

## **THE ROLE OF ALTERNATIVE FORMS OF TOURISM IN THE PROMOTION OF THE TOURIST LOCALITIES OF SHARR MOUNTAIN**

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### **Abstract**

The basis for the development of alternative forms of tourism is founded on the attractions of natural and anthropogenic origin that the landscape contains.

Sharr Mountain is a set of natural rarities and beauties, each of which represents separate rarities.

A significant place in the paper is occupied by the section dealing with the most important characteristics and values that affect the development of alternative forms of tourism such as geographical and tourist position and traffic connection, geomorphological characteristics, climate characteristics, hydrographic characteristics, flora, and fauna, where special emphasis will be placed on the tourist sites of Sharr Mountain such as Brustovec, Leshnica, Popova Sapka, Ljuboten which have greater potential in the development of alternative forms of tourism in Sharr Mountain.

The natural beauties that these tourist sites contain are quite interesting and represent a great tourist offer.

Given the growing involvement of tourists in various alternative tourism activities, it can be seen that this sector of alternative tourism, as part of the tourism industry, is gaining importance.

That is why this issue is being addressed, and the possibilities for the development of alternative forms of tourism in the Southwest region of the Republic of North Macedonia are being explored.

The Popova Shapka site is the only site that has a tourist infrastructure, which from a historical point of view it can be concluded that this site was closer to the road and had the advantage of being the first to develop as a tourist center.

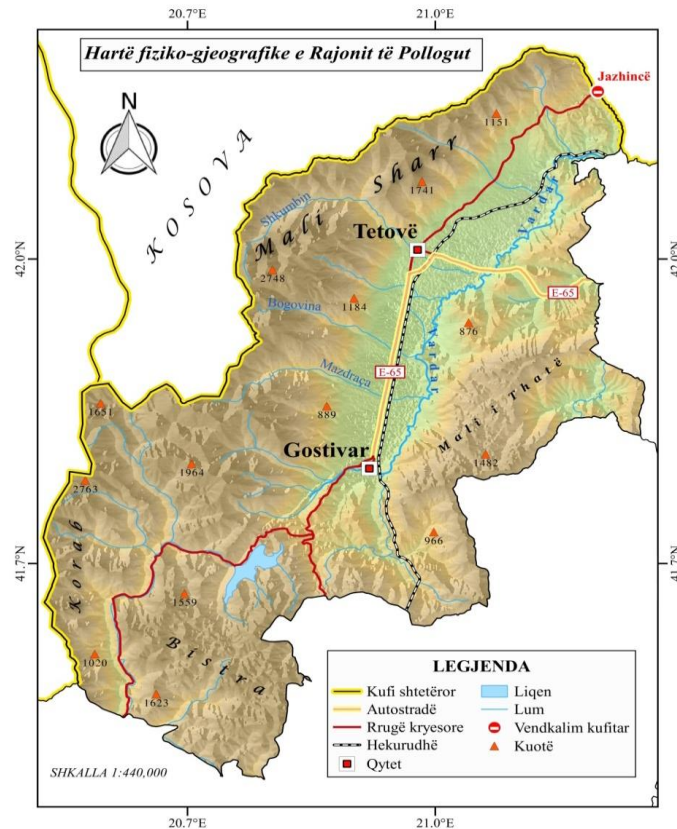
*Keywords:* Sharr Mountain, natural features, tourist sites, alternative tourism.

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### **1. Geo-tourist position and communication**

Sharr Mountain is one of the largest and highest mountain massifs in the Republic of North Macedonia. Sharr Mountain is located in the northwestern part of the Republic of North Macedonia. [9] The massif extends northeast-west-southwest for 80 km (measured along the ridge), with an area of 1600 km<sup>2</sup> and an average ridge height of 2200 m. It starts from the river Lepenec and Kacanicka Gorge in the northeast, in the east the border is determined by the Polog valley, in the southwest the Stirovichka River and the sources of Radika, in the south the source of the river Vardar – Vrutok.

