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# NATURAL AND CULTURAL HERITAGE OF THE OHRID REGION WORLD HERITAGE SITE

## REFLECTION ON THE MANAGEMENT SYSTEM

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Ohrid Region is located on the shore of Lake Ohrid in the Republic of Macedonia, in South-East Europe. It is shared between Macedonia and Albania, while its catchment extends well into the Lake Prespa. Dating from ancient geological eras, Lake Ohrid mesmerizes with its outstanding natural beauty and it represents an authentic museum of living endemic and relict species of flora and fauna. Possessing all these features, its significance for global science is exceptional.

In this special place, natural and cultural history has intertwined through time to create truly exceptional heritage which led to placing it under strong legal protection, dating back to the Ottoman period. The protection of the region was further strengthened in 1979, when the UNESCO World Heritage Committee decided to inscribe the Ohrid Region on the World Heritage List for its Outstanding Universal Value (OUV) as a natural heritage site under criterion (iii), which is presently criterion (vii), and in 1980 this was amended with the criteria for cultural heritage (i), (iii) and (iv), thus making it a mixed World Heritage Site.<sup>1</sup>

The inscribed property includes the area that stretches out on the territory of three municipalities: Ohrid, Struga and Debarca. In particular, it includes the historic city of Ohrid, the town of Struga, several fishermen's settlements on the shore, early Christian spiritual centers and monasteries, protected monuments from the Ottoman period, as well as over 250 archaeological sites covering a period of more than 5,000 years, this way representing one of the oldest living heritage sites in Europe. The long historic continuity in this region has created natural and cultural heritage of outstanding universal values that surpass national boundaries and are equally important for the current and fu-

ture generations of the entire humanity.

When it comes to the management of the World Heritage property, one of the challenges for a successful management and conservation is the establishment of balance between the contemporary needs and preserving of the unique natural and cultural values (including the OUV) of the region. This inevitably requires cooperation and communication of all involved institutions, stakeholders, municipalities and local communities, which have to negotiate different aspects and organize public debates in view of establishing a long-term protection and sustainability of the property.

Although, there is a strong legislation and an institutional framework to safeguard this World Heritage property, research has shown that one of the critical issues identified is the lack of focus on people and their livelihoods in addition to the issues of safeguarding heritage values. This requires, in the first place, to understand the values of the property, including interlinkages between nature, culture and people, and to work towards the sustainable development of the region.

## **HERITAGE MANAGEMENT AND PROTECTION IN THE OHRID REGION**

The World Heritage property "Natural and Cultural heritage of the Ohrid region" is managed by two Ministries, the Ministry of Culture and the Ministry of Environment and Physical Planning of the Republic of Macedonia. The municipalities Ohrid, Struga and Debarca, are responsible for the urban planning of the territory. The Ministry of Environment and Physical Planning, as a responsible state authority in charge of protection of Lake Ohrid, in cooperation with the Ohrid Hydrobiological Institute, is continuously monitoring the ecosystem of the lake and conduct various research activities. The Ministry of Culture, through the

<sup>1</sup> Authors note: various resources available on: <http://whc.unesco.org/en/list/99>

Directorate for Cultural Heritage Protection, is responsible for the maintenance, conservation and revitalization of the built heritage.

Because of the importance and concentration of the cultural heritage in this region, a special National Institution for its protection was established: the Institute for Protection of Monuments of Culture and Museum –Ohrid (1973), which in coordination with the National Conservation Centre, has the authority regarding the protection of cultural heritage.

The Natural and Cultural Heritage of the Ohrid region has a several layers of legal protection. The protection of cultural heritage is regulated by the *Law on Cultural Heritage Protection* and several by-laws, and the protection of natural heritage is regulated by the *Law on Nature Protection*.

The *Law on Proclamation of the Monumental Ensemble Old Town Nucleus of Ohrid as Cultural Heritage of Special Significance* foresees that the Old Town Nucleus of Ohrid will be managed by the National Institution for the Protection of Monuments of Culture and Museum – Ohrid, while in the name of the local community – by the Ohrid Municipality.

The rights and obligations of the Republic of Macedonia and of the municipalities Ohrid, Struga and Debarca, as well as the rights and obligations of all legal and physical persons concerning the management of the world natural and cultural heritage of the Ohrid region, are determined with the *Law on Management of the World Natural and Cultural Heritage of the Ohrid Region*. In 2017, according to the Article 9 and 10 of the Law, a Committee for management of the natural and cultural heritage of the Ohrid region, as a management structure for control of the development pressures and interventions on the property was established.

