

UNIVERSITY OF LJUBLJANA
SCHOOL OF ECONOMICS AND BUSINESS

MASTER`S THESIS

**AN ANALYSIS OF THE IMPACT OF THE WORLD HERITAGE
STATUS ON SUSTAINABLE TOURISM DEVELOPMENT: THE
CASE OF OHRID**

Ljubljana, November 2024

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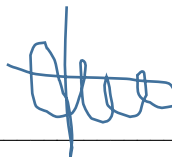
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ABSTRACT

Sustainable tourism development is even more challenging for destinations which are World Heritage (WH) sites. The purpose of this thesis is to investigate and analyse the impacts of the WH status on the sustainable tourism development of the destination of Ohrid, from stakeholders' perspective. For primary data collection, a qualitative research approach was applied, by using semi-structured interviews. In this research, eight stakeholders from the governmental sector, private sector and NGOs were included. The main findings revealed that although the WH status has many positive impacts in all aspects of sustainability (economic, environmental, socio-cultural), it is not a crucial factor in achieving sustainable tourism development in Ohrid. This issue should be addressed on a local level. With improved governance efficacy, redefined tourism planning and policy, enhanced stakeholder cooperation and increased awareness, the negative impacts of tourism will be minimised. Only in this way, the natural and cultural heritage of Ohrid will be preserved, and tourism will continue to benefit the industry and the local community. The thesis findings provide valuable insights into stakeholders' perspectives and add to the knowledge of sustainable tourism development and the WH status impacts. It may contribute to the formulation of more effective tourism policies and the enhancement of management practices in Ohrid and other WH sites.

KEY WORDS: sustainable tourism; tourism impacts; World Heritage status; stakeholder's perception

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS



POVZETEK

Trajnostni razvoj turizma je še večji izziv za destinacije svetovne dediščine. Namen te diplomske naloge je raziskati in analizirati vplive ki jih ima status svetovne dediščine na trajnostni turistični razvoj destinacije Ohrid, z vidika deležnikov. Za primarno zbiranje podatkov je bil uporabljen kvalitativni raziskovalni pristop z uporabo polstrukturiranih intervjujev. V to raziskavo je bilo vključenih osem deležnikov iz vladnega sektorja, zasebnega sektorja in nevladnih organizacij. Glavne ugotovitve so pokazale, da čeprav ima status svetovne dediščine številne pozitivne vplive v vseh vidikih trajnosti (ekonomski, okoljski, družbeno-kulturni), ni ključen dejavnik pri doseganju trajnostnega razvoja turizma v Ohridu. To vprašanje je treba obravnavati na lokalni ravni. Z izboljšano učinkovitostjo upravljanja, na novo opredeljenim načrtovanjem in politiko turizma, okrepljenim sodelovanjem deležnikov in večjo ozaveščenostjo bodo negativni vplivi turizma zmanjšani.

na minimum. Samo na ta način bo ohranjena naravna in kulturna dediščina Ohrida, turizem pa bo še naprej koristil industriji in lokalni skupnosti. Ugotovitve diplomske naloge zagotavljajo dragocen vpogled v perspektive deležnikov in prispevajo k znanju o trajnostnem razvoju turizma in vplivih statusa svetovne dediščine. Lahko prispeva k oblikovanju učinkovitejših turističnih politik in izboljšanju upravljaljskih praks v Ohridu in drugih območjih svetovne dediščine.

KLJUČNE BESEDE: trajnostni turizem, vplivi turizma, status svetovne dediščine, percepcija deležnikov

CILJI TRAJNOSTNEGA RAZVOJA



TABLE OF CONTENTS

1	INTRODUCTION.....	1
2	CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK FOR SUSTAINABLE TOURISM	4
2.1	Sustainable development	4
2.2	Tourism and sustainability.....	6
2.2.1	Definition of tourism	6
2.2.2	Tourism impacts	8
2.3	Sustainable tourism development	13
2.3.1	Definition of sustainable tourism	14
2.3.2	Characteristics of sustainable tourism development	15
2.3.3	Sustainable and responsible tourism.....	18
2.3.4	Destination management.....	21
2.3.5	Tourism planning and policy.....	24
2.3.6	Place-oriented tourism planning and development	27
2.3.7	Monitoring of sustainable tourism development	29
3	STAKEHOLDERS IN THE TOURISM INDUSTRY	32
3.1	Barriers to stakeholder involvement and collaboration.....	37
3.2	Role of stakeholders in tourism.....	37
3.2.1	Role of the Government.....	37
3.2.2	Role of the private sector	40
3.2.3	Role of Non-Governmental Organisations	41
3.2.4	Role of the residents	42
4	UNESCO ORGANISATION OVERVIEW	43
4.1	Mission and vision of UNESCO World Heritage	44
4.2	Organisational structure of UNESCO	45
4.3	The UNESCO World Heritage List	47
4.4	Sustainable tourism in World Heritage sites	50
4.5	UNESCO sustainable tourism program	52
5	DESTINATION OF OHRID	53