However, it is still a relatively high mountain, which, apart from the miraculous treasures it possesses, also attracts with the immensity of its mass. The general appearance of Sharr is most pronounced on the southeast side, where above the Tetovo valley the mountain rises to a relative height of 2125 m. The peak Ljuboten occupies the most prominent position of the entire mountain range, and the highest peak is Titov Vrv 2748 m. It belongs to the area that is named after her, in the internal zone (which still includes the mountains: Bistra, Stogovo, Karaorman and Galicica) 56.25% of the massif itself belongs to Republic of North Macedonia, 43.12% to the Republic Kosovo, while the rest of only 0.63% to the Republic Albania. [3] In fact, Sharr Mountain is a high mountain, created to admire and at the same time to attract with the immensity of its mass and the wonderful wealth of its features. The Frenchman Ami Boué, who studied Sharr Mountain in particular, compares it in one place to the Pyrenees.



**Figure 1.** Physical-geographical map of Sharr Mountain and Polog valley [Source: H. Xhemaili, 202 ]

[9] The first surveyors of Sharr Mountain were the French geologist Ami Bouet and A. who in 1838 from Tetovo climbed to Kobilica from where through the village of Struzhje disembarked in Prizren. The following 1839 in July, Grisebach with nine locals and one soldier under the direction of a Turkish officer through the village of Stare Selo climbed Ljuboten. In 1877, a team from the military-geographical institute from Vienna resided in Sharr. Famous Balkan Geographers, Jovan Cvijic and Rista Nikolic 1910 from Tetovo through the passage "Sharr" came down to Prizren.

The traffic connection is a major prerequisite for the development of tourism because it allows natural rarities and beauties to become available to modern man, that is, it connects the tourist supply with the tourist demand.

To the foot of Sharr Mountain leads an asphalt road with 18.5 km (from the town of Tetovo to Popova Shapka), which connects the rural settlements, and at the same time can serve as a starting point to all attractive parts of the mountain. The road was built in 1981, making the tourist sites of Sharr Mountain more accessible to visitors.

*1.1. Natural-geographical characteristics as a factor in the development of alternative forms of tourism:* On Sharr Mountain, the appearance of very specific and attractive natural motifs is characteristic. Among them will be the geomorphological, hydrographic, climatic and biogeographical characteristics, and their importance for the development of alternative forms of tourism on this mountain.

*1.1.1. Geomorphological features:* In general, the formation of the Sharr Mountain massif, as part of the Sharr system, was influenced by both Hertzian and Alpine orogeny. However, the structures that were created during Hertzian orogeny for the most part by alpine orogeny, during the tertiary period, have been intensively redesigned and altered.

A large part of the formation of various geomorphological forms and shapes of Sharr Mountain had different geological compositions whose indirect influence on the development of tourism was reflected through the other elements of the natural-geographic complex. [6] On Sharr Mountain, there are spacious undulating surfaces and steep backs, rounded and sharp peaks, flat slopes, and plateaus over which high rocky sections rise. It is only part of the geomorphological contrasts of Sharr Mountain, which other mountains with a unique geological composition do not have. Its mountain range consists mainly of Paleozoic shales, with the destruction of which they compose rounded relief forms and slopes with a slight slope suitable for winter sports activities. On the other hand, high limestone peaks and rock sections suitable for planning and climbing rise above them.

Rock sections are also important for the development of alternative forms of tourism, but also as a significant natural heritage. They are important to increase the demand for active recreation of people, i.e. planning, more precisely its highest degree of mountaineering. On Sharr Mountain, there are numerous and very high-quality spaces for planning mountaineering and extreme forms of tourism.

Fluvial relief forms and shapes are very common on Sharr Mountain. Of these, the most important for ecotourism are of course river valleys, which in some places have a gorge character. There are many such river watercourses on the mountain. They descend from the high parts to the Polog Valley. Their liquid troughs are rocky with a large fall, which led to the construction of several smaller waterfalls on them. The most attractive and largest is the waterfall of Belovishkaka River, known as Dolna Skala (Lower Ladder) at 1,100 m above sea level, and the smaller waterfall Gorna Skala (Upper Ladder) at 1,200 m above sea level.

[4] During the diluvium, Sharr Mountain was affected by intense glaciation, which left deep traces in its relief, ie various glacial shapes important for science and tourism. These are various erosive and accumulative glacial forms, the result of which are numerous cirques, then waves, and moraines. In the interior of Sharr Mountain, more precisely in the part that is separated from the main mountain ridge by the river Pena (known in Albanian as Shkumbini), i.e. its catchment area, the most dominant glacial traces are found on the mountain.

We can summarize that Sharr Mountain with its geomorphological forms, and above all the height, slope, space, and glacial traces, can satisfy even the most refined tourist clientele.

*1.1.2. Climate characteristics:*As for the climate, on Sharr Mountain, there is an interesting climatic feature that is characterized by various micro and macro climatic variations and in which the meteorological elements have their own specific daily and annual impact.

The mountain climate is mostly to be found in Sharr. The average annual temperature is significantly low, and the daily and annual temperature fluctuations are reduced and quite mitigated. According to the data from the meteorological institute that I had, Popova Shapka has an average annual temperature of 5.3 ° C and it is 6 ° C lower than the average annual temperature of the city of Tetovo. Due to the high radiation power of the snow, which is long present in the winter and spring months, the air is exposed to intense cooling. The so-called inversions of the air are also frequent, i.e. the temperature does not decrease with altitude but increases. During inversion, on average, the temperature in Sharr Mountain is 5 ° C higher than in Polog.

The average annual rainfall, measured in the area of Jelak and Sunny Hill (Kodra e Diellit) is over 1,200 mm. Snow cover occurs on average from October and lasts continuously until April, in higher places and until May and June, and there are places where the snow stays throughout the year. On Popova Shapka (Kodra e Diellit), the average height of the snow cover during the ski season is 100-150 cm, and the average number of snow days in this tourist center during the year is 135 days, which is an excellent condition for the development of winter sport tourism. Snow avalanches are rare but not completely excluded. And in the last season (2023/2024) Sharr

Mountain had only 10 days of optimal snow coverage for a normal tourist season and tourism development.

[5] Winds prevail on Sharr Mountain mainly from the west, southwest, and southeast. On terrains and plateaus surrounded by higher peaks, wind speeds are significantly reduced compared to the peaks themselves, where high-speed winds blow, especially in the winter months. Regarding the development of winter tourism, the winds have a negative impact because they blow the snow cover. Numerous peaks that obscure the slopes reduce their speed, thus allowing longer snow retention.

*1.1.3. Hydrographic features:* Sharr Mountain is rich in various hydrographic objects and phenomena, which need to be studied and valorized, which can be very successfully activated by tourists. This primarily refers to the many springs, steep mountain watercourses, and of course the most attractive glacial lakes. [3] There are 39 lakes in Sharr Mountain, of which 25 are permanent and 14 are occasional. Today, 27 lakes have been established on the territory of the Republic of Macedonia, of which 19 are permanent and 8 are occasional glacial lakes.

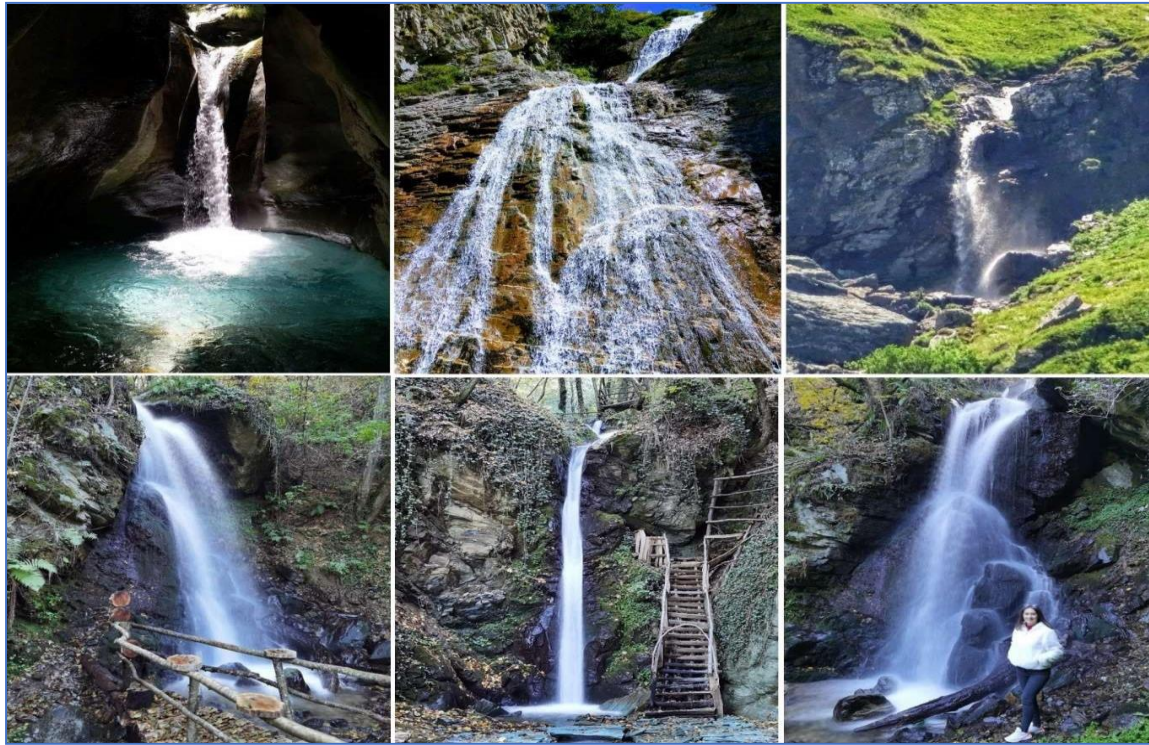
Sharr Mountain has a huge number of springs. The most important are the springs of Tetovo Pena, and the most attractive are the springs of Kamenjanska Reka (Kamjan River) which make up a system of 8 springs, and the whole width of the spring is 28 m, which are located on n. c. from 2,100 m. However, the most famous and strongest source of the Vardar River - Vrutok. (700 m above sea level and 50 m wide).

River Pena is the largest tributary of Vardar in Sharr Mountain. Its length is 29.7 km. Other major rivers on the Shar are Bistrica (Tearechka), the river Belovishte, Porojska river, Mazdracha, Leshnichka, Karanikolska, Brodechka, Vrapchishka, Lubotenska, Bogovinska, Речкаичкака, Vratnichka (Rakita), Kamenjanska and others.

The mineral springs are also present on Sharr Mountain, which are the least used wealth of the mountain. Most of the springs with acid mineral water are above the village Golema Recica (Big Rechica). There are also springs of mineral water in the villages of Dolno Palchishte, Neprosteni, and Leshok. Of course, it is inevitable not to mention the Hisar spa, which the locals call Banjice.

Sharr Mountain, which due to its water wealth belongs to the richest mountains with water, not only in the Republic of North Macedonia, but also on the Balkan Peninsula. There is no doubt that these hydrographic facilities are very attractive and can be activated by tourists.





**Figure 2.** Sharr Mountain Falls [Source: [www.wikipedia.org](http://www.wikipedia.org)]

*1.1.4. Biogeographical features:* The mountain massif is characterized by rich flora and fauna. From the forest resources, several types of forests are represented on Sharr. The region of deciduous vegetation extends in the lower parts and covers about 60% of the slope. This region is mostly composed of oak, beech, and chestnut forests. Beech forests cover an area of about 3,000 ha. The chestnut forest has an altitude of up to 1200 m above sea level. The oak forest is rarer than the others and there is no numerical data for it. Taken as a whole, deciduous vegetation, except through tall trees, is also represented by shrubs and bushes. A relatively narrow zone of conifers is spread over the deciduous belt. In this zone, the tall fir and the spruce are mostly present. Today, unlike in the past, the fir tree is very much suppressed by spruce. High mountain pastures cover an area of about 45,000 ha. Understandably, they are distributed over the coniferous zone. Sharr Mountain is our richest mountain with grass, which grows even to the highest parts of the mountain. The presence of dense, diverse, and juicy grass is a prerequisite for the development of animal husbandry, especially sheep breeding. From the floral flora, on Sharr Mountain, the entzianier is most represented. The fauna is also large with over 44 species of game, for which the natural factors are the most responsible, as well as the weak population.

[9] The flora of Sharr Mountain is extremely rich and according to current data, it counts over 2000 species of vascular plants, which is more than half of the whole of Macedonia. Sharr Mountain is one of the most important Balkan and European centers of high-mountain endemism, which includes relict, endemic-relict, and endemic species. There are about 200 endemic and subendemic plant taxa (species, subspecies, and varieties) on Sharr Mountain. Stenoendemic orophytes (mountain species) that have a tertiary, rarely glacial age; tertiary orophytes (mountain species with tertiary age), and these are most often stenoendemic or subendemic species; glacial species with arcto-alpine distribution (ice age species) that are very rare species on the Balkan Peninsula.

From the animal world, the following species are distinguished: The lynx, which today is naturally rare in Sharr. It lives only in the high forest parts and belongs to the harmful game, because they destroy the useful game, especially the rabbit. Wolves, at higher altitudes, in

summer and autumn, are regular "companions" of sheep herds. In winter they descend to the lower parts and around the villages in search of food. The bears of Sharr Mountain live far from the settlements in dense forests, and occasionally attack domestic animals. Their permanent habitat is hollow trees, pits and grass-covered caves. Wild boars are rare in the Sharr, and like wolves, they descend to the lower reaches in winter, searching for dry leaves and acorns. The roe deer move to the higher mountain zone in summer because they feed on grass. In winter they seek shelter under branched trees and hollows under rocks. The chamois can be seen in the high and inaccessible areas of Sharr. Often, they form groups of about 15 heads. In winter they hide in the beech forest, and in the absence of grass, they feed on the young trees and branches. It is worth mentioning that there is a rock at the foot of Luboten, which is named after the wild goats that often walk in the area around the rock. This rock is called Kozja Karpa or folk, Kozja Stena. From the smaller game of Sharr are found foxes, martens, squirrels, rabbits, wild cats and badgers. Of the birds, the presence of eagles, falcons and hawks is noteworthy. Nightingales, swallows, ravens, sea urchins, etc. also live in the forests. Speaking about the Sharr Mountain fauna, it is inevitable not to emphasize the Shar Mountain, which is an endemic species and pride of Shar Mountain and the Republic of North Macedonia.

[9] With 167 species of butterflies, Sharr Mountain is the richest area of Europe, and there are over 200 species of birds (eagle beard, white-headed beard, suri eagle, grouse). In the mountainous areas there are golden marten, white marten, otter, but also wild cat, lynx, bear and chamois. However, the most famous is the dog called Sharr Mountain, a shepherd dog named after the mountain.

## *1.2. Tourist sites of Sharr Mountain:*

*1.2.1. Tourist sites of Sharr Mountain:* One of the most beautiful and picturesque landscapes of Sharr Mountain is the site of Ljeshnica. It is one of the most spacious areas of the Sharr Mountain and occupies the source part of the Pena River. Its borders extend south from the peak Trpeznica (2,610 m), from where it extends to the peak Turk (2,748 m) and Bakrdan (2,700 m). It stretches north through Kazani, passes through quotas of 2,577 m and 2,559 m descends the rocky sections on Platte (2,396 m) from where it turns west, cutting the valley of the Pena River and through Babasanic it exits the border with the Republic of It takes Kosovo south to Trpeznica. In this space are the attractive spaces of: Karanikolo, Plat, Babasanica, Dolna Leshnica, Goran Lheshnica, Krivo Sija and Gini Beg.



**Figure 3.** The site of Leshnica on Sharr Mountain [Source: [www.wikipedia.org](http://www.wikipedia.org)]

Five ski runs can be traced through this area, with a total displacement of 2,200 m. The best ski runs can be traced through the central part of Curved Neck. [5] Starting from the highest parts of the circus, above the lake at a height of 2,500 m, where the paths are divided to the left and right of the lake and go to the very foot where the rocky sections are obstructed.

[8] The tourist potential that the site of Leshnica contains is quite large and because of these characteristics there is a great potential for the development of several types of alternative forms of tourism, such as: winter sports tourism, mountaineering, ecotourism, camp tourism, summer stationary.

Other types of tourism are not represented due to the lack of access roads and lack of accommodation facilities.

*1.2.2. Tourist site of Brustovets:* This tourist site is named after the highest peak in its entire southern part. The peak of Brustovets has a height of 2,662 m and on the north and south sides it is bounded by shafts and cirques where there are rock sections and siphers, and the other sides are even more leveled and thus have the appearance of rounded mass that is widely provided in the surrounding area. [5] This area is also connected by Rudoka (2,658 m), whose foot contains several cirques, and on it are registered various periglacial relief phenomena, especially on the slopes of Lake Ridge where fossilized rock glacier with a length of up to 1.5 km exist and because of these characteristics tourists and geomorphologists visit it. This section is an open museum of glacial forms.

[8] This locality extends from Terpaznica (2,610 m) in the north to Corgelino (2,629 m) in the south. On the north side of the wide shaft under the peak of Brustovets is the largest carp lake - Bogovinsko Lake, and on the other side of the peak surrounded by Rudoka is the Black Lake. Near Bogovina Lake towards the west is White Lake.

[4] This space allows the tracing of ski trails, especially from the Brustovis peak of 2,662 m. According to A. Stomilov, the total displacement of ski runs is 5,960 m, which has a high probability. However, due to the unavailability of the field for performing winter sports, a more comprehensive analysis of this area has not yet been made.

This tourist site has the opportunity to develop these types of alternative forms of tourism: Winter – sports, summer stationery, excursion, tourism, fishing, hunting, health, and ecotourism.

*1.2.3. Tourist site of Popova Shapka:* In the very heart of the massif of Sharr Mountain at an altitude of 1,700 m lies our oldest and most famous mountain resort Popova Shapka. One of the most beautiful skiing challenges is Popova Shapka, where the very arrival seems to exclude you from the everyday world and takes you to a special winter story. [1] Popova Shapka is a paradise for skiers, one of the oldest winter recreational and mountain centers in the Republic of North Macedonia and the Balkans. Mountain activities began in 1929 with the establishment of the mountaineering company Luboten, and skiing has been developing since 1929 with the establishment of the ski section. [9] The story of the construction of Popova Shapka's home is quite significant and interesting. The foundations of that home are the foundations of the current Popova Shapka ski resort. The home was built in 1934 and upgraded and expanded in 1938.

In the immediate vicinity of Popova Shapka are the sites of Jelak, Leshnica and Ceripashina, which all together increase the attractiveness of this tourist site.

Popova Shapka has exceptionally favorable terrains for skiing and sledding that are connected to a cable car and ski lifts. The ski resort has ski runs of 35 km, three homogenized tracks according to FIS standards, with 9 ski lifts and 2 two-seater ski lifts. Ski runs are suitable for multiple ski disciplines and are especially attractive for recreational skiers.





**Figure 4.** Popova Shapka [Source: www.wikipedia.org]

*1.2.4. Tourist site of Luboten:* The tourist site of Luboten is located in the extreme northeastern part of Sharr Mountain. It covers the peak Luboten (2.499 m) with its foothills. Although it is not the highest peak of Sharr Mountain, due to its distinctive, sharp features and pyramidal shape, it is one of the most beautiful and striking carp peaks.

[2] From a tourist point of view, Luboten is the most famous and earliest visited mountain landscape of Sharr Mountain. With his dominance, he attracted the first mountaineers, scientists, skiers, and nature lovers of Sharr Mountain. Therefore, in 1923, two Luboten amphibians were built, where the first mountaineers spent the night. The first mountain home on Sharr Mountain, and also in the Republic of Macedonia was built on Luboten in 1930.

[8] The home was located at an altitude of 1,700 meters and had three rooms with 15 beds. Today, the home is remodeled and has about 40 beds. If this is where the first tourist movements began, this site is neglected and in the future measures must be taken to revitalize it.

The locality also has opportunities for the development of health tourism due to the mountain climate it possesses. It can be concluded that on this site tourist turnover is realized only from symposium-sport and summer stationary tourism, and the sweet types of tourism can also be developed: picnic, extreme, mountain, fishing, hunting, and ecotourism.

Regarding utilization, this monastery is completely stopped from receiving visitors, which it does on certain conditions and regimes of stay.

## **2. Conclusions**

Sharr Mountain has a wide range of tourist motifs that can valorize and represent a very important tourist attraction. In the abstract and during the process of the whole research ranged all natural conditions that the massive of Sharr mountain for development of many possible tourist localities.

During the process of the research, we have stressed natural characteristics as preliminary conditions for the development of a tourist locality. It has been understood that natural beauties, climate elements, water flows, glacial lakes and many other springs, flora and fauna, the highest summits are considered a huge range of elements that can serve to create a very abundant tourist offer.

What I think is that it should be stimulated to create a tourist chamber within the frame of the municipality that will deal with organizing, and promoting all tourist possibilities that Sharr Mountain offers. It should also attract investments to develop other tourist localities. Besides



Popova Shapka (Sunny Hill) as a locality, Lehsnica is another locality that has more appropriate conditions for tourist infrastructure, there would be even longer skiing tracks because this is enabled by the terrain exposition.

It needs more attempts and cooperation from the government with the locals so that Sharr Mountain to bloom as it used to before.

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