

NATURAL AND CULTURAL VALUES IN THE SOUTHWEST REGION OF THE REPUBLIC OF NORTH MACEDONIA AS A PREREQUISITE FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF ALTERNATIVE FORMS OF TOURISM

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Abstract

Protection of natural wealth means care and maintenance of certain or selected areas, including living or non-living nature, which due to their specific natural values we specifically analyse and value and spatially limit them. Man, as a part of nature and as a major factor in the processes of its transformation, strives through its activities to always use natural and cultural resources. The southwest region is abundant in cultural heritage with a total number of 278 facilities, which date from different periods and are of great potential for the development of alternative forms of tourism.

Every country, region, and area strives for the accelerated development of alternative forms of tourism, at the same time, great attention is paid to the protection of natural and cultural values.

By valorizing the total number of natural and cultural heritage of the region, we can incorporate them to build a rich tourist offer for tourism development.

Keywords: Southwest region, natural and cultural resources, alternative forms of tourism.

1. Introduction

Every country, region and area that strives for the accelerated development of alternative forms of tourism, at the same time, great attention is paid to the protection of natural and cultural values of the space. This is the only reason that most tourists come to a destination just to enjoy and see the unique attractiveness that the region or that country owns. Protection of natural wealth means care and maintenance of certain or selected areas, including living or non-living nature, which due to their specific natural values we specifically analyze and value and spatially limit them. [1] Man, as part of nature and main factor in the processes of its transformation, strives to always use natural resources through his activities because of his needs, while changing natural resources, and thus directly affecting the violation of natural balance.

The natural conditions of the Republic of North Macedonia (geological construction, relief structure, climate characteristics, hydrography, pedological composition) allow it to be counted among the few countries in Europe with rich natural values that allow the development of alternative forms of tourism. It also has a rich cultural heritage that it inherited from the peoples who have been living in these spaces for centuries.

2. Natural and cultural values in the southwest region of the republic of North Macedonia as a prerequisite for the development of alternative forms of tourism

The southwestern region is located in the Southwestern Part of the Republic of North Macedonia, [1] between $20^{\circ}28'48''$ and $21^{\circ}21'36''$ e.g. and $40^{\circ}57'36''$ and $41^{\circ}50'24''$ d.g.l. Therefore, it is a region of extremely favorable geographical location, but also with a high concentration of the most diverse natural and anthropogenic tourist values of world importance. [6] Its total area is 3340 km², with 286 residential areas and a total of 177 398 inhabitants (2021), with 65.6 inhabitants in 1/km². The region borders the Polog Region to the north, the Skopje region to the north-east, the Vardar region to the east, the Pelagoniaregion to the south-east and south, and with the Republic of Albania to the west, where partly this border passes through Lake Ohrid. This region is also of great importance, as through this region, the Republic of North Macedonia enters the Adriatic Sea and through four border crossings, such as the Blace, Chepishite–Trebishte, Cafa San, and St. Naum border crossings.



Map 1. Southwest region of the Republic of North Macedonia
Source: www.freeworldmaps.net

2.1. Natural Heritage: [8] The protection of natural and cultural heritage in the Republic of North Macedonia is regulated by the Law on the Protection of Natural Rarities, the Law on the Protection of Ohrid, Prespa and Dojran Lake, the Law on the Protection of National Parks, the Law on the Protection of Cultural Heritage, and other laws and sublegal enactments governing this area. [2] According to the degree of research and scientific knowledge so far, 265 sites are registered in the Republic of North Macedonia, which according to their characteristics and natural values will be placed under the appropriate protection regime. Several natural heritages in the Southwest region have a major impact on the development of alternative forms of tourism.

[1] The following will list the areas and natural facilities of the Southwest Region.

Table 1. Overview of areas and facilities by protective groups of the Southwest Region