5.1	Demographic characteristics	53
5.2	Historical background	55
5.3	Ohrid as a World Heritage site.....	56
5.4	Tourism in Ohrid	57
5.4.1	Cultural tourism	58
5.4.2	Coastal tourism	60
5.4.3	Nature-based tourism	61
5.4.4	Seasonality	61
5.4.5	Socio-economic impact of tourism	63
5.4.6	Tourism challenges of the Ohrid region	64
6	RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND DATA.....	67
6.1	Description of data collection methods.....	67
6.2	Sampling.....	68
6.3	Description of the interview process.....	70
6.4	Data analysis.....	71
6.5	Limitations of the research	72
7	FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION.....	73
7.1	Stakeholders' knowledge and perspectives about sustainable tourism	73
7.2	Stakeholders' perspective on tourism in Ohrid	74
7.3	Destination management of Ohrid	78
7.4	Stakeholder perspectives regarding the World Heritage status of Ohrid	81
7.5	World Heritage status impacts on sustainable tourism development	82
7.5.1	The economic impacts of World Heritage status of Ohrid from stakeholder's perspective.....	82
7.5.2	World Heritage status impact on environmental protection	84
7.5.3	Benefits and challenges for the local community	85
7.6	Stakeholders' recommendations for a better future for Ohrid	87
8	CONCLUSION	89
	LIST OF KEY LITERATURE	91
	REFERENCE LIST	91

APPENDICES	100
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LIST OF TABLES

Table 1: Factors influencing interactions between tourists and destination.....	11
Table 2: Stakeholder and their role in sustainable tourism	34
Table 3: Interview participants	69
Table 4: Interviewees data.....	70
Table 5:Example of the coding process	72

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1: Sustainable Development Goals	12
Figure 2: Sustainability pillars and responsibility triggers.....	20
Figure 3: The 3As model and the GSLI destination management model	23
Figure 4: Tourist inflow in Ohrid, 2023	54
Figure 5: Monthly tourist flow in Ohrid, for a period of 10 years (2013-2023)	62
Figure 6: Unsustainable Tourism of Ohrid	75

LIST OF APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Povzetek (Summary in Slovene language).....	1
Appendix 2:Coding.....	3
Appendix 3:Interview transcripts	5

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

APPT – Agency for promotion and support of Tourism

DMO – Destination Management Organisation

ETIS – European Tourism Indicator System

NGOs – Non-Governmental Organisations

NTAs – National Tourism Authorities

NTOs – National Tourism Organisations

OECD – Organisation for economic co-operation and development

OUV- Outstanding Universal Value

PPP- Public-Privat Partnership

RTOs – Regional Tourism Organization

SDGs – Sustainable Development Goals

TSA – Tourism Satellite Account

UNEP – United Nations Environmental Program

UNESCO- United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

UN Tourism- United Nations World Tourism Organization

WCED – World Commission on Environmental and Development

WH - World Heritage

WHC – World Heritage Committee

WTO – World Trade Organisation

1 INTRODUCTION

Sustainable tourism is a relatively new concept defined by the United Nations World Tourism Organisation (UN Tourism) in 1995 as “Tourism that takes full account of its current and future economic, social and environmental impacts, addressing the needs of visitors, the industry, the environment and host communities” (UN Tourism, 1995). It represents any form of tourism that adheres to the principles of sustainable development. Although its interpretation varied throughout the literature (Butler, 1999), in today's fast, dynamic, developing world we live, the implementation of sustainable tourism development is crucial more than ever.

The needed balance between economic prosperity, social well-being, and environmental protection is difficult to achieve and maintain, but it's a goal worth working towards. Therefore, understanding the profound relationship between the three pillars of sustainability is crucial for effective sustainable tourism development.

Tourism is often seen as the leading environmental threat, pursuing fast earnings without consideration of long-term sustainability. However, without the economic benefits it brings, the development of the destination will be restrained and impossible, which will affect the quality of life of the local communities. On the other hand, tourism can be used as a powerful tool for raising awareness about the importance of environmental protection and fostering intercultural respect (UNEP, UN Tourism, 2005). Therefore, the main objective of sustainable tourism development is to ensure the maximisation of the positive impacts of tourism and reduce the negative as much as possible (Murphy, 1998). In order to achieve that, tourism should be adequately planned and managed, considering all these aspects and with a goal of long-term sustainability. It requires awareness, involvement, commitment and cooperation from all interested parties, and legal support from well-implemented legislation and policies (Hall, 2008).

The importance of stakeholders' participation in sustainable tourism development has been recognised through the literature by the world's organisations (UN, 2015; UNEP, UN Tourism, 2005; UNESCO, World Heritage and Sustainable Tourism Programme, n.d.), as well as by many researchers (Byrd, 2007; Ladkin & Bertramini, 2002; Nicolaides, 2015). Even if their interests differ, they should share the same values and vision about their destination and work towards sustainability. Moreover, stakeholder collaboration is crucial when a destination tries to balance heritage protection and management and tourism development (Aas et al., 2005). As a matter of fact, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) has highlighted the importance of stakeholders in their “World Heritage and Sustainable Tourism Programme” by stating in their vision that: “World Heritage and tourism stakeholders share responsibility for the conservation of our common cultural and natural heritage of Outstanding Universal Value

and for sustainable development through appropriate tourism management” (UNESCO, n.d.).

According to UNESCO, there is a strong relationship between the World Heritage (WH) and sustainable tourism. On the one hand, most of the WH sites are also attractive tourist destinations; on the other, tourism enables them to meet the requirement of the Convention ‘to present’ the properties and contribute to providing means for their preservation and conservation. Moreover, they stand for the same goal of protecting natural and cultural heritage and transferring it to future generations. Therefore, tourism must be developed and managed sustainably to maintain the integrity of the WH sites and bring social and economic well-being to the local community (UNESCO, n.d.).