One of the latest management docu-

ments that has been prepared by the Directorate for Protection of Cultural Heritage as the coordinative body, is the *Draft Management Plan for the Natural and Cultural Heritage of the Ohrid Region 2016-2025*. This Plan provides the vision for the future of the World Heritage property, defines the current problems and challenges and presents a review of the main goals, strategies and activities related with the protection, conservation and planned development of the region. Together with the implementation instruments, it aims at preserving the universal value and outstanding importance of the region, as a benefit to future generations, simultaneously striving to preserve its integrity and authenticity.

In 2016, in accordance with the provisions stipulated in the *Law on Proclamation of the Old Town nucleus of Ohrid as a Cultural Heritage of special Significance, a Plan for Integral Protection of the Old Town Nucleus of Ohrid* was prepared by the National Institution – Institute for Protection of Monuments of Culture and Museum – Ohrid and the Local self-government of Ohrid Municipality. This Plan provides the special conditions for permanent preservation of the monumental ensemble and to remove anything that would endanger its values, and also the purpose of coordinated implementation of joint initiatives, actions or projects for protection, arrangement, use and revitalization of the monumental ensemble of the Old Town nucleus of Ohrid.

Since one third of Lake Ohrid is shared with Albania, various international transboundary management projects have been implemented to enhance the bi-lateral cooperation for the protection of the region during recent years. One of the pioneering projects was the *Lake Ohrid Conservation Project* (1996), with an objective to promote a cost-effective solution for transboundary natural and resource management and pollution problems and to provide a basis for



The Old Town  
Nucleus of Ohrid  
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the sustainable economic development of the watershed. Following the success of the *Lake Ohrid Conservation Project*, the Prime Ministers of Macedonia and Albania signed the *Agreement for the Protection and Sustainable Development of Lake Ohrid and its Watershed* in June 2004. This Agreement, ratified by the parliaments of both countries in 2005, established a bilateral Lake Ohrid Watershed Committee, and a Secretariat as the coordinative body of their work. Another international agreement is the establishment of the “Ohrid-Prespa” Transboundary Biosphere Reserve under UNESCO’s Man and the Biosphere Programme in 2014.

The latest international and still on-going project is the joint EU-UNESCO project called “Towards strengthened governance of the shared natural and cultural heritage of the Lake Ohrid region” which is in its final phase. The project is building a participatory process for integrated management planning and the preparation of a dossier by the Albanian authorities to extend the World Heritage property to the Albanian part of the Lake Ohrid. It aims to profile the transboundary area by assessing its values and opportunities for sustainable development, and to improve capacities for the effective management of the natural and cultural heritage in the Lake Ohrid region. The Project is implemented by UNESCO World Heritage Centre in cooperation with UNESCO Venice

Office/Antenna Office in Sarajevo together with the project partners The Government of Albania, the Government of the Republic of Macedonia, IUCN, ICOMOS and ICCROM.<sup>2</sup>

### **THREATS AFFECTING THE WORLD HERITAGE PROPERTY**

The legislative framework for the protection of the Ohrid Region is granted through several laws and by-laws in accordance with national and international regulatory standards. Although the legislative arrangements are adequate, there are conditions that hinder effective implementation. Having in mind the fact that the Ohrid region is both a World Natural and Cultural Heritage property, it is of outmost importance to preserve its authenticity and integrity and to protect its natural and cultural values in a proper and sustainable way.

Among the threats affecting the general values of the Ohrid region are the inadequate communication among all entities involved in the management process, lack of respect for the established legal mechanisms, the scarce awareness of stakeholders in the process of protection and implementation of the World Heritage values, insufficient investment in the educational

<sup>2</sup> Authors note: various resources available on: <http://whc.unesco.org/en/lake-ohrid-region/>

system to train future staff, and unprofessional repair of the sacred and residential buildings by their owners. In recent times, there are increased local development pressures, which are taking their toll on the environment and heritage values of the Ohrid region. The lack of engagement of the local authorities in the conservation and management of the property is also representing a threat.

One of the biggest challenges is that responsibilities over the site are distributed among different local and national institutions that work separately, turning heritage management into a bureaucratic and time-consuming process. In terms of management of the property, it continues to be carried out separately by the cultural and natural institutions. The natural values of the site are under pressure from unsustainable use of resources, especially fishing, but also from unsustainable tourism deve-

lopment in the entire region, accompanied by low awareness among the decision-makers and lack of integrated urban planning. Uncontrolled constructions along the lake shore have negative impacts on the lake and the landscape. This excessive urbanization of the area directly influences the living conditions of both flora and fauna and impacts the values of the eco-system.

Cultural heritage is a significant component in the overall values of the Ohrid region. The recognizable architecture of the urban matrix of the old urban nucleus of the town of Ohrid and the layers of historical periods confirm the role of immovable cultural heritage and the need of its proper protection. However, despite the large number of conserved and restored buildings, there are still many factors that are threatening the sustainable use of cultural heritage. Among the threats affecting the cultural heritage are the insufficient level of awareness on the architectural and artistic values of the built cultural heritage, unadjusted development concepts which disrespect the limitations set by the protection criteria, inexistence of financial assistance for the owners of protected buildings and insufficient professional staff in the institutions for heritage protection.

Pressures on the environment increase when socioeconomic conditions are difficult and unemployment rates are high. There are many causes for socioeconomic problems in the Ohrid region, but solving of these problems is central to healthy communities and healthy environment.

#### **CHANGES WITHIN THE HERITAGE MANAGEMENT SYSTEM TO PROMOTE INTEGRATED APPROACH**

Management approaches must accommodate the shift to a wider, more inclusive approach to heritage and to a greater emphasis on community engagement. In the case

Small narrow street  
of the Old Town  
Nucleus in Ohrid  
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of the Ohrid region, a **people-centered** or “bottom-up” approach to heritage management should be adopted so that the interlinkages between nature, culture and people are acknowledged and managed in a holistic and integrated way. In 2001, the World Heritage Committee has adopted four Strategic Objectives - *Credibility, Conservation, Capacity-building and Communication*, to which was added a fifth in 2007 - *Community*. The Strategic Objective “*To enhance the role of Communities in the implementation of the World Heritage Convention*” (UNESCO, 2016), known as the ‘5<sup>th</sup> C’, underscores the need to respect and support communities to be involved in World Heritage processes. Communities contain capacities and assets that outlast political or professional structures and complement expert knowledge and skills. A people-centered approach harnesses these capacities in order to offer long-term conservation and co-management for the good of heritage and for the good of the community.

Regarding the Ohrid region, we do not get the impression that people, that is, the local self government in this region, have been consulted in any way by the competent authorities. Their biggest engagement is in urban planning, where they must comply and integrate the immovable cultural heritage in the new plans. A participatory approach that fails to engage all interest groups, particularly those who are often marginalized, can actually do more damage than good.

Furthermore, the sustainable development paradigm that relates to heritage, which talks about heritage, should contribute to the sustainable development of society. Unfortunately, the spectrum of possibilities for the use of heritage in the Ohrid region is quite limited by the local government or the local community. It is mainly being used as a resource for the promotion of tourism and a stage for cultural, artistic

and outdoor events during the summer season. Heritage needs to take on a more dynamic role where it can produce results beyond its confines, reaching equilibrium<sup>3</sup> with the community, which will see more reasons to safeguard it.

The rights of individuals and communities associated with World Heritage Sites matter as an integral part of the World Heritage Convention’s approach and contribution to the 5<sup>th</sup> ‘C’, social equity and sustainable development. Recent research regarding the Ohrid Region, suggests that a great part of the local population is not aware of their rights to participate in the processes, and thus, there is low awareness of the significance and importance of their own cultural and natural heritage. Hence, it is necessary to conduct various educational programs to raise the public awareness of the essence of the protected property, its history, and its values, as well as organize public debates where the people’s voice would be heard. If there would be adequate training for the local population, it will simultaneously increase their awareness of the necessity to deal with issues affecting the heritage. Therefore, they will become equal partners in the process, providing long-term protection and monitoring of the World Heritage property, as well as strengthened capacities, which are apparently among the priorities and a great necessity in this sector in the Republic of Macedonia.

The diverse outputs communities can bring to the heritage process can be vital to the well-being of the World Heritage property and the protection of its values. As mentioned previously, the communities in the Ohrid region have very little role, if any, in the heritage management. Therefore, it is out of utmost importance to strengthen their voice within the heritage sector, through all components of the management system mentioned above or by making reforms in the heritage sector to revise

the existing management system on a state and local level, as well on site level.

When it comes to reforms in the institutional framework in a way to enable more inclusive management approach, it has to be considered whether the institutional framework is transparent and accessible to the public. This is vital to favor accountability and staff motivation and to facilitate participatory approaches, among other things. When it comes to the resources, joining forces with others and promoting partnerships can increase resources (enhancing publicity and consolidating fundraising initiatives) and improving their deployment to deal with the particular challenges of the World Heritage property.

In order to implement these recommendations, it is necessary to make legal changes in the existing legal framework that regulates the protection and management of the natural and cultural heritage of the Ohrid region.

#### **WITH A PARTICIPATORY APPROACH TO A LONG-TERM PROTECTION**

Integrated management of the natural and cultural heritage of the Ohrid region, through a joint coordinating body and joint management planning are urgently needed in order to ensure that the values of the property are conserved. Given the vulnerability of the property related to the excessive urban development and impacts of the tourism, the management requirements practices must be put into place. This may include in the first place, ensuring adequate financial and human resources for management as well as effective management planning and proper law enforcement.

Heritage management in Macedonia is seen as a responsibility of the central government. Local governments or municipalities are minimally involved in heritage-related processes. It would be desirable to

make changes in the organizational structure of the municipalities, so the protection and management of the World Heritage will be decentralized by creating specialized departments within the municipalities. They should be equipped with appropriate staff in the relevant field to tackle the everyday challenges. This will lead to an allocation of more funds from the municipal budget, resulting in a responsible management of the property, as well as a higher appreciation of heritage in general. In order to implement these practices and methods, it is first necessary to make legal changes in the existing legal framework that regulates the protection and management of the World Heritage property.

Through analysis of the laws that are of interest to the protection and management of the Ohrid Region, primarily the *Law on Protection of Cultural Heritage*, it has been recognized that the role of the local government and the local community is almost absent or at least extremely small. The special law adopted for the protected urban nucleus of the town of Ohrid, is simply full of restrictions for the local community in terms of the use and management of the protected property. There is a need for legislative changes that will lower or eliminate these barriers, in a way that will ensure a more direct participation of the local community and the local authorities. This can be regulated by amending new articles in the laws which address the protection of the World Heritage property and the *Law on Local Self-Government*. In addition, it could share the tasks and responsibilities with the competent institution for conservation work, where the professional staff at their disposal could educate and train local people to work in this field. If these recommendations are not observed, the abyss between them will only increase, the mistrust and resentment will grow, and heritage will suffer to an irreversible extent.

It becomes clearer that heritage and its inextricable link to people should be recognized. Consequently, communities should be engaged in the conservation and management of heritage as this brings them a reinforced sense of identity and belonging. Recent work, including training courses for heritage practitioners, has been undertaken by ICCROM and other partners, on engaging the communities in the conservation of Nature and Culture.<sup>3</sup>

The complexity of the heritage management system in the Ohrid region requires innovative governance models able to deal with a multitude of management objectives in the broader transboundary Lake Ohrid region with a clear focus on the multiple heritage values of the property, recognized by several international and national designations. One of the key questions which can improve the World Heritage management system is the inter-institutional and inter-sectoral collaboration and an interdisciplinary approach. Cooperation between the cultural and natural sectors is essential, and the capacities of the site management must be strengthened in order to effectively

<sup>3</sup> Authors note: More information available on: <http://www.iccrom.org/priority-areas/living-heritage/>

protect both the cultural and natural values of the property. Effective integration and implementation of planning processes at various levels, cross-sectoral collaboration, community participation and transboundary conservation are all preconditions for the successful long-term management of Lake Ohrid region.

Lastly, it is truly a great privilege to have the status of World Heritage and to be among the elite of sites with universal natural and cultural values, one of the 1073 places in the world whose values belong to the entire humankind. This privilege is even greater since the Ohrid region is one of the 35 areas in the world included on the World Heritage List as a mixed site that equally possesses both natural and cultural universal values. However, at the same time this status implies a great responsibility and obligation of the entire social community to protect and preserve the globally acknowledged and verified universal values. Therefore, regardless of the fact if a resident owns a protected building or it is in the hands of the state, the care for the irreplaceable World Heritage is a responsibility of every individual and everyone should take care and look after it with great respect. Thus, our roots, our identity, will continue to exist for the present and future generations. •

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Lake Ohrid, Struga  
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