Facility Name	Municipality	State of protection
Galichica	Ohrid, Resen	Protected
Jakupica	Sopishte, Sudenichani, Zelenikovo, Bogomila, Caska, Veles, Samokov, Zhelino, Bervenica	Suggestions
Strazha	Kichevo	Suggestions
Osoj	Ohrid	Suggestions
Krushevo	Kichevo	Suggestions
Zajashka Reka	Kichevo	Suggestions
Studencishta	Ohrid	Suggestions
Studencanski Izvori	Vevchani	Protected
Vevchansko Ezero (Vevchan Lake)	Vevchani	Suggestions
Gipsana Peshtera Alchia	Debar	Suggestions
Gorna Slatinska Peshtera	MakedonskiBrod	Protected
Dab	Plasnica	Suggestions
Dabova steblo	MakedonskiBrod	Suggestions
Dabova steblo	Struga-Dologozhda	Suggestions
Dabova steblo	Struga	Suggestions
Dobovjani	Struga-Veleshta	Suggestions
Duvalo	Ohrid-Kosel	Protected
Ala	Vevchani	Suggestions
Zmejovica	MakedonskiBrod	Suggestions
Kosten	Struga	Suggestions
Krapa	MakedonskiBrod	Suggestions
Macedonian Dab	Ohrid	Protected
Oreoec	MakedonskiBrod	Suggestions
Ostrovo	Ohrid	Suggestions
Ohrid Lake	Ohrid-Struga	Protected
_Peshna	MakedonskiBrod	Suggestions
Samoska Dupka Cave	Ohrid	Suggestions
Jaorec Cave	Ohrid	Suggestions
Kamenolom Cave	Kichevo	Suggestions
Utova Dupka Cave	Drugovo	Suggestions
Kalina Dupka Cave	Drugovo	Suggestions
Gincheica Cave	Drugovo	Suggestions

Pitran	Plasnica	Suggestions
Platan	Struga	Suggestions
Platan-Chinar	Ohrid	Protected
Lake Podgorechko	Vevchani	Suggestions
Slansko	MakedonskiBrod	Suggestions
Tajmishte	Zajas-Kichevo	Suggestions

Source: Spatial Plan of the Republic of Macedonia, 2004 and processed by the author

The data obtained from the table can be concluded that the region has great potential for natural values, so [2] special attention in the protection of natural rarities should also be paid to the way, type, and volume of construction provided for in protected spaces to avoid or overcome collisions and collisions with incompatible functions.

To this end, observance of the following principles is necessary:

- Preserving the dominant characteristics of the existing natural state;
- Optimal protection of spaces with exceptional natural values;
- Improving the values of natural heritage;
- Minimum management and construction of technical infrastructure in spaces with natural values;
- Rational construction of recreational infrastructure and
- Locating risky functions and content outside in sensitive natural ecosystems.

Thanks to the rich potential of the Southwest region, it represents a special entirety of interest of values, not only of national, but also of international interest. This section separates Ohrid as a separate whole, the heritage of which is also registered within the Witness frameworks. Lake Ohrid, as well as the beautiful city of Ohrid thanks to their wealth in 1980, was declared a UNESCO World Heritage Site. [7] Its importance was also confirmed in 2010 when NASA and the International Astronomical Union decided that one of the lakes of Saturn's moon Tita should be named "Lake Ohrid".

[1] Lake Ohrid is one of the oldest lakes in Europe, surrounded by ancient roads and settlements that have survived throughout history. Natural and cultural history in this special place intertwined over time, creating an exceptional heritage with its specificities that count it in world heritage and as such should be preserved and transferred to future generations. [3] Lake Ohrid has long been known as a superlative natural phenomenon. With a geological and biological history of 1.3 million years, it is distinguished as the oldest natural lake in Europe and one of the oldest lakes in the world. The lake's watershed supports equally rich and significant biodiversity and several endemic species. From a scientific point of view, this aquatic ecosystem is among the most important water ecosystems, such as Lake Baikal and Tanganyika.

This superlative natural phenomenon is distinguished by the following exceptional universal value:

- With the highest average depth of 155 meters, Lake Ohrid is the deepest lake not only on the Balkan Peninsula but also in Europe, but the 14th in the world;
- It is the last remnant of the ancient water region of the Eurasian continent before the Ice Age and according to its geological and biological history is among the oldest lakes in Europe;

- It is an exceptional hotspot of biodiversity of global importance. With 212 endemic species of flora and fauna and an area of 358.2 km², it is probably the most diverse lake in the world, in terms of represented endemic species per unit area. Living fossils and endemic species developed as the only result of geographical insulation and the uninterrupted unfurl of biological activity. This endemism of Lake Ohrid covers snails, flickering worms, a number of algae and diatom relics, lake sponges, algae, fish, as well as 87 bird species. Remnants of vegetation are also present in swampy vegetation of glacial origin, as the only example of the Balkan Peninsula, as well as in the aquatic plant world;
- The absence of the main stages of glaciation in the Pleistocene created conditions for certain ecosystems (especially cave and aquatic ecosystems) and fauna elements that are part of these ecosystems to survive over long periods. Ancient groups (relic species of fauna) spread through an evolution process where two or more genetically independent species (speciation) are formed, resulting in numerous local endemic species.