The WH status is a prestigious label and well-recognised brand, simultaneously offering many possibilities. However, it also imposes vast management responsibilities to protect and preserve the site’s Outstanding universal value (OUV) without compromising residents' quality of life (Petrevska, Mihalič, & Andreeski, 2023). In other words, overcoming the negative impacts of tourism and implementing sustainable tourism development in WH destinations is even more demanding (Schmutz & Elliott, 2016). Although UNESCO “seek to ensure an appropriate and equitable balance between conservation, sustainability and development” (WHC, 2002), this is difficult to achieve in practice.

For our thesis research, we have chosen the case of Ohrid as a WH site, which is constantly struggling to keep up with the requirements of UNESCO to preserve its heritage while developing as a tourist destination. The OUV of Ohrid Lake was recognised as a natural phenomenon a long time ago, at the 3rd Session of the World Heritage Committee in 1979, and the following 1980, together with the city of Ohrid, it became part of a mixed Natural and Cultural World Heritage Site (UNESCO, 2021). Its importance comes from the fact that it is one of the oldest lakes in the world, rich with biodiversity, and the whole region has significant historical meaning. However, although it is the one and only WH site in North Macedonia, after all these years of transition and development, the state finds it difficult to do its part in preserving this natural and cultural heritage and enabling sustainable tourism development to its most significant tourist destination. Even though the primary strategic goal of the destination is ‘sustainable development by applying the principles of UNESCO’ (Municipality of Ohrid, 2020, p. 174), unsustainable, irresponsible, and economically driven practices are usually implemented (Petrevska & Mihalič, 2020). This may result in putting the site on the List of WH in Danger (WHC, 2019), which brings out the urgency to raise awareness and, as soon as possible, make some changes in the destination's management.

According to UNESCO, insufficient shared understanding of the values of the property and the lack of involvement of all stakeholders, insufficient collaboration between institutions and conflicting visions are the main reasons for making decisions which lead to further destruction of the OUV of Ohrid (WHC, 2020, p. 95). Therefore, it is also essential to hear their side of the story. By assessing the personal thinking and perceptions of different

stakeholders from the tourism sector, we will try to profoundly analyse the impacts of the WH status on sustainable tourism development in Ohrid.

The main purpose of our thesis is to identify and analyse the impacts of the WH status on the destination's sustainable tourism development. In addition, we aim to investigate the relationship between the WH status and sustainable tourism development from a stakeholder perspective, specifically focusing on the case of Ohrid.

The primary data collection will be obtained through a qualitative research method. A more profound and purposeful discussion is needed since we aim to investigate and understand the stakeholders' perceptions (their thinking, knowledge, and awareness). Therefore, a qualitative approach will be applied for this empirical research, using non-standardised, semi-structured interviews as the most appropriate technique. A purposive sampling was employed to select both the site and individual participants (Saunders et al., 2009). This analysis will provide insights into WH's status, challenges, and opportunities and contribute to developing strategies for more sustainable tourism in Ohrid and beyond. With our research, supported and complemented by secondary data analysis, we will endeavour to provide exhaustive answers to the following research questions:

1. How knowledgeable are the local stakeholders about the principles of sustainable tourism and how do they perceive tourism in Ohrid?
2. How effective is the current destination management of Ohrid in promoting sustainable tourism development, and who are the key responsible decision-makers in this process?
3. What is the significance of the World Heritage status of Ohrid from the stakeholders' perspective?
4. What are the perceived benefits and challenges of Ohrid's World Heritage status for sustainable tourism development?

The outline of the thesis is structured in eight major chapters in which the main aspects and issues related to the topic will be discussed. Therefore, following the introduction, an overview of the relevant literature about sustainable tourism and sustainable tourism development will be presented. The main points will be defined and discussed, along with the important segments of the process, such as tourism planning, policies, and monitoring. The third chapter will explain the important role of stakeholders in sustainable tourism development. The next chapter will present UNESCO's organisational structure and purpose. In addition, the meaning of WH status and its relation with sustainable tourism will be discussed. In the fifth chapter, an overview of the destination of Ohrid, the selected WH site for this study, will be presented. Afterwards, in the sixth chapter, the research methodology will be explained, followed by the findings, discussion, and interpretation of the obtained data. Finally, the study's conclusion will be summarised, and further recommendations will be provided.

2 CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK FOR SUSTAINABLE TOURISM

This section provides an in-depth exploration of sustainable tourism, guided by foundational principles of sustainable development. It emphasises the intricate balance between economic, social, and environmental dimensions critical to long-term viability. Key elements include the relationship between tourism and sustainability, detailing how tourism impacts destinations both positively and negatively. Definitions of tourism and sustainable tourism set the stage for understanding these dynamics, supported by the essential characteristics and goals of sustainable tourism development.

