The summer edition of the festival takes place at the beginning of August. It provides many contents, such as hiking, running, adrenaline paragliding views, unforgettable rides through the Krushevo nature, fun and other events. The festival also has a winter edition, "When in Krushevo – Winter is Here", which takes place at the beginning of February. The winter edition of the festival also offers interesting content such as a photo tour, recreational walking tour, winter tandem paragliding, winter horse riding, tasting of delicious Krushevo specialities and unforgettable entertainment.



Krushevo old town architecture - The houses are freestanding, mostly symmetrical, without open spaces typical for other towns in Macedonia. The back of the houses is built of stone, while the front of the so-called *bondruk* – which is the construction of wooden columns and beams covered with white plaster. There is almost always a well on the ground floor. On the main facade, there are usually blue decorations painted. Blue is also traditionally used for the window frames and other details of the facades. A small balcony on the upper floor usually has a triangular pediment above it to accentuate the house's symmetry.



Krushevo traditional cuisine is still unique and original, withstanding the influences of modern times. Krushevo's most recognized traditional recipe is the *chomlek*. It is a veal meat pot enriched with peppers, onion, blue plums, wine, and spices.



Lokum - This is a dessert made for generations in this town and has top quality. Krushevo residents keep the recipe as a legacy. The lokum originating from Krushevo is a local privilege and cannot be found elsewhere, at least according to local stories.



Puslici/Celufki (left) is a dessert made from egg whites and sugar, which is traditional, crispy, white and delicious.

Elbasan has a reach and various resources for tourism development due to its favourable location, climate, and many destinations with historical, cultural and natural interests.

There are over 70 monuments of nature in the Elbasan region, protected for their scientific, historical, and tourist value. A common characteristic is their unique specimens in the country and beyond.



Fortress of Elbasan - The Fortress of Elbasan attracts attention as soon as someone reaches the city centre. It has a rectangular shape, 308 by 348 meters. It has been surrounded by a 4 meters deep moat, supplied with water from the Zaranika stream. It has four gates and 26 protection towers, located 40-50 meters from one another.

The Roman part of the walls can be found up to 5 meters above the foundations and is 3 meters wide. The walls have ramparts used for surveillance and defence purposes.

The surrounding outer walls display this Fortress's main periods: the Roman, early Byzantine and Ottoman periods. This Fortress is one of the most interesting field Fortresses in the Balkans, closely related to Via Egnatia.

The Clock Tower - The Clock Tower is built above one of the Fortress's towers, dominating the main square of Elbasan. It has undergone several reconstructions, the latest dating back to 1899. It has a quadratic base of 4.3 x 4.3 meters. On the arch of the southern gate of Elbasan Fortress, there is a marble plaque describing its history: "Under the auspices of the King of the world (Sultan) Abdul Hamid the Generous, this graceful clock tower was built. The dignified men of Elbasan had the grace to revive this heart-pleasing timepiece. Aqif Bey showed particular care and interest. May God give him the best of this world, for its sound tells the accurate time. It was built at the beginning of the year 1315 (1899)".



Bezistan Plane Tree - This natural resource is situated at the city centre and has been an epicentre for centuries. It has a sturdy trunk and a typical canopy. Next to it is a great archaeological site, the Paleo-Christian Basilica, full of mosaics with lovely colours and fine art.

Basilica of Bezistan - Close to the historical, centuries-old Bezistan Plane Tree, there is an ancient basilica dating back to the 5th century. The basilica also contains a monumental tomb covered by a mosaic and about 30 meters from the Fortress's walls. The Basilica has many valuable archaeological and artistic values, like mosaics and frescoes. It is a masterpiece of fine artistry, depicting the idea of eternity. Figures in the mosaic are characterized by a floral, animal and bird motives, an expression of high mastery for the time it was created. It is proof of great heritage, as well as of advanced economic and cultural development.



King's Mosque - This mosque is situated inside the Fortress of Elbasan. As inferred from its name, it is one of several mosques built in the late XV century by Sultan Bayezid II in occupied territories in Albania. Its typical roof is made of wood, with a vestibule in front of the praying hall. This mosque might be the only religious shrine in Albania that is in perfect harmony with the urban setting where it is built.



Ethnographic Museum - Located in the city centre, not far from the Fortress of Elbasan, this museum is housed in a traditional two-story 18th-century house and tells of this medieval town's culture, folklore and lifestyle. The museum that recounts the story of Elbasan's culture and lifestyle is housed inside one of the city's most traditional houses. The museum presents in detail the culture and folklore of Central Albania, the crafts of the time, the daily life of the city and its suburbs, and the main tools of trade in Elbasan over the years.



Naziresha Mosque - This mosque attracts visitors' attention thanks to the harmony and beauty of its structural shapes and colours. It dates back to the end of the XVI century and is named after a woman much respected by the city's population. Its plan and volume expressed the classic Ottoman style of the time when it was built. The mosque maintains its original square-shaped praying hall, while its minaret has minor damage on the top.



Saint Mary's Church - The Orthodox Church is located at the very heart of Elbasan Fortress, partly inhabited by the Orthodox Christian population. The church as it stands today was rebuilt in 1826-1833 on the ruins of an XVII-century church that was burnt in 1819. The dome paintings date back to 1859. In addition to high mastery of wood carvings, the church is valued for its architectural beauty, particularly its vestibule's arcades and carved stones.



Ad Quintum Station - Ad Quintum Station is a resting point along the ancient Via Egnatia, which connected Rome with Constantinople, built between 146 and 120 BC. Ad Quintum Station is situated in Bradashesh, about 7.3 km from Elbasan.



Kisha e Shen Kollit - Church of St. Nicholas - This church is located in Shelcan village, about 12 km from Elbasan. Based on its construction characteristics, it's believed that it was built in about the late XIV century. This church is decorated with lively frescoes from medieval painters Onufri and Kostandin Shpataraku.



Unique cooking of Elbasan

Traditional Biscuits (Ballakume)

Everyone in Albania knows that the nationally recognized feast, "Summer Day" is inevitably linked to *ballakume*, the city's traditional dessert, the preparation of which requires both effort and time. This delicious dessert is a large biscuit made from wheat or corn flour and a substantial amount of sugar. Indeed, its sweetness has become a symbol of the Summer Festival. The preparation of *ballakume*, however, is a real challenge as one has to adhere faithfully to the recipe's steps and carefully add each ingredient. Traditionally, the ingredients are mixed with a wooden spoon in a copper bowl.



Meat and Yoghurt Casserole (Tavë Kosi)

The recipe for this delicious summer dish originated in Elbasan, is now prepared and served all over the country. One of the secrets of Tavë Kosi is that it is cooked only with the meat from young livestock. The other secret lies in marinating the meat with herbal spices. Initially, the meat is baked in the oven to release all its juices, thus ensuring the softness of the meat. The meat is then coated in a thick mixture of eggs, flour and a significant amount of fresh yogurt and baked again. The sour freshness of the yogurt accentuates the sweetness of the lamb for a delicious meal that melts in your mouth.

III.5 ACTIVITIES

The activities offered at the site are key motivational forces for visiting an adventure and vibrant destination not only from the point of variety or exclusivity but also from the point of their touristic value opposed to activities for professionals/sport level, as well as from the point of safety standards and safe & rescue system at the destination.

It is safe to say that Krushevo offers various outdoor activities ranging from soft to hard adventure. Also, quite uniquely, Krushevo offers outdoor activities year-round. For this analysis, only active and adventure touristic activities will be considered:

Paragliding (tandem) - Active clubs and certified pilots offer tandem paragliding flights from 2 take-off locations, both located at Meckin Kamen (east side) as the main one and an alternative one on the west side. Tandem paragliding is offered from April to October and even during the other seasons if the weather conditions are favourable in Krushevo.

Mount Biking - Krushevo Municipality, in cooperation with EU funded LRCP project, developed over 40 km of biking trails. In collaboration with the private sector, they have implemented a joint project for expanding the network of marked biking trails adding up to the total mileage of mountain biking trails of 80+ km that are existent but not marked.

Skiing – offering winter skiing and accompanying sports and recreation at the site called Stanich, which has two runs for amateurs and one professional 618m long ski run. The site has a ski lift – one-seater and a cable one-seater lift. On the top of the ski site, there are two restaurants – Shape and Skaut that offers refreshments and a variety of food. The cable car that leads to Stanich is only a few minutes away from the center of Krushevo.

Winter Safari – offered by a private service provider, tourists can enjoy a "winter safari" from the top of Bushava Mountain up to where they are taken by an amphibious vehicle and undertake the adventure of free skiing, hiking, and other activities on the top of Bushava Mountain.

QUAD Adventure – possibilities to rent a two or 4-seater ATV and explore the Krushevo natural surroundings following one of many maintained trails or go off the beaten track for true adventure by yourselves or with a guide.

Adventure Park – an organized park of several adrenaline activities operated by certified instructors offering zip lines, climbing, rope walking and bouldering at fair prices.

Mountain Go-Kart – during the dry season, ski runs are used for mountain go-karts having the ski lift taking the people to the top from where they use gravity to drive down to the start of the run.

Hiking and Trekking – Krushevo has great potential for this type of outdoor activity throughout the year, offering mountain lovers easy, moderate, to difficult trails. There are local guides from Krushevo surroundings providing guided tours. Many of the tracks are still to be marked, but in the current situation, more than 40+ km are easy to follow and hike by yourselves.

Horseback Riding – this activity is standardized, ranging from 10 to 30 minutes with local horses, guided at a fair price, enabling the visitors to enjoy the mountainous scenery of Krushevo. At least ten horses with two service providers are available for this touristic activity.

Local Experiences – even though the making of the locum is a well-kept secret, other local recipes can be practised with the locals at their homes, such as sweets called *celufki*, or meat speciality *chomek*. These experiences can be arranged with the help of the travel intermediary or the accommodation facility at the site.

Some of the adventurous activities that can be offered in Elbasan are:

Paragliding from the plateau of Cerruje, near Funar.

Archery can be applied in several sites and destinations in Elbasan, lake Funar, Byshek, Qerret, Gjinar, Bukanik, etc.

Camping and **grilling** are most suitable at Funar, Gjinar, Qerret, Shmil, Krrabe, etc.

Canoeing along the Shkumbin River (in spring, early summer and autumn).

Hiking in well-defined trails like:

- Elbasan – Godolesh – Samurr – Labinot – Elbasan
- Elbasan – Godolesh – Funar
- Elbasan – Byshek – Shushice – Fushe Buall – Ura e Polisit (which follows the path of ancient Via Egnatia)
- Elbasan – Garunje – Fortress of Bodin
- Elbasan – Shelcan
- Elbasan – Gjinar – Valesh (in Valesh there are the ruins of an old Fortress and church.)

Kayaking at the canyons of river Gostima; **Skiing** in Gjinar and Funar, only during winter; **Zipline** in Bukanik, Godolesh; **River fishing** in the Shkumbin River; **Horse riding** in Funar, Gjinar, and Byshek; and **Orienteering**, mainly in mountainous areas in Funar, Gjinar, Shmil, Zavaline, Bukanik, Korre and Godolesh ; Zip line in Bukanik, Godolesh, etc.

III.6 AMENITIES

As elaborated above, amenities are particularly interesting to adventure tourism development, including safety logistics, internet access, health insurance, access to first-aid facilities, etc. Recent developments due to COVID-19 introduced anti-spread amenities, including special measures for cleaning the accommodation and transport facilities, public spaces and sites of great attraction.

Krushevo and Elbasan are moderate in amenities accompanying the accommodation, transport and food facilities. Apart from standard amenities for the above destination elements, Krushevo offers clean air and an unpolluted natural environment due to its specific location and lack of transport.

Food is of great attraction potential, yet both territories can still offer healthy and homemade food, whether served in traditional restaurants or B&Bs. Internet access is provided in every facility, apart from a few B&B accommodations in rural Elbasan, which is part of the unique offer - meaning offering peace and online detox.

IV. KEY FINDINGS

The analysis of the primary data gathered from in-depth interviews and joint discussions at the cross-border workshops and the secondary data from consulting relevant literature supported forming a general view of tourism development potentials in Krushevo and Elbasan. Inclusive of insights regarding the problems and opportunities, the state of play at the destination leads to the conclusion of key findings followed by corresponding recommendations.

In general, both Municipalities, Krushevo and Elbasan can be perceived as adventure & active destinations following the above analysis regarding the ATTA definition of adventure tourism as a trip that **includes at least two of the following three elements: physical activity, natural environment, and cultural immersion.**

Furthermore, the extensive analysis of the 5As, presented above, on the key elements of the destination: access, accommodation, attractions, activities and amenities revealed:

- Similarities mostly in the category of access points, attractions and amenities;
- Moderate consistency in the variety of accommodation capacities, and
- Variations in type and quality of the activities offered.

In particular, Krushevo and Elbasan can be easily reached by regional and local roads and three International airports. Additionally:

- A direct route connecting Elbasan-Krushevo and vice-versa is plausible;
- A round trip inclusive of Kosovo passing and visiting is convincing;
- Foreign arrivals are of high probability with low-cost carriers through the international airports in Skopje, Tirana and Ohrid;
- Good access to the destination through motorways and regional and local roads as part of Balkan routes.
- Both Krushevo and Elbasan offer accommodation in Hotels, B&B, homestays, guesthouses and apartments.
- Krushevo offers 1 250 beds all year round, all located in the town;
- Elbasan offers 998 beds: 810 of them located in the city and 188 in Gjinar and Funar.
- Both Krushevo and Elbasan accommodation facilities are present on online booking platforms like Airbnb.com and Booking.com;
- Krushevo accommodation style varies yet overall follows the traditional manner in a modern translation of the architectural design;
- Elbasan accommodation follows a contemporary style in the majority of accommodation facilities.

Regarding attractions, Krushevo offers a unique mix of cultural, historic and adventure in nature. At the same time, Elbasan, in the current situation, is most popular as a wellness destination, yet it offers outdoor activities in the sense of adventure. Activities that attract the most visitors are:

- Paragliding and hang gliding
- Hiking
- Mountain biking
- Adrenalin park activities (zip line, etc.)
- Wellness and leisure
- Camping
- Canoeing
- Rafting
- Skiing
- Horseback riding
- Off-road adventure

In particular, [Krushevo's key attractions](#) can be summarized as follows:

- Recognized paragliding and hang gliding destinations on the world map;
- Important historic destination due to Ilinden Uprising and the Makedonium monument is an attraction by itself;
- Cultural resources:
- Krusevo as urban settlement with specific, traditional Krusevo architecture and urban clothes (established in the late 18th and early 19th century). The famous French architect Le Corbusier was particularly moved by the architecture of Krusevo. For the creation of Krusevo as a town settlement, the immigration of the Vlachs from Moskopole and its surroundings from 1769 to 1788 is significant.
- Well-known Krusevo builders, painters, fresco painters and woodcarvers from that time.
- Churches: "[St. Nikola](#)" (1832), "[Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary](#)", "[St. John the Baptist](#)", "[St. Sunday](#)", "[St. Petka](#)", "[Ascension of Christ](#)", "[St. Trinity](#)", "[St. Vasilij](#)" and [Monastery St. Preobrazenie \(1986\)](#)
- [Museum of the Ilinden Uprising and the Krusevo Republic](#), and the [Museum of the People's Liberation War](#)
- [The bullet foundry - a museum in Krushevo](#), where bullets were made during the [Ilinden Uprising](#) .
- The old Bazaar street with series of small craftsmen and trade shops, arranged next to each other. It is the most picturesque part of the city, to which the neighbourhoods follow, where the whole life takes place. From the formerly world famous Krusevo bazaar some of the old crafts: tinker, goldsmith, coppersmith, cobbler, and other crafts are still present.
- Presentation of Krushevo as a city of culture, with the Toše Proeski Memorial-Cultural Center and the Nikola Martinoski Gallery, among others;
- Outdoor destination for hiking and biking with 40 km + organized and marked trails;
- Winter holidays family resorts;
- [Adventure Park and adventure activities](#) at the destination, easy to book and implement;
- Local and authentic traditional food available at restaurants.

Elbasan Municipality is rich in tourist attractions, allowing various touristic products and offers to develop. Although not sharing a coastline, it can focus on specific types of tourists, boosting segments that find tourist attractions of Elbasan worthy of visiting and re-visiting.

Below there are some of the main assets or strong points that Elbasan may exploit to develop its tourism further:

- Thermal spas of Tregan (named Llixha by locals). Most hotels are situated there, welcoming thousands of health tourists annually;
- Historical sites (Fortress of Elbasan, Clock Tower, Basilica, other smaller fortresses in rural areas, Roman Thermal complex Ad- Quintum, Via Egnatia route, etc.);
- Natural resources (Bezistan Plane Tree, Byshek Plane Trees, Shkumbin valley, etc.);
- Cultural resources (King's Mosque, Nazareshta Mosque, Saint Mary's Church, Saint Nicolas Church, Ethnographic Museum, etc.);
- The building of the Auto Moto Park in Elbasan, a motor circuit of approximately 5.3 km in length.
- Attractive destinations (Gjinar, Byshek, Funar, Qerret, Polis, etc.), well known for hiking trails, local feasts, off-road riding, horse riding, archery, rafting;
- Traditional cuisine (like distinctive local cooking), and long tradition in hospitality and cuisine;
- Nationally recognized feast, "Summer Day" and other regional or rural festivals;
- Diverse types of reliefs allow for a wide range of outdoor sports and activities. Some of the activities that are already offered are horse riding, canoeing, and abseiling;
- Support from the University of Elbasan "Aleksander Xhuvani" professors and students for a dedicated bachelor's degree in Tourism;
- Local government commitment to designing and implementing the tourism strategy development (Elbasan Municipality)

- Specific outdoor sports associations, like “The Association of Alpinism, Skiing and Mountainous Tourism”, with an office in Elbasan;
- Devoted tour operators, like “Albanian Sport Tourism” and “Elite Travel.”

Regarding amenities, Krushevo and Elbasan offer standard and regular internet access coverage at satisfying levels and health protection institutions. There is a lack of locally organized transport.

The conducted research contributed to identifying some of the problems and challenges for further development of tourism in Krushevo and Elbasan:

- Lack of a distinctive strategy for tourism development at Elbasan Municipality. However, a positive mind-set toward tourism prevails in the everyday activities of the Municipality of Elbasan and other local government bodies. Preparation clear and written strategy for tourism development is essential;
- There is no one-stop-shop - Tourist Info Center in Krushevo - offering systemized and promotional information on touristic offers in the town;
- There is no systemized and integrated touristic offer in the form of ready-to-use products, such as guided tours to attractions in Krushevo and Elbasan;
- There is no consistent/unique promotional message on the Krushevo brand across the advertising channels;
- There is a need for greater promotion of Krushevo attractions regarding outdoor and adventure activities on a national level among domestic visitors;
- There is a great lack of certified local guides in multiple languages, even in English;
- There is a lack of mountain guides (English-speaking) in Elbasan;
- Waste management requires improvements, especially at the attraction sites in Krushevo, Funar area in Elbasan;
- Some infrastructural improvements are required in Krushevo in support of the adventure offer: reconstruction of the road to the paragliding take-off site, construction of a longer and with higher capacity zip line;
- Capacity building for hospitality service providers is required to meet travellers’ expectations.
- Further networking, especially with designated adventure international organizations, is needed for “know-how” and sharing of experiences;
- Modernizing the curriculum in the high school for hospitality and upgrading the cooperation with the private sector are needed;
- No digital access for self-guided tours (biking and hiking) in multilanguage is available;
- There is no dedicated directory for tourism development and policies in the Municipality of Elbasan. Responsibilities regarding tourism are divided between two existing directories, which may lead to a lack of concordance.
- Poor road infrastructure to main tourist points of interest like Funar, Gjinar, Qerret or Polis. The road to Funar is in a bad condition although lately the area has been promoted as a beautiful destination. Following a new trace, a new route is planned to be built. This road will link Funar with the Tirana-Elbasan highway, making Funar easily accessible and shortening travel time to the destination. Nevertheless, this project is still in the feasibility phase, implying it will take several years to complete.
- No dedicated web page promotes Elbasan, its tourism attractions and tourism-related activities and events, nor is there a dedicated page on social media. In a time when most tourists use the online environment as the primary source of information, this is a serious shortcoming for Elbasan. Most information about Elbasan comes from the central government, privately administered sites or pages. Much of the information, especially from private sources, is outdated.
- There is no catalogue of hiking or biking trails in Elbasan, nor are there signs/markings for existing routes. The diverse landscape and hilly and mountainous reliefs offer many interesting and exciting routes with different difficulty levels. But this kind of information is not widely available, and paths and trails are known only by several experienced people or enthusiasts.
- There is no formalized and institutional collaboration between tourism stakeholders in Elbasan. Workshops, meetings, or conferences about tourism are organized occasionally, but there are no formal and periodic meetings between parties interested in tourism development.

- Lack of a complete list of touristic attractions in Elbasan Municipality. There is information on websites about different attractions and destinations in Elbasan, but there is no categorized list with all relevant information and data. This list would be completed with useful and updated information about accommodation, food and entertainment in Elbasan.
- There is no formal information office for tourism in Elbasan. Although most visitors rely on online sources, a physical information point or office for tourism in Elbasan would demonstrate a serious commitment to tourism and tourists.

V. RECOMMENDATIONS

Following the above analysis of the two local destinations and investigating possibilities for developing joint adventure touristic packages, it is conclusive that both Krushevo and Elbasan should follow further tourism development in adventure travel, as their greatest potential is that specific type of tourism.

In that regard, both destinations share elements which are base for linking the offer considering the current situation and use that as a foundation for further development, following the recommendations below:

- Setting up local DMO for Krushevo (municipality)
- Developing USP and UVP for Krushevo (DMO)
- Developing consistent and unique promotional messages for all-year-round adventure Krushevo (DMO)
- Developing and implementing a national advertising campaign on Krushevo (a joint effort of all stakeholders)
- Developing standardized half-day adventure and cultural tours as regular offer in Krushevo (DMO)
- Joining international adventure travel associations for further networking, like ATTA (municipality)
- Setting up a subsidy/grant scheme for certifying local guides in hiking and biking (municipality)
- Organizing capacity-building training for hospitality staff (co-organization with international donors; civil sector)
- Introducing free local touristic transport (hop-on-hop-off open minibus)
- Introducing and implementing a local system on sustainability and green destination in Krushevo (DMO)
- Introducing infrastructure upgrade for biking destination in Krushevo (baking trails, accommodation facilities)
- Developing and promoting digital tools (web-based) for self-guided hiking and biking tours in Krushevo
- Further marking of hiking and biking trails in Krushevo, and introducing downhill biking trails during the summer on the ski runs (private concessioner, municipality)
- Further improvement of the paragliding infrastructure, extra take-off spot, and large facility at the site in Krushevo
- Further refinement of the road network in Krushevo, focus on road access to attractions: Meckin Kamen and Adventure Park
- Building long and greater capacity zip line in Krushevo
- Introducing a safe & rescue system in Krushevo and Elbasan (municipality, adventure clubs)
- Joining further CB initiatives for integrated adventure offer
- Offering Krushevo and Elbasan as part of round Balkan trips (presence on travel fairs, municipality)
- Cleaning Krushevo town, improving the waste management (municipality, utility enterprises)
- Introducing at least two more large-scale events in Krushevo, preferably one in the autumn and one in the spring
- The municipality of Elbasan must draw up a formal strategy for tourism development in Elbasan. All stakeholders must be part of this project, while available qualified human resources are abundant. The same type of participants that were present in two workshops organized during this project is also more than suitable for discussing a tourism strategy at the local level.

- Developing a tourism identity for Elbasan, i.e., what Elbasan stands for. A specific logo and tagline should accompany Elbasan's branding. This would make Elbasan more distinctive and easily link its name with specific attractions it offers to tourists. The logo and slogan would be used in every tourism-related activity.
- Revitalizing the most valuable attraction of Elbasan municipality, the Fortress of Elbasan. It is a perfect site to turn into an Old Town, with souvenir shops, traditional workshops, ethnic restaurants, cafes, live music and performances and other cultural activities, like exhibitions. The square in front of the southern gate of the Fortress may allow only pedestrians, creating an attractive ensemble with the Basilica, Bezistan Plane (Platanus) Tree, Ethnographic museum and the new Ballie Mosque.
- Establishing a dedicated directory for tourism and tourism policies and development in the Municipality of Elbasan. This will result in an improved focus on tourism, and tourism-related activities will become better coordinated.
- Developing a dedicated web page for tourism in Elbasan, as well as respective pages on social media. Those pages would contain relevant information about tourism and destinations in Elbasan, updating them daily (not to say more frequently than customary). The web page is an excellent and low-cost tool for promoting Elbasan nationally and internationally.
- Evidencing, signalling, marking and promoting hiking and biking trails in Elbasan. Outdoor sports and activities should also be encouraged since Elbasan is suitable for many activities. Besides hiking and biking, these outdoor activities can be introduced in an organized way in the destination of Elbasan and Krushevo:
 - Archery: the sport, practice or skill of using a bow to shoot arrows;
 - ATV riding: riding with all-terrain vehicles for recreational purposes;
 - Camping: an outdoor activity involving overnight stays away from home, either without shelter or using basic shelters such as a tent or a recreational vehicle;
 - Backpacking: carrying gear on one's back while hiking for more than a day. It is often an extended journey and may involve camping outdoors;
 - Birdwatching/telescope: observing birds as a recreational activity or a form of citizen science. A birdwatcher may watch by using their naked eye, using a visual enhancement device like binoculars or a telescope, and listening for bird sounds;
 - Canoeing: an activity that involves paddling a canoe with a single-bladed paddle;
 - White Water Rafts & Paddles, Paddleboards;
 - Disc golf: a flying disc sport in which players throw a disc at a target; it is played using rules similar to golf;
 - Fitness trail: consists of a path or course with outdoor exercise equipment or obstacles installed along its length for exercising the human body to promote good health;
 - River fishing, Horse riding, and Grilling;
 - Hang gliding: an air sport or recreational activity in which a pilot flies a light, non-motorized foot-launched heavier-than-air aircraft called a hang glider;
 - Hunting, Mountain climbing, Alpinism and Off-road riding;
 - Orienteering: an activity that requires navigational skills using a map and compass to navigate from point to point in diverse and usually unfamiliar terrain whilst moving at speed. Participants are given a topographical map, usually a specially prepared orienteering map, which they use to find control points;
 - Outdoor fitness: consists of exercise undertaken outside a building to improve physical fitness;
 - Outdoor gym: a gym built outside in a public park, with the all-weather construction of its exercise machines, somewhat modelled on playground equipment;
 - Airsoft/paintball: a team game where participants eliminate opposing players by tagging them out of play with spherical plastic projectiles shot with mock air weapons called airsoft guns;

- Photography;
 - Abseiling: the controlled descent of a steep slope, such as a rock face, by moving down a rope;
 - Plogging: a combination of jogging with picking up litter. As a workout, it provides variation in body movements by adding bending, squatting and stretching to the main action of running, hiking, or walking;
 - Tree climbing, Running;
 - Rafting: recreational activity which uses an inflatable raft to navigate a river or other body of water;
 - Zip line: a pulley suspended on a cable, usually made of stainless steel, mounted on a slope. It is designed to enable a person propelled by gravity to travel from the top to the bottom of the inclined cable by holding on to or being attached to the freely moving pulley.
- Establishing a formal collaboration between tourism stakeholders in Elbasan and Krushevo. Periodic meetings can be organized, where recent developments in tourism and future challenges and plans will be analyzed and discussed. There is no better way than discussing face-to-face everything that concerns interested parties. These meetings will also contribute to harmonizing efforts and achieving synergy in promoting and developing tourism in Elbasan and Krushevo.
 - Compiling a complete and updated list of all touristic attractions in Elbasan. This list can then be combined with other information to create specific tourism offers and products for various types of tourists (as discussed before). This would increase the appeal of Elbasan as a tourist destination.
 - According to the latest international standards, there is a need to open a physical information office for tourism. This office would serve as a reference point for foreign or domestic tourists. Also, besides providing face-to-face information for visitors, printed promotional materials can be organized as a shop for souvenirs.
 - Exploration and promotion of the Catacombs of Elbasan are still unknown to most of the people of Elbasan themselves. These catacombs lie beneath the city, and most are still unexplored. They originate from the Fortress of Elbasan and head towards Elbasan city outskirts.
 - Modifying and adapting actual curricula of the bachelor's program in Tourism offered by the University of Elbasan to better comply with tourism sector needs and requests. This means better collaboration between tourism-related businesses and respective departments at the University of Elbasan "Aleksander Xhuvani". Some of the subjects that may be offered are "Designing for the Visitor Experience", "Tourism Futures", "Tourism Attraction Management", "Niche Tourism", etc. Also, open seminars can be organized, where representatives from tourism businesses from Elbasan can share their expertise and experiences with students and professors at Elbasan University.
 - Develop and offer specific training for individuals and employees interested in progressing in the tourism sector. This training should be practice-oriented and can be developed by tourism experts/practitioners and tourism scholars. Everybody should benefit from shared experiences and knowledge to grow professionally and advance in their career.

VI. Strategy for Marketing Promotion & Branding of one unique Krushevo /Elbasan tourism package

Destination marketing is a complex and interrelated activity gathering all relevant stakeholders at local and national levels around a common purpose. The aim is to increase customer awareness of a certain destination so that they start to think about visiting or help them remember the location when they are ready to book a holiday. By defining and developing single brand overarching destination key factors of attractiveness, potential customers will decide to book a trip to that destination due to its promotion.

Destination marketing is the key activity of the Destination Management Organization (DMO), as previously mentioned in the recommendations, section V, in this analysis, to try and bring more visitors to the area, boost the local economy and establish itself as a desirable trip destination.

Destination marketing aims to make the **customer aware of and interested in the target location** before they arrive. Stressing the location means that DMOs or the entity implementing the marketing strategy should find a way to promote two counties-one trip, as the case is for the Krushevo-Elbasan joint tourism active offer. Regardless of the consistent offerings in terms of adventure, the tourism product spreads across the border, including two non-bordering territories.

Branding a tourism destination requires a long-term strategy integrated into numerous channels and goes beyond the scope of the current document. In any case, the branding of a destination is more than just logos, taglines, commercials, billboards and social media posts.

Perception of its guests defines a destination’s brand. It is an emotion that visitors have, brought on by experiences created by stakeholders, meaning consistent and long-term research on visitor satisfaction should be employed systematically and in an organized way, most suitably by the local DMO to obtain and organize relevant data. Successfully implementing a branding strategy must begin with the destination asking itself, “What makes our destination unique and attracts visitors?” Followed by analysis and interpretation of the gathered data from local destinations into specific priorities, measures and actions toward a long-term strategy for destination marketing. In that manner, every step should be assigned to one or more stakeholders responsible for implementation, along with the timeframe and budget.

Destination marketing trends reveal that online communication with the potential target leads the tourism movement globally. Namely, according to the Travel Trends Report 2018, **9 of 10 travellers consider it essential to read online reviews**. Moreover, 95% of travellers always trust tour & activity reviews on third-party sites such as TripAdvisor.

However, **suppose the destination is not that popular yet. In that case**, travel consumers are looking for video and photo material to find out what to expect from the location they would like to visit. In that respect, the first step in destination promotion is to highlight a particular territory or to draw attention to specific attractions and experiences for the visitors. The figure below presents the factors to be elaborated in the message communicated with the potential visitors that influence its competitiveness, meaning that the visitors should choose our destination in comparison to one’s offering similar tourism products.

Figure 8: what influences competitiveness



The above factors are extensively elaborated in the above sections (II.1 to III.6) for Krushevo and Elbasan, and elaboration regarding their similarities is investigated. Following the finding, a USP should be developed as a basis for creating the specific Marketing strategy for the active destination Krushevo - Elbasan.

Unique selling proposition (indicative)

As elaborated above, Krushevo-Elbasan destination faces competitors (local destinations) within the cross-border area offering similar tourism products to the same target (tourists) in varying market segments and with equal or lower prices. Attractions in competitive destinations are identical. The destination maturity (degree of development and recognition as a tourism destination) is higher than the Krushevo-Elbasan viewed as a joint destination per the adventure theme.

Nevertheless, the Krushevo-Elbasan destination joint tourism package is perceived as one trip - two countries. On the other hand, the price sensitivity of the market segments targeted as adventure individuals

and small or private groups is high, as they tend to travel on a budget which should be considered when promoting the Krushevo-Elbasan destination in one travel package.

Concise, a unique selling proposition is based on features/characteristics that make a destination more competitive compared to the competitors, considering the most recognized assets and factors of attraction. Below, an exercise for developing USP is presented, following the field and desk research in the project's scope. However, to secure local ownership over the USP, a process of greater scale of participation and inclusion of more actors should be introduced. In that regard, the below proposals on USP are indicative:

Table 9: unique selling proposition of the Krushevo – Elbasan destination

Unique selling proposition of the Krushevo-Elbasan destination	
What makes Krushevo-Elbasan unique?	Two countries-one trip
What is the essence of the destination?	Adventure, outdoor activities
What triggers the travellers to the destination?	Tasty food, hospitable people, peace & relaxation in nature, physical activities like hiking and biking, spectacular views, interaction with locals
What is the tourist's opinion of the destination?	Undiscovered, private, green and hospitable
<p>All year-round destination for family adventure!</p> <p>Nature, adventure and tasty food for urban detox!</p> <p>Experience ancient trails and feel like a Roman!</p> <p>Become fit by fitting into nature!</p>	

Market segmentation

As the Krushevo – Elbasan destination is still at the starting phase of the joint presentation of its tourism offer and has very limited foreign market presence, the below analysis tackles market segmentation and positioning, as those findings are preconditions in optimizing the marketing strategy.

According to the general acknowledgement, no discussion is needed over people's different tastes. It follows that every tourist should be observed individually. They are all drawn to a certain destination for various reasons of taste, ranging from pure leisure to a very specific enjoyment.

Another acknowledgement is that the tourism industry cannot, in any case, serve all travellers individually, leading to market segmentation. Furthermore, as elaborated by this Analysis, all stakeholders can use market segmentation in tourism, from restaurants and hotels to small or large international tour operators and destinations.

This section elaborates on geographical, demographic and psychographic (lifestyle) characteristics of the incoming travellers to Krushevo – Elbasan destination only regarding the JOINT ADVENTURE OFFER. The market segmentation analysis below relates only to the joint tourism products developed within the adventure portfolio of the two local destinations comprising unique tourism packages.

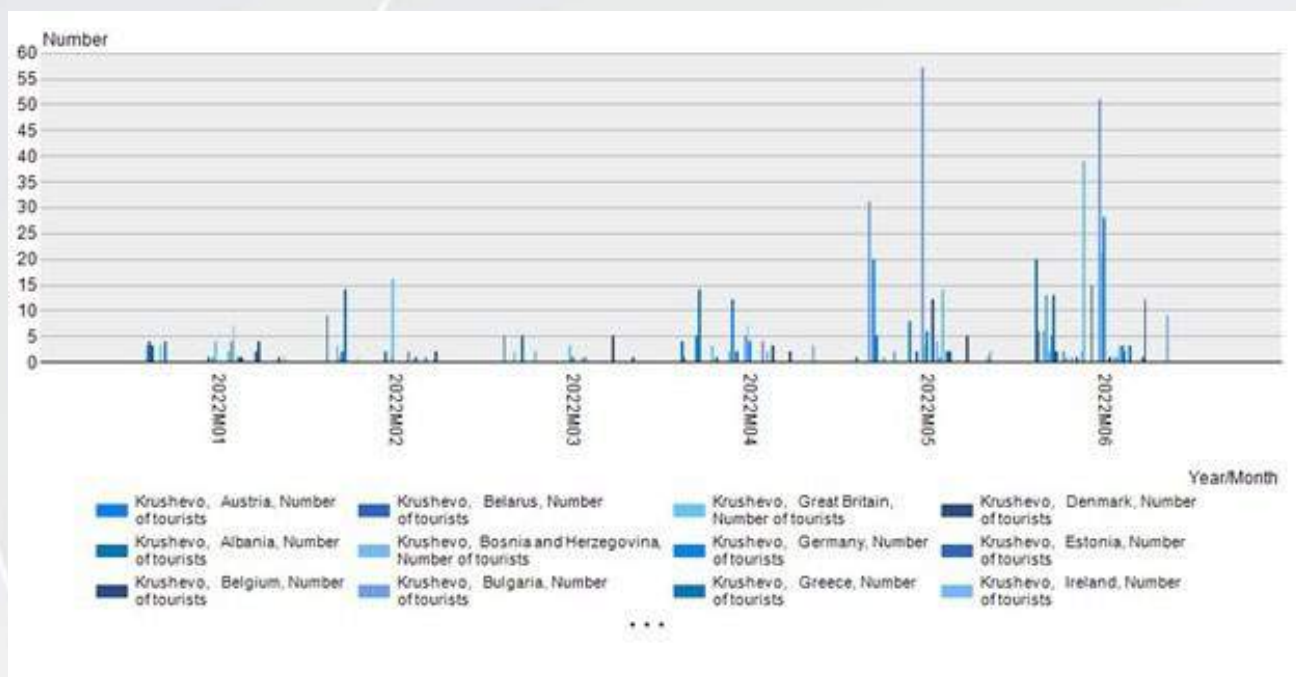
The outbound market should be observed as a pool of many different smaller markets formed upon other personal characteristics of each customer, thus enabling the destinations to excel in serving the needs of a specific group or market segment. When choosing tourists from abroad, destinations should determine whether to select the market based on country borders or investigate different market segments that internationally address travellers' common needs.

Not following only the data for arrivals from 2021/2022 for Krushevo as it presents exceptional circumstances and cannot be used as an indicator for future target value setting, local stakeholders report on arrivals per category rather than per geographical location.

In addition to expatriates - citizens who live abroad and return mostly in the summer to visit friends and

relatives or for one-day visits, figure 5 shows overnight stays of visitors for the period of first six months in 2022 by country of origin in Krushevo.

Figure 5: number of overnights per country of origin



Source: Makstat database, 2022

Data presented above on arrivals per country of origin support the evidence from the field research from Krushevo that tourists originate from various countries with the tendency of more appearances from the region, i.e. most visitors in the first six months of 2022 are from Slovenia and Albania, followed by Turkey. As the scope of this segmentation is already geographically narrowed to the outbound travel market of European countries and neighbouring countries of North Macedonia and Albania, **efforts should be focused on identifying the different groups of individual tourists**, middle sales entities such as tour operators, travel agencies - traditional or online companies.

Based on the previous elaboration of accessibility to the destination, one of the key issues in determining whether the destination will attract foreign arrivals is the possibility of direct flights to/from International Airports in North Macedonia and Albania.

Research conducted for incoming travels to North Macedonia and Albania proved that European tourists prefer a direct connection to the final destination rather than multiple flights.

Furthermore, a few low-cost air flight operators provide cheap direct flights from both countries (WIZZ AIR, Germanwings, Blueexpress, etc.).

Market segmentation based on categories instead of geographical clusters allows for targeting potential tourists using factor analysis. Analysis of the lifestyle factors of the visitors of previous years must be acknowledged as of limited influence as the evidence from the field is limited to the reports by the local stakeholders, i.e. anecdotal data. Also, the factor analysis incorporated data from 2011/2022 to obtain evidence on the lifestyle factors of the national visitors coming to Krushevo for a day trip or holidays.

Going into further detail, **Key Source Markets and Consumer Segments** present at the destination of Krushevo, all categories, no matter the country of origin were further analyzed using factor analysis. Five types of visitors were identified based on their lifestyle preferences: **adventure seekers (paragliding foremost), nature lovers, cultural explorers, active sporty visitors and families travelling for leisure.**

Lifestyle factors are not alone the tourist preferences as external factors also greatly influence their behaviour and final decision to visit a destination. Further analysis based on age, gender and family affiliation revealed that tourists arriving at the Krushevo destination are mostly middle aged, mostly in family relations, or they are young but have an association with a group of friends. Another group is represented by older visitors who are organized into touristic cultural groups.

Following the market segmentation based on geographical, demographic and psychographic (lifestyle) analysis, Krushevo destination should target the potential visitors from the market segments:

- *Mid-income families* who love nature and soft adventure and local experiences;
- *Younger people* travelling to discover destinations for an active holiday;
- *Professional athletes / sportsmen* for pre-competition preparations;
- *Older people* travelling organized by an intermediary (travel agencies) for a cultural exploration of “new” destinations;
- *Business purposes* for business-related activities, like team building activities, meetings, conferences, workshops, fairs and training; and
- *Individual travellers* seeking adventure in non-tourist destinations.

Inferring from in-depth interviews and workshops, the profiling of the tourism market with joint thematic destination Elbasan was possible. These are the types of tourists identified:

- *Business purposes*: these individuals visit Elbasan for business-related activities, like business agreements and meetings, conferences, workshops, fairs and training;
- *Personal purposes (health)*: these individuals visit specific destinations in Elbasan, like the thermal spas of Tregan (Llixha) or Gjinar;
- *Historical/cultural/adventurous*: these individuals visit Elbasan for its various historical, cultural, and natural resources. This category also includes visitors on different traditional days or sport-related activities;
- *Family visits*: family celebrations or gatherings, weddings, funerals, etc.;
- *Transit travellers*: Individuals travel to other destinations and take a break in Elbasan.

These tourists and visitors need a wide range of products and services. Some are related to tourism, and some are not so obvious. A list of possible products and services was identified from the interviews and workshop discussions: Accommodation, Food/traditional food, Infrastructure, Touristic guides, Translators, Fuel, Money exchange, Medical assistance, Information, Transport, Road or trail signposts, Specific logistics (halls, simultaneous translating systems, IT equipment, internet access), Parking spaces, Security, Entertainment, etc.

Summarized, Krushevo and Elbasan attract the same two categories of tourists: *nature lovers participating in adventure&active tourism and families travelling for leisure and local experiences.*

On the other hand, both of the local destinations attract a different category of visitors due to authentic factors of attractions such as visitors for wellness (Elbasan); transit visitors (Elbasan); paragliding professionals (Krushevo); national history lovers (Ilinden in Krushevo).

Pricing strategy

The price is the value that the tourist and tourism product provider establishes to enable an exchange.

For the tourists, who are consumers, in this case, the price they are willing to pay at the destination equals the expected satisfactory experience. Conversely, the tourism service provider seeks to cover his costs and obtain the desired benefits.

Recognized pricing strategies like Dynamic pricing, Price skimming, Competitors based pricing, etc., are more likely to be employed for a product already on the market and its ongoing promotion. For new products, like the one in question within this Analysis, the literature advises on Penetration pricing strategy.

However, this strategy suggests pricing lower or equal to production cost, which in the case of Krushevo – Elbasan would not be possible to implement as the product is not developed or sold by one tourism service provider alone. On the contrary, the product in the case of a Krushevo - Elbasan destination, as per the ToR requirements, should represent a JOINT TOURISM ACTIVE PACKAGE, comprised of several and various touristic services such as accommodation, guiding, transport, local experiences, food, outdoor adventure, etc.

The purpose of the pricing strategy in this stage of the Krushevo – Elbasan destination is to attract visitors and, up to a certain degree, generate repetitive arrivals.

Another factor influencing the pricing strategy is the perception that the destination is “full” and it is hard to find availability to visit it, i.e. if there is the urge to book in advance to see it due to its attractiveness. On the other hand, there is the Tourism Carrying Capacity (TCC) issue.

WTO defines Tourism Carrying Capacity as the maximum number of tourists that can visit a destination at a certain moment without destroying the physical, economic, or sociocultural environment and an unacceptable decrease in the quality of visitors’ satisfaction, meaning that number doesn’t always equal the number of available beds in the destination.

Nevertheless, the analysis of the accommodation availability showed that the number of beds is far below the destination potential (42 beds on average are occupied on an annual level out of 1 250 available in Krushevo), and current arrivals, in any case, do not reach the TCC of the destination of Krushevo and Elbasan.

Furthermore, the pricing strategy should consider the tourism product’s place and offer pricing within the range of the cost of the inputs into the product, such as fixed costs (utility, salaries, property taxes, etc.) that are regular for that destination/place.

The positioning also determines the pricing, as the price range should match the income levels of the market segments targeted as potential tourists to the destination (profiling of potential visitors was presented above, the section on segmentation).

Promoting the destination as a two-country trip for adventure in nature and a family leisure destination offering unique local experiences (see proposals on USP above) also affects the pricing strategy. The destination is promoted as a cross-border nature oasis that provides adventures such as paragliding, hiking, or rafting with authentic accommodation (Krushevo town style and Elbasan guest houses rustic style) and tasty food. The pricing strategy should relate to the overall experience offered at both local destinations.

Considering the above-analysed aspects of the marketing mix of the destination (product, place, promotion), Krushevo – Elbasan’s pricing strategy should be based on a cost-plus margin calculation for both local destinations separately. It is a win-win concept both for local tourism providers and tourists.

At this stage of the development of the *JOINT ACTIVE TOURISM PACKAGE*, a joint pricing strategy is not plausible. Namely, the common touristic product is not yet piloted or promoted. The stakeholders are not networked at a business level. There is no overarching organization (DMO) coordinating and implementing a unique marketing mix of the two local destinations.

Further research should follow as the destination is set in two different economies, and the coordinated pricing of the travel package should reflect the national market trends.

Marketing and advertising plan

Before setting the marketing and advertising plan, current destination marketing industry trends are elaborated to serve as the general frame for the specific activities of the marketing plan for Krushevo – Elbasan. The very precondition for an implementation of a unique marketing plan, as any action plan for that matter, for any destination, is to have a responsible organization (no matter whether public, private or multi-stakeholder founded).

On the project level, as per the ToR requirements, an indicative marketing plan should consider a joint tourism active package between Krushevo and Elbasan rather than promoting the overall destination.

For the Analysis, this indicative plan takes into consideration current marketing trends:

SOCIAL MEDIA is the main channel for communication and marketing, following the current industry trend worldwide. Social media is a top priority in driving awareness and familiarity with the destination of Krushevo – Elbasan as an adventure destination.

For example, Instagram (IG) Stories launched in 2016 for the first time have grown 11 times faster than standard Feed posts and comprise 47% of all IG content. Most powerful IG stories are shared by actual visitors participating in an adventure at the destination. Videos of visitor paragliding or rafting, immersing in spectacular nature, are the new “word of mouth” in advertising.

On the other hand, not all influencers (people paid to advertise a destination) have created equal promotion. It can be difficult to determine who is a high-quality influencer to get Krushevo – Elbasan destination closer to the identified target of profiled tourists.

Another approach that proved to be effective on social media is to involve locals in marketing campaigns to convey the culture and vibe of the destination effectively.

In particular, **INSTAGRAM** is a robust platform for visual storytelling. Instagram drives the most engagement per post compared to any social network – 84 times more than Twitter, 54 times more than Pinterest, and ten times more than Facebook (SproutSocial).

With 95% of Instagram users are also on Facebook (Pew Research Center), cross-promotion of the destination will drive further reach and engagement. In addition, nearly half of all Instagram users use the app to help them choose a travel destination. With Instagram's dynamic ads for travel and the growing use of the platform for booking the trip, the marketing plan can define the low-cost budget for targeting potential travellers to the destination of Krushevo – Elbasan offering exact joint active packages to the destination itself.

With over 2 billion active users monthly, **FACEBOOK** maintains its position as the number one social media platform for reaching potential visitors. In combination with paid ads and promoted posts, the best way to drive social traffic for Facebook is to publish fresh, unique content. Over half of Facebook users say their friend's photos inspire their travel plans. As Facebook continues to expand its role in the travel space with the launch of app features like "City Guides" in 2017, a direct competitor to "Google Trips", Facebook will more clearly join the ranks of TripAdvisor, Google, etc., in detailed trip planning.

People use **Twitter** to discover something new and interesting, and travellers use the platform for all phases of trip planning and ultimately share travel experiences. Twitter users are 45% more likely to post opinions about destinations than other social media users (AdWeek).

YOUTUBE Travel videos are some of the most viewed on YouTube as the channel maintains its status as the second largest search engine in the world. Today, the platform is used by 18-49- year-olds, more than any other cable network in the U.S. (Hootsuite).

SEO, Search Engine Optimization are more important than ever. More than half of travellers under 34 (which coincided with the profile of tourists potentially visiting the destination for active outdoor adventure) use a general search engine to check accommodations and activities and compare prices to destinations before deciding where to travel.

On top of the usage of social media and SEO for marketing purposes, this analysis also considers traditional tools for promotion. One of the most used marketing tools in the B2B tourism business is the organization of FAM (familiarization tours). It is a marketing tool to attract intermediaries (travel agencies and tour operators) to the destination for organized sales of tourism packages. Usually, all related costs are covered by the organizer, a DMO, or any other responsible body. Travel agencies offer their products/travel packages to organized groups, or in the case of Krushevo – Elbasan, they would target older people interested in culture and history (please see market segmentation).

In a nutshell, the marketing plan of the Krushevo - Elbasan destination should be detailed and implemented by a unified body, a DMO, or another responsible body for destination promotion as a whole. In the meantime, the focus should be given to the joint active touristic package utilizing Social media channels and FAM tours.

In terms of indicative allocations per advertising activities, a respective presentation is given below the following literature recommendations for newly developed tourism products:

As presented above, the Budget for advertising in % includes investments in paid advertising on Instagram of up to 35%, Facebook 25%, FAM Tours 20%, and B2B sales of up to 5%.

It is important to address the joint and complementary possibility for advertising via FB and Instagram as both social media channels are managed through the same tools, meaning the same produced content can be easily advertised on FB and Instagram or can be shifted accordingly to the target audience the destination is addressing.

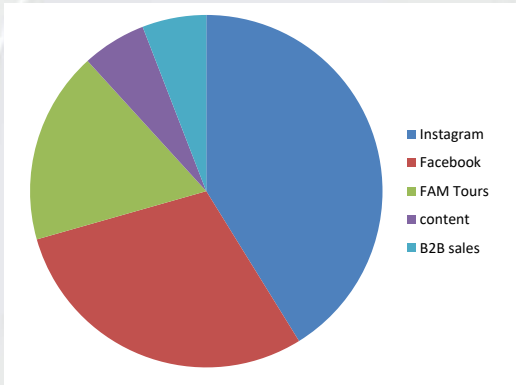


Figure 6: portion of the budget for advertising in %

Nevertheless, for strong and unified promotion across the advertising channels, original media content should be developed according to the key guidelines set in the Unique Selling Proposition (see above).

VII. Joint adventure tourism packages of the Krushevo – Elbasan destination

Proposal A: **A week of adventure in nature** *developed by a mixed group of tourism-related stakeholders during the 1st WS held in Elbasan on 18-19 of May 2022.

Designed for: small organized groups, 8-12 people;

Type of service: full travel package

Itinerary & program proposal:



Intro:

Mountainous countries in the Balkans still have hidden gems of nature and hospitality, offering travellers the unique possibility to explore towns and villages across borders. An exciting journey to both North Macedonia and Albania will reveal beautiful scenery, great cultural riches and interesting local stories. During this trip, you will be active and enjoying the outdoors amongst stunning nature, tasting local cuisine and feeling the enormous hospitality that prevails in the destination of the towns of Krushevo in North Macedonia and Elbasan in Albania.

It is a trip that holds travel through time, offering marked trails in untouched nature for hiking and mount biking, history and culture to be explored, starting from ancient sites such as Ad Quintum in Elbasan to the modern Memorial Centre of the famous Macedonian singer Toshe Proeski in Krushevo.

A rare mix of culture and active travel awaits the outdoor enthusiasts, as you can paraglide both from the highest town in the Balkans – the worldly renewed paragliding destination of Krushevo, as well from the mountainous lake area of Funar near Elbasan; you can explore the woods horseback riding, rafting the rivers near Elbasan, ski in the winter or just relax in the wellness facilities of Elbasan as well wine & dine. Urban detox is guaranteed on this two-country trip experience!

Day-to-day program:

Day 1: Arrival in Elbasan (access point Tirana, AL), local food for diners, and overnight in Elbasan (possibility to stay at Hotel in Elbasan town, SPA Hotel, or in Guest House in surrounding rural area)



Day 2: DAY OF ADVENTURE – EXPLORE THE AREA OF FUNAR ON FOOT!

Funar is situated in the north of Elbasan, about 50 minute-drive from the centre, in a mountainous region. Four reservoirs were built in 1967, but the pine wood surroundings create a picturesque view of alpine lakes. The area is cool in summer and quite beautiful in snowy winter. It is very suitable for practising various outdoor activities and sports.

Funar lake area can be reached by foot, offering hikes amongst amazing natural settings!



Day 3: ENJOYING THE NATURE – SWIMMING AND KAYAKING AT THE LAKES OF FUNAR

Enjoying outdoors at Funar lake area will get you a chance to be active and choose between swimming in the four reservoirs of emerald waters and kayaking for a few hours in the freshness of the forest air. Either way, the Funar area offers an active trip, mixing water activities with delicious food prepared by the locals and served as a picnic outdoors, by the lake, enjoying stunning surroundings of nature. Some of the activities that are suitable to be performed there are:

- **Paragliding:** mainly in spring and autumn, starting from the plateau of Cerruje (near Funar).
- **Archery:** there is an association in Elbasan which offers an archery experience.
- **Camping and grilling:** there are pristine meadows around the lakes, which are perfect for camping activities.
- **Canoeing** in the lakes and other water games.
- **Mountain biking** in the trails through the forest around the lakes of Funar.
- **Hiking** around the lakes of Funar or exploring other trails like Cave of Mbykje (Mollagjes, near Funar), Mount of Korre (near Funar) and Canyon of Dopaj (near Funar).



Day 4: MEET THE JERUSALEM ON THE BALKANS – OHRID, the city of culture and nature

Transfer from Albania to North Macedonia, to the town of Krushevo as a second hub on this trip, is the best experience if done via Ohrid through the crossing point of Qafe Thane/Kafasan.

After approx. 2 hours drive (including time for border crossing), visitors will reach the town of Ohrid, where you will immediately catch the sight of the oldest Lake in Europe, Ohrid Lake. Take a few hours to explore the birthplace of Slavic literacy as well as the town of 365 churches. Plaoshnik, Kaneo, St. Sofia church, Robevi House, the Old Town and the Kale are some popular sites to visit if you want to learn more about the history and culture of Macedonian people. On a warm day, you can take a refreshing swim into the crystal blue waters of Ohrid Lake or relax by the shore, tasting the famous Ohrid trout. The trip continues with a transfer to Krushevo via Bitola. Overnight in Krushevo, possibility to stay at Hotel, SPA Hotel, or apartments.





Day 5: ADRENALINE RUSH OVER THE SKY OF KRUSHEVO

Krushevo is a world-famous destination for paragliding, offering an almost year-round adventure of tandem paragliding over Pelagonija valley. A truly perfect way to see the heights of the highest town in the Balkans is one flight above it; Tandem paragliding adventure with experienced and licensed paragliding pilots will take you over and around this hilly town settled at 1350 m.a.s.l allowing you to enjoy half an hour of views over Pelagonija valley as well the dense forests surrounding Krushevo. After this adrenaline rush, your energy will be restored with traditional lunch made of local produces in the city centre located restaurant. Here, in Krushevo, you can taste the traditional meal Chomlek, a veal meat pot enriched with peppers, onion, blue plums, wine and spices.

The afternoon is reserved for a guided city tour, so you learn about the rebellious history of the Krushevo people, the Ilinden uprising, and the landmark Makedonium, the symbol of the Macedonian rebellion against the Ottoman Empire at the beginning of the XX century. Enjoying the city walk can be sweetened with local desserts – lokum, or celufki, a dessert made from egg whites and sugar, traditional, crispy, white and delicious.

Day 6: EXPLORE THE OLD FORESTS OF KRUSHEVO BY HORSEBACK RIDING

Unspoiled nature awaits you to detox from urban life or enjoy your time slowly and fully. Horseback riding through the 300-year-old woods, refreshing air and stunning views is the experience in Krushevo for the day. Guided or self-guided for more experienced riders, horseback riding tours are offered at a few trails as you can choose to enjoy the Krushevo Lake's surroundings or the Krushevo forests' density. Either way, the first half of the day will be filled with relaxation and amazing views of untouched natural sites.

Traditional food prepared by locals, offering pies and cheese, can be served as a picnic by the lake for a memorable time in

Krushevo. The afternoon is free to discover the local shops, cafes, and bars in the narrow streets of the old bazaar of Krushevo in the city center. Overnight in Krushevo.

Day 7: departure, check-out point Skopje, North Macedonia

Proposal B: A mixed group of tourism-related stakeholders developed a week of adventure in nature
*during the 2nd WS held in Krushevo on June 2022.

Designed for: small organized groups, 8-12 people;

Type of service: full travel package

Itinerary & program proposal:

Intro:

Krushevo and Elbasan, as CBC areas' destination, has a combined offer for tourists, such as the untouched environment, valuable nature, historical and cultural heritage, prospects for active / adventure tourism (paragliding, active sports, hiking, mount-baking, kayaking and more). Both CBC areas firmly decided to go world top-level as a unique touristic destination.

Krushevo is one of the top world destinations for paragliding. In 2019 it was host to the 16th World Paragliding Championship. The +5000 annual arrivals due to paragliding adventures, put Krusevo as destination on the world travellers' map. At the same time Krushevo, makes actions for innovative tourist actions (Promoting the lake for swimming, kayaking, easy walk around; Promoting many new bicycle trails throught the incredible nature; Adventure park and Bouldering rock; Skiing in winter and securing snow with snow cannons when necessary and using the same skiing track for driving ATVs during summer; Horseback riding through the Krushevo forest, Hiking in the mountains and woods around Krushevo and picking wild strawberries, Visiting the spa center in Panorama Hotel etc.) that are attracting the adventure and family tourists to come throught the whole year.

Elbasan is a vivid testimony of history. Within the city apart from dwellings and shops, Elbasan already contains many history/culture buildings such as churches, monasteries, mosques, and hammams (public baths). Specific potentials for tourism development is Funar which is a forest-rich area with four lakes or reservoirs divided, two within the village Funari and two others hidden behind the mountains that surround it. With a little efforts, this area can be attractively turned into a daily tourism area as the fresh climate, impressive nature and artificial lakes make the best of it.

All this attractions will be promoted with this proposed travel package.

Day-to-day program:

Day 1: Arrival in Krusevo, (Access point Skopje, NMK), local food for diner, and overnight in Krusevo (possibility to stay at Hotel in Krusevo, SPA Hotel, or in a traditional Guest House within the town).





Day 2 – Enjoying outdoors in Krusevo will get you a chance to be active and choose between swimming / kayaking in Krusevo lake, tandem paragliding fly, hiking through the woods or biking through mountainous tracks, visiting the adventure park and / or drive ATVs down the ski terrain. After this adrenaline rush, your energy will be restored with traditional lunch made of local produces in the city centre located restaurant. Here, in Krushevo, you can taste the traditional meal Chomlek, a veal meat pot enriched with peppers, onion, blue plums, wine and spices.

Afternoon can be appointed for a city tour and visit the historical monuments, churches and places, so you learn about the rebellious history of the Krushevo people, and the Ilinden uprising. Visiting the Krusevo landmark Makedonium monument, the symbol of the Macedonian rebellion against the Ottoman Empire at the beginning of the XX century; Visiting the Foundry (Bullet) Musium, Museum of Ilinden rebellion and Krusevo republic, Museum of Nikola Martinoski, visiting the Mechkin Kamen area and thus see the city traditional architecture. This city walk can be sweetened with the local desserts – lokum, or celufki, a dessert made from egg whites and sugar, traditional, crispy, white and delicious. The Lokum and coffee can be served in an authentic setting of an old Krushev house.

Day 3: After entering Albania from Qafe – Thane (Kafasan) border point, a stop at paleo Christian Basilica in Lin (Pogradec), and lunch at a restaurant near Ohrid lake. Then travel to Elbasan. Folk evening, traditional food, costumes, and music and dance. Overnight in Elbasan.

Day 4: Rafting in the Shkumbin River during the first half of the day, lunch at a traditional restaurant. Travel to Funar during the second half of the day, accommodation to local facilities and tents (camping). Local food for dinner. Overnight in Funar.



Day 5: Paragliding, canoeing in Funar lakes, water sports, hiking, fishing, and archery. Local food for lunch. Travel to Elbasan in the evening. Dinner at a traditional restaurant.

Day 6: Travel to Gjinar. Horse riding, hiking, biking, visiting old local churches and natural monuments, and archery. Overnight in Gjinar.

Day 7: Travel back to Elbasan, visit the historical sites of Elbasan (Fortress, basilica, etc.) (optional, depending on time), departure to Tirana, check out point Tirana Airport.