[3] Several natural value sites have been identified in the Ohrid region as a world heritage site and which influence the development of alternative forms of tourism, they are:

- St. Virgin Mary Kalishta - subaltrian sources;
- Kalishta – the only natural habitat of the yellow water-lily (*Nuphar lutea*) on Lake Ohrid;
- Podmolje- the most common reed belt (*Phragmites australis*) on Lake Ohrid, a natural habitat of endangered bird species and carp spawning ground;
- Mazia– revitalized natural habitat of the yellow water lily (*Nuphar lutea*), carp spawning ground and habitat and bird nesting ground;
- Studencishko Blato - macrofit vegetation and fertilization ground of carp fish;
- Veli-Dab - subaltrian sources, trout fertility and biodiversity of benthos fauna;
- Velja-Pesh - subaltrian sources, trout fertility and biodiversity of benthos fauna;
- St. Peter - coastal and sublacustrian sources, trout spawning ground and biodiversity of benthos fauna;
- St. Naum Springs – the most tasked source of Lake Ohrid, spawning trout and carp fish and biodiversity of benthos fauna.

[1] The National Park Galicica (1958) is also a protective area of the Southwest Region. Its spaces are characterized by a very rich and diverse plant and animal world, but the greatest emphasis is the headquarters of the eleven relics and endemics that meet right here. The greatest interest of all is shown by the concentration of butterflies in such a small space, i.e. over 1644 species.

In addition to these protected spaces, the protection of others, namely Jakupica National Park (proposal plan), the Sini Biroj, Pesochnata Reka (Sand River)-Debarce, Krushino-Kichevo, etc. are planned.

Most of such protected spaces and facilities are not signalled and put into operation, which means that it is necessary to activate them in the direction of their affirmation and use not only for scientific purposes but also as cultural presentation and recreational activity, especially for alternative tourism.

2.3. *Cultural Heritage* : The Republic of North Macedonia has a rich real cultural heritage, with outstanding cultural, historical, and artistic values, which confirms the existence, continuity, and identity of the people living in the country. [1] The data recorded in the state organization responsible for the protection of cultural heritage and its regional units are registered and recorded in the Republic of North Macedonia. The most present, the real cultural heritage discovered so far are archaeological sites—4,260, 88 of which are of scientific interest during archaeological excavations. [2] Of these, 1,726 churches and monasteries with over 150,000 m² fresco painting, 1,213 buildings of old urban and rural architecture, 47 towers, fortresses and bridges, 1,026 monuments and memorials, 126 buildings of Islamic architecture, 24 sheets and other historical, urban-architectural units, 32 commercial buildings and several other types of buildings and real estate.

The real cultural heritage is located everywhere on the territory of the Republic of Northern Macedonia, but more significant areas are distinguished: Ohrid-Struga area with the highest concentration of cultural monuments, the Skopje region, the Pelagonia region, etc. Much of the real estate cultural heritage, about 45% (RNM), is located in rural settlements and hill-mountain areas, which are completely or partially abandoned, which significantly complicates their protection and use.

[1] The list of non-recent cultural monuments is drawn up based on data from the central register, municipal registers, and individual solutions for proclamation, i.e. determining the property of a cultural monument. Most monuments have been registered in the following municipalities: Ohrid with 69 monuments, Struga with 30 monuments then municipalities with fewer monuments are Makedonski Brod with 8, Centar Zhupa with 20 monuments (churches, monasteries and archaeological sites), and more.

The long historical continuity of the Southwest region and the exchange of cultures between East and west formed a special identity of this small territory as it does not exist in the wider Balkan space. [1] The southwestern region has several cultural heritages, more important: the historical centers of the cities of Ohrid and Struga with their architectural-urban matrix, several coastal settlements near Lake Ohrid, over 250 archaeological sites covering over 5,000 years, early Christian spiritual centers and monasteries, byzantine and Ottoman buildings, the Gulf of Bones, etc. A prehistoric palafitte settlement with a time affiliation of late bronze and early iron weather has been discovered at the site of Ploca-Miqov Grad (The Mičov City Plate), and during previous research, 6,000 wooden stake residues were recorded in the waters at the bottom of the lake, at a depth of 3 to 5 meters, which were probably a common wooden platform on which twenty prehistoric residential buildings operated,

also built of wood. [5] Previous archaeological underwater activities have established the settlement's dimension an underwater archaeological square network has been installed and excavations have been carried out on several research fields. Numerous bronze-dope and iron time artifacts were collected, mainly fragmented and entire ceramic pots, stone and flint objects, less bronze, with a multitude of fragments of animal bones, including those that served as tools. The Locality of Ploca Micov Grad in the Bay of Bones is now an attractive museum complex that has several contents: a reconstructed palafitte settlement over the waters of the lake, Roman castrum that is canned, restored, and presented on the highest plateau of the Gradishte Hill, an accessible facility with museum showcases and an underwater tourism realization facility.



Picture 1. Bay of Bones in Ohrid

Source: www.wikipedia.org

[1] The Southwest region is also the seat of the oldest Slavic monastery (St. Panteleimon) and home to more than 800 Byzantine-style icons of world fame painted between the 14th and 14th centuries. Ohrid architecture is the best preserved and most complete collection of urban architecture in this part of Europe. Slavic culture spread from Ohrid to other parts of Europe. [5] Ohrid is home to one of the oldest Slavic monasteries, founded by St.

Kliment Ohridski in the 9th century (considered the first "University" in the Balkans), which spread literacy, education, and culture throughout the ancient Slavic world. Archaeological research has so far discovered seven basilicas in the old part of Ohrid, dating back to the period between the 4th and early 6th centuries, and contain architectural and decorative properties that undoubtedly indicate the strong rise and glory of ancient Ohrid (Lichnidos). The Monastery Complex of St. Constantine and Helena is also of great interest. Archangel Michael (St. Naum) on the southern part of the Ohrid coast, the monastery complex of St. Bogorodica Zahumska -Zaum, at the v. Trpejca, the monastery complex of St.

Virgin Mary (Sh. Maria) – Kalishta on the west coast of Lake Ohrid and St. Jovan Bogoslov– Kaneo (Natural and Cultural Heritage of Ohrid region, 2019-2028), also the most significant are the settlements of the Mouth of Drim (Ustanadrim) and Vrbnik in Lake Ohrid, Church meadows in the village of Vranishta, the localities St. Ilija in the v. Delogozhda, Plachikrusha in the v. Dobovjani, Cemetery in the v. Koroshishta, as well as the three early Christian basilicas in the villages of Radolishta, Oktisi and Tashmarunishte. These basilicas have unique floor mosaics from the 4th–6th century (www. struga.gov.mk).

Having in mind the rich cultural-historical, architectural, archaeological, and ethnological values that give the region specificity, uniqueness, representativeness, and authenticity, with their preservation, diversity, and integrity, opportunities have been created for the region to be a good of the highest national importance with universal value for humanity and its history, culture, art and science.

[3] The cultural and artistic values of the Southwest region that are protected well with all their attributes recognized worldwide are:

- Painting: mosaics, fresco painting, icons, wall decorations, illuminations of manuscripts, graphics, paintings on canvas;
- Sculpting and carving: sculptures, stone plastic, iconostas, bishop's thrones and other church mobiliary, wooden carved decorations; Plan for the management of the natural and cultural heritage of the Ohrid region 2019-2018 129
- Applied arts: items of ceramics, glass, wood, metal, textiles, leather, paper and various other works of traditional artisans;
- Intangible cultural heritage: traditional customs and religious and cultural manifestations.

[4] Cultural heritage should necessarily have treatment of the lower-level spatial planning process, to provide planning conditions for their protection, the achievement of their cultural function, spatial integration and the active use of cultural monuments for appropriate purpose in the small farm and services and in the overall development of the region.

3. Conclusion

The South-west region is a region of extremely favourable geographical location, but also with a high concentration of the most diverse natural and cultural tourist values of world importance. The region represents the most developed tourist space after the Skopje region in the Republic of North Macedonia. This is convincingly shown by the latest data on tourist visits and stays. Tourist turnover is the majority of products related to natural and cultural tourism, as 54.3% visited the region for a "holiday and cultural heritage visit", according to data.

Tourism as a multidimensional and multifactorial phenomenon has become a global phenomenon that develops at an unprecedented pace. Modern tourism development shows specificities that are in the direction of expanding tourism demand. Trends to expand demand are moving towards increasing the quantity of activities and services in tourist offers, but also improving the quality of the services provided.

The acceleration of tourism development in the Southwest region is thanks to GIS access and mapped zones and centers for the development of alternative forms of tourism, the marking is a function of improving visibility, as well as awareness of tourists involved in activities related to alternative forms of tourism.

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