2.1 Sustainable development

The inability to effectively handle environmental issues while maintaining development was a significant threat to all nations. Since global problems could not be treated and solved independently, almost forty years ago, the world needed “A global agenda for change”, as stated by Brundtland, the Chairman of the World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED). The report “Our Common Future” (Brundtland Report) was published in 1987. Ever since, the term sustainable development has gained its importance and broadly accepted definition as “development which meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (WCED, 1987). In essence, within sustainable development, the utilisation of resources, the direction of investments, technological advancements, and institutional changes should all be in harmony to enhance both current and future potential to meet human needs and aspirations. It is a continuous process of managing natural resources to ensure growth and prosperity and, at the same time, to provide means to protect the environment. The main idea is “to create a better life for people in a way that will be viable in the future as they are in the present” (UNEP, UN Tourism, 2005), or at least to ensure that the next generations will not face poorer prospects and more significant risks than we are dealing with today (Tosun, 1998, p. 596).

Afterwards, in 1992, the so-called ‘Rio Earth Summit’ resulted in a ‘plan of action’ Agenda 21, which offered concrete objectives, activities and means of implementation for the major sustainability challenges at local, national, and international levels. As well it also focuses on the importance of monitoring sustainable development by using indicators as a tool to keep up with any progress or changes that happen over time (UN, 1992; Miller & Twining, 2005). However, the concept of sustainable development gained a much better understanding after the World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg in 2002 by underlining the three pillars of sustainability:

- Economic sustainability means creating long-term prosperity at different levels of society while ensuring cost-effective management of all activities.

- Social sustainability means equal rights and opportunities for everyone through fair distribution of benefits and intercultural respect.
- Environmental sustainability means the preservation of nature and effective resource management.

These three segments are deeply interconnected, so implementing the concept of sustainability means seeking a balance between them (UNEP, UN Tourism, 2005, p. 9). Still, when we talk about growth or development, we mostly think from an economic perspective, but the environmental and social aspects are equally important. As stated by the WCED, “Economy is not just about the production of wealth, and ecology is not just about the protection of nature; they are both equally relevant for improving the lot of humankind” (WCED, 1987, p. 36). Therefore, institutions and policymakers must take that into account while making decisions or solving problems.

In the same manner, Jacobs (1991) outlines three key points regarding the concept of sustainability and its implementation. Firstly, institutions must integrate environmental concerns into their policies and operations logically and coherently. Secondly, no depletion of natural resources is acceptable, and intergenerational fairness concerning the planet's natural assets should exist. Third, economic growth should not be regarded as sustainable development.

From the recent events more important are the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development in 2012 (‘Rio+20’) with the declaration “The future we want” and the United Nations Conference in 2015 with the 2030 Agenda as the outcome document. After uneven progress, Rio+20 reaffirms the principles and objectives set out in Agenda 21 and emphasises the need for international cooperation for an equitable and inclusive world (UN, 2012). Likewise, the 2030 Agenda aims to ‘Transform our world’ through 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and 169 targets, and hopefully to bring peace, end hunger and poverty, deal with climate change challenges, etc. (UN, 2015).

Still, there have been certain concerns that achieving SDGs might require some trade-offs that prioritise economic prosperity over social and environmental well-being, as has happened in the past (Gupta & Vegelin, 2016). Although international agreements have made significant progress, the different interpretations of sustainable development by developers, economists, politicians, and environmentalists represent a barrier to its complete implementation (Miller & Twining, 2005, p. 8). The concept is also often criticised by the literature as imprecise and too ambiguous since it aims to solve issues that initially start as a result of the same economic system. On the other hand, these attributes provide flexibility to the term for different interpretations and implementations depending on the specific place, culture or environment (Wall, 1997). The definition of sustainability has also faced disapproval since it always addresses the issue of long-term viability when, as argued, there are only predictions and actions taken today with the hope of bringing sustainability in the future (Costanza & Patten, 1995).

In addition, by analysing the progress made throughout the literature in ecosystem ecology and global change theory, Miller and Twining drew several conclusions for sustainable development and, therefore, sustainable tourism. As a first point, they emphasise that sustainable development as a combination of ecological, economic, and environmental issues requires an integrated and multidisciplinary approach. Secondly, it involves complex systems which are inherently unpredictable, so they need non-linear approaches. Thirdly, since sustainable development is a continuous process of change, policies and actions need to evolve and adapt accordingly. Last but not least, they highlight the importance of development monitoring from local to global scales, enhanced system knowledge, and extended human foresight in order to protect and reduce the Earth's vulnerability to sudden changes (Miller & Twining, 2005, p. 17).

2.2 Tourism and sustainability

Tourism, as a significant driver of global economic growth, has the potential to bring substantial benefits, including job creation, cultural exchange, and infrastructure development. However, it also poses challenges, such as environmental degradation, resource depletion, and cultural disruptions, which can undermine its sustainability.

This chapter explores the concept of tourism in depth, beginning with its definition to provide a clear understanding of its scope and significance. It then delves into the impacts of tourism, examining both the positive contributions and the potential negative consequences on destinations and their communities. Together, these subchapters set the foundation for comprehending the critical relationship between tourism and sustainability.

2.2.1 Definition of tourism

Tourism's worldwide expansion is a result of the continuous development of the economy, technologies, education, improved standards of living, advances in transportation and communication, and the overall world's globalisation. Nowadays, in the internet era and with the abundance of information available, people find it increasingly convenient to plan and arrange vacations. There are a variety of options for accessible destinations, accommodations, activities... From luxury resorts to modest private residences, they are now within the reach of varying budgets and personal interests. Consequently, travelling has become an integral part of people's lives, and the tourism industry is experiencing constant growth. Whether it's for leisure or business, travelling is the best way to get to know different cultures and languages, discover all the beauty in the world and get in touch with nature.

Tourism is described as a social, cultural, and economic phenomenon. It represents people travelling to countries or places outside their usual environment for not more than one consecutive year for different purposes. As defined in the Manila Declaration back in 1980: "Tourism is considered an activity essential to the life of nations because of its direct effect

on the social, cultural, educational and economic sectors of national societies and on their international relations” (UN Tourism, p. 1). Moreover, it does not necessarily mean travelling internationally; simple domestic trips (outside the usual environment) may also have positive or negative impacts. Still, from a technical perspective and for statistical purposes, trips that do not include overnight stays are classified as excursions, so they are isolated from other forms of travel. Therefore, for a better understanding and definition of tourism, it should include:

- Minimum length to stay – one night;
- Maximum length to stay – one year;
- Strict purposes of visit categories.

A distance consideration is sometimes included - the UN Tourism recommendation is 160 km. In addition to the above-mentioned, Cooper et al. (2005) present the following aspects as essentials to tourism:

- Travelling to the destination and the activities during the stay.
- Travelling is always a temporary activity.
- Tourism destinations are visited for various reasons, but they should not include employment or acquisition of permanent residence.

Accordingly, there is a need to specify the types of travellers. As tourism consumers, they’ve been classified by UN Tourism (1994) as:

- Visitor - anyone involved in tourism as a consumer.
- Tourist - visitor who stays overnight.
- Same-day visitor - a visitor who doesn’t stay overnight (Smith, 2004).

These explanations and terms are related to the demand side of the industry. Tourism is highly dependent on the demand generated by tourists and their willingness to pay. They engage with every aspect of the tourism system and directly influence the industry's consumption of goods and services. Additionally, they have significant contributions in shaping the nature of tourism development and providing benefits for the destination and its local community (Jha & Mishra, 2014).

On the contrary, its supply side is even more difficult to define as it includes a broad range of sectors and services that utilise not only the tourists but also the local population. According to Leiper (1979): “The tourist industry consists of all those firms, organisations and facilities which are intended to serve the specific needs and wants of tourists(in Cooper et al.,2005). Therefore, Jha & Mishra (2014) have described them as market links since they connect the destination’s supply of resources and the demand side of tourism. This encompasses all inward and outward intermediaries such as travel agents, tour operators,

airlines, hotels, and marketing organisations, but also local businesses like accommodation facilities, bars and restaurants, handicrafts, food production, etc.

Furthermore, Cooper et al. (2005) emphasised the importance of the Tourism Satellite Account (TSA), as a widely recognised statistical framework. It's a tool developed jointly by the UN Tourism and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) to serve at facilitating the economic measurement of tourism and improve supply analysis. TSA provides significant information about the economic impacts of tourism, which is important for comparing tourism with other industries, contributing to tourism planning and policies and further research.

Additionally, tourism is an activity that relies on a special connection between consumers, the industry, the environment, and the local communities. Unlike other sectors where products are transported to the consumer, tourism is unique since the consumer is a tourist who travels to the tourist product and its producer (destination). In the tourism industry, the product is the complete experience of travelling. It encompasses many different segments that create the destination's attractiveness. Its ecological environment (tourism attractions), including natural beauties and cultural heritage, the socio-cultural interaction with locals, and its economic environment, including specific goods and services produced for its tourists. Therefore, tourism demand and supply are influenced by various factors, not only by quantity and price as in many other industries (Mihalic, 2022).

2.2.2 Tourism impacts

Tourism's importance is mainly seen from an economic perspective, so it is often referred to as the world's fastest-growing industry. In 2019, its contribution was 10.4% of global GDP and 1.5 billion international arrivals, which were estimated to reach up to 1.8 billion by 2030. Unfortunately, we witnessed an unpredictable turn in 2020 due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Tourism was one of the most affected by the crisis, but it still managed to recover from it quickly. In 2022, the tourism and travel industry reached a 7.6% share of global GDP, an increase of 22% from 2021 and only 23% below 2019 levels. Additionally, it created 22 million new jobs, meaning 11.4% below 2019 (WTTC). These data only indicate how powerful this industry is while simultaneously strongly interdependent on everything happening in the world.

However, that's only one side of the tourism industry. The range of impacts that may arise from tourism can affect different aspects. It operates as a system of three main environments: economic, ecological, and socio-political. According to Mihalič (2022), the ecological environment includes three main aspects: natural, cultural and social environment, while the socio-political environment refers to society's ethics and awareness and its politics (institutions, legislations, decision-making...). From this arise the multitude of possible positive and negative influences of tourism.

According to Kreag (2001), tourism impacts can be divided into seven groups. Besides the usual economic, environmental, and socio-cultural impact, he adds crowding, congestion, services, taxes, and community attitude. Each of these categories includes positive and negative impacts.

Economic impacts - Tourism is a vast and diverse industry, with constant demand growth, requires different skills and expertise and offers a variety of employment opportunities, while new jobs generate more income tax revenue. Additionally, tourism growth brings possibilities for more investments and improvement of transport infrastructure (roads, public transport, airports...), but also of other public utilities beneficial for both tourists and residents. It's the main source of foreign exchange earnings. From lodging and sales taxes to air travel and transportation taxes, gas taxes, etc., tourism increases the community's tax revenue. Although this may be true, part of the tourism industry is usually foreign owners of hotels and businesses, so the profit doesn't always stay in the local economy (leakages). The employees are often underpaid or have a minimal wage in poor conditions and rights, or a low-skilled workforce is imported. As a consequence of tourism and increased consumption come increased prices of goods, services, and land, which leads to increased living costs for the residents (inflation effect) (Mihalic, 2022).

Environmental impacts - Tourism is considered as clean of the 'non-smoke' industry, in comparison with the others based on factories; tourism is based on the natural environment and hotels, restaurants, attractions... Travellers attracted by the destination's natural beauty will usually take care of it and act with higher awareness. Tourism is also the direct source of income for protection and preservation through entry fees for natural and cultural assets, protected areas, parks, historical buildings, and monuments. Additionally, it can positively impact the natural environment through special programs or incentives and improved environmental management to control pollution, reduce waste and maintain the natural aesthetics of the destination. On the other hand, tourism also has a negative impact on the natural environment. In many destinations, it is considered a major polluter. A large number of tourists, especially in hotels, intensify the consumption of water and energy and generate more waste and pollution. Natural resource attraction can be put in danger of degradation, destruction of landscape, and loss of flora and fauna are only some of the possible negative environmental impacts.

Social and cultural impacts - How residents and tourists engage with each other can have various positive or negative impacts. The increased tourist inflow can influence residents to adopt different moral behaviours, good or bad. It can enhance the acceptance of differences in appearance, gender, culture... Tourism can be an inspiration for residents to revive or recover forgotten cultural customs or historic exhibits and use them as tourist attractions. It provides funding for the conservation of important built cultural heritage and different cultural events and products. At the same time, tourism may lead to commodification and standardisation. Some unique cultural characteristics and traditions can be lost over time

when trying to meet global trends and tourist satisfaction. Additionally, there is an increased consumption of alcohol and drugs in tourist destinations, which increases vandalism and destruction of cultural heritage and may also affect the quality of life of the local population (Mihalic, 2022; Kreag, 2001).

Crowding and congestion - Overcrowding can affect the normal activities of the residents and create dissatisfaction and frustration towards tourists. Tourism can put significant pressure, especially in small towns or places with central historical or cultural amenities. It can lead to a constant influx of people, traffic congestion, and sometimes even the eviction of the local population.

Services - Tourism brings opportunities for developing new services, recreation facilities and amenities that otherwise wouldn't be part of the community. The service in hospitality and other sectors is at a higher level to meet the tourist's expectations, leading to increased prices. On the other hand, some traditional services may be moved out due to competition with tourist's interests. The increased pressure that comes with tourism growth may lead to water, fuel, or energy supply shortages.

Taxes - Tourism brings additional sales tax revenue from enhanced retail activities and increased lodging tax revenue. Still, the increased tax burden for the development of infrastructure and other services will lead to increased property taxes and affect the property owners.

Community attitude - The tourists' satisfaction can positively impact local pride and make residents more aware of the beauty of their homeland. They also enjoy all the tourist attractions and events. However, increased community tension and division may arise concerning tourism development, pitting those who support tourism against those who do not. Also, as already mentioned, crowding can create tension between residents and tourists. Additionally, residents may feel a sense of exclusion and loss of control over their community development, increasing their frustration towards tourism (Kreag, 2001).

Knowing and recognising the possible effects of tourism in a specific destination is essential for better management and planning. This is the only way development can go in the right direction: to minimise the potential negative impacts and focus on maximisation of the positive ones. In addition to the listed possible tourism impacts, it's essential to identify the factors that have influenced those interactions between residents, tourists, and the environment. Various considerations can mainly be divided into two general groups: tourist factors and destination factors (Kreag, 2001, p. 13).

Table 1: Factors influencing interactions between tourists and destination

Tourist factors	Destination factors
Number and type of visitors	Local economic condition
Length of stay	Diversification of the economy
Mass arrivals and departures	Attitudes of tourism leaders
Links to community residents	Spatial characteristics of a destination
Ethnic/racial characteristics	Viability of the host culture
Economic characteristics	History of stability in the community
Activities selected	The pace of tourism development
Ability to speak local language/accents	Fragility of the environment
"Demonstration effect" of tourists	Public transportation options

Source: Kreag (2001).

As a result of its dynamism and growth, as well as its significant contribution to the economies of many countries, tourism can thus enhance sustainable development. This leads to three critical aspects of the relationship between tourism and sustainable development:

- **Interaction:** Tourism fosters direct and indirect interaction between the visitors and the host destination by providing an exchange of cultural, social, and environmental experiences.
- **Awareness:** Tourism can raise awareness about the importance of sustainable practices and make people more conscious of their acts in nature and in relations with other cultures.
- **Dependency:** Tourism depends on sustainability, a well-preserved environment, and cultural heritage, as visitors expect to experience while travelling (UNEP, UN Tourism, 2005).

Moreover, tourism can directly or indirectly contribute to achieving all SDGs and improving global sustainability. Its importance is especially recognised and included as targets in Goals 8, 12, and 14, which are inclusive and sustainable economic growth, sustainable consumption and production, and the sustainable use of oceans and marine resources, respectively (UN, 2015).

Figure 1: Sustainable Development Goals



Source: UN Tourism (2017).

Therefore, the tourism industry should equally focus on its global impacts since they will also have a direct effect on tourism itself, especially pollution from tourism (greenhouse gas emissions), the use of non-renewable natural resources (water, energy), and eventually climate change (UNEP, UN Tourism, 2005). Consequently, analysing the mutual connection between tourism and sustainable development, we can conclude that tourism is a powerful industry. On the one hand, it can have many positive impacts; on the other hand, if not adequately managed and controlled, tourism may negatively affect sustainability.

Some of the benefits of tourism are:

- It has less impact on natural resources and the environment than most of the industries.
- It is based on the enjoyment and appreciation of local culture, built heritage, and natural environment, and as such, the industry is strongly motivated to protect these assets.
- It can play a positive part in increasing consumer commitment to sustainable development principles through its unparalleled consumer distribution channels.

- It provides an economic incentive for the conservation of natural environments and habitats which might otherwise be allocated to more environmentally damaging land uses, thereby, helping to maintain bio-diversity.
- It provides opportunities for enterprise development and employment creation as well as stimulating investment and support for local services.
- It adds tangible economic value to natural and cultural resources, generating direct income from visitor spending for conservation efforts, and increasing support for conservation from local communities.

On the contrary, tourism can:

- Place direct pressure on cultural heritage and fragile ecosystems causing degradation of the physical environment and disruption to wildlife.
- Exert considerable pressure on host communities and lead to the dislocation of traditional societies.
- Compete for the use of scarce resources, notably land and water (some hotels and resorts consume significantly more water and energy per capita than the local population).
- Be a significant contributor to local and global pollution (poor waste management, which often results in water and land pollution).
- Be a vulnerable and unstable source of income, especially for developing countries heavily dependent on tourism, as it is often very sensitive to actual or perceived changes to the environmental and social conditions of destinations (UN Tourism & IHRA, 1999).

All things considered, as acknowledged by Pigram (1992), while tourism can be self-destructive and contribute to environmental degradation, it also has the potential to bring significant environmental improvements. Also, as stated in the UN Tourism Guide for Policymakers (2005, p. 18): “Making tourism more sustainable is not just about controlling and managing negative impacts, it’s about maximising tourism’s positive and creative contribution to local economies, the conservation of natural and cultural heritage, and the quality of life of host and visitors”. However, tourism needs to be carefully planned, managed, and strongly supported by the government’s clear policies and stakeholder involvement.

2.3 Sustainable tourism development

Sustainable tourism development focuses on integrating the principles of sustainability into tourism practices to ensure long-term benefits for destinations, communities, and the environment. It seeks to balance economic growth, environmental preservation, and social equity while addressing the needs of both visitors and host communities.

This chapter begins with a definition of sustainable tourism and explores the key characteristics of sustainable tourism development, highlighting the importance of ethical practices and community involvement. The concept of sustainable and responsible tourism is examined to underscore the role of accountability and shared responsibility among stakeholders.

Key strategies for achieving sustainable tourism are presented through discussions on destination management, effective tourism planning and policy, and place-oriented planning tailored to local needs. The chapter concludes with the significance of monitoring sustainable tourism development, ensuring continuous evaluation and adaptation to achieve sustainability. Together, these subchapters provide a comprehensive framework for understanding and implementing sustainable tourism development.

2.3.1 Definition of sustainable tourism

The principles of sustainable development can and should be incorporated in any industry. As one of the largest industries, tourism heavily depends on natural resources and cultural heritage. The destination's environmental uniqueness (cultural and historical assets, beautiful landscapes, protected areas, beaches, etc.) is what mostly attracts visitors, so inevitably it needs to be managed in a sustainable manner. So, with protection and conservation of the environment, it will be sustained in the future and continue to provide tourist satisfaction, economic growth, and benefits for the local community.

This necessity was recognised by UN Tourism in 1995 at the first World Conference on Sustainable Tourism, where a 'Charter for Sustainable Tourism' was adopted. The declaration outlines the fundamental principles and objectives for sustainable tourism, including the need for integrated planning, consultation of stakeholders, and improved quality of life for the local population (Miller & Twining, 2005, p. 33). Accordingly, it was defined as: "Tourism that takes full account of its current and future economic, social and environmental impacts, addressing the needs of visitors, the industry, the environment and host communities" (UN Tourism, 1995), or in other words tourism based on the principles of sustainable development. It does not represent a special form of tourism like: 'eco', 'alternative', or green, instead it's a condition and way to manage and develop any form (mass or small-scale) of tourism, regardless of the location (UNEP, UN Tourism, pp. 11-12). Furthermore, Agenda 21 for the travel and tourism industry: Towards environmentally sustainable development was adopted by the World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC), World Trade Organisation (WTO) and Earth Council. The role of the private sector was stressed, as well as the importance of partnership between the governments, the industry, and the non-governmental organisations (NGOs) (WTTC et al., 1997). Essentially, the needs of all tourism stakeholders operating within the destination's natural and socio-economic environment should be satisfied, and among other things, tourist satisfaction must be provided.

There are various interpretations and suggested definitions of sustainable tourism in the literature. It's a 'positive approach' which intends to alleviate the conflicts arising from the interaction between the tourism industry, environment, tourists, and the host communities while promoting their long-term well-being (Bramwell & Lane, 1993). In his 'State of the Art' Butler (1999) provides various definitions as the one of Eber (1992): "Sustainable tourism is tourism and associated infrastructure that: both now and in the future operate within natural capacities for the regeneration and future productivity of natural resources; recognise the contribution that people and communities, customs and lifestyles, make to the tourism experience; accept that these people must have an equitable share in the economic benefits of local people and communities in the area". This is one of the most extensive and comprehensive definitions. Lane (1991) described sustainable tourism as creating satisfying employment opportunities without overpowering the local economy or causing any harm to its natural surroundings. While this definition acknowledges the social and environmental aspects of sustainability, it can still imply that she only prioritises the long-term economic sustainability of tourism. On the other hand, Mihalič (2022) emphasises that sustainable tourism should ensure that its current economic activities will not have any ecological, social or economic consequences and will not negatively affect the lives of future generations.

Furthermore, Butler argues that the term sustainable tourism may represent different things to different interested parties. For the tourism industry, it means proper development; for conservationists, it means reusing the aged principles; for the environmentalists, it means protecting the environment; and for the politicians, it's just another opportunity to use more words than actions (Butler, 1999, p. 11). Similarly, there is a lack of clarity in frequently using the terms preservation, conservation, and protection without a detailed explanation of whether they refer to renewable or non-renewable natural resources. Even more critical is how tourists or tourism operators understand and implement them in real life while trying to operate sustainably since every destination has a different capacity (Hunter, 1997). Additionally, he has questioned the constant use of the term balance in discussions on sustainable tourism. He explains that during the process, there will always be some needs that should be considered, like demand, supply, environmental impacts, and community needs. Therefore, certain trade-offs may occur daily in decision-making by prioritising different aspects in different situations, and it's impossible to be in balance all the time.

Although plenty of discussions about this topic and the mentioned concepts may exist, its importance should not be doubted. Sustainable development is the only way tourism can grow and function successfully in the long term.

2.3.2 Characteristics of sustainable tourism development

In destination planning and management, sustainable tourism is the ultimate goal. Still, continuous changes, monitoring, and practice of sustainability principles are required. In other words, it takes sustainable tourism development of a destination to state that

sustainable tourism has been put into place. In this process, two key elements should be embraced:

- The ability of tourism to continue as an activity in the future, ensuring that the conditions are suitable for this;
- The ability of society and the environment to absorb and benefit from the impacts of tourism in a sustainable way (UNEP, UN Tourism, 2005, p. 18).

Therefore, it's important to emphasise the difference between sustainable development and sustainable tourism development. Despite the similarity of these terms, they are conceptually distinct. Even though sustainable tourism is based on the principles of sustainable development, it's mainly focused on the industry's growth and is usually product-centred while aspiring to environmental goals. Additionally, given tourism's dependency on investments and high consumption levels, it does not always correspond with the broader and more integrated vision of sustainable development. Moreover, full implementation of sustainability principles in tourism is always challenging due to the sector's economic and social nature. It includes constant interaction between tourists and the destination, which inevitably brings some impacts. However, this should not undermine the significant contribution that tourism can make towards sustainable development. The growth of tourism has proven to be an effective tool for many countries to achieve sustainable economic growth and corresponding socio-economic and environmental development (Guo, Jiang, & Li, 2019).

Moreover, the need for well-balanced pillars of sustainable development is equally important and applicable in tourism. Thus, according to those mentioned above, sustainable tourism development is a comprehensive approach that works towards a balance between economic, environmental, and social factors to provide long-term viability for tourism destinations. Still, according to years of experience in this field, Mihalic (2009) has suggested a new model with an additional three pillars to make the concept of sustainability more operational and applicable to tourism. The 3+3 sustainability model, besides the already mentioned pillars (economic, social, and environmental), includes:

- Consumer satisfaction - as the essence of the tourism business;
- Environmental education - as the basic step in raising awareness about environmental importance;
- Responsibility - includes sustainable behaviour and political support (in Mihalic, Cvelbar, & Žabkar, 2012).

Sustainable tourism development requires comprehensive assessment and consideration of all these aspects, which are crucial for effective planning and management of tourism destinations. Additionally, the United Nations Environment Program (UNEP) and UN Tourism (2005, pp. 18-19) have suggested twelve aims that need to be pursued: Economic viability, Local prosperity, Employment quality, Social equity, Visitor fulfilment, Local

control, Community well-being, Cultural richness, Physical integrity, Biological diversity, Resources efficiency and Environmental purity. All these aims are interconnected; they can contribute to a better understanding and achievement of the sustainability objectives.

Conclusively, to make tourism sustainable, the following requirements must be fulfilled:

- Increased awareness and education about environmental sustainability to make optimal use of natural resources. This includes providing information and promoting sustainable behaviours among tourists.
- Enhance the intercultural respect to preserve the cultural heritage of the host communities.
- Economic benefits to all stakeholders in the tourism industry and increased employment opportunities.

Additionally, sustainable tourism development requires the informed participation of relevant stakeholders of the destination and proper political environment (Mihalic, 2022) with firm leadership to establish broad participation and consensus building (UNEP, UN Tourism, 2005). Correspondingly, Murphy has contributed to a better understanding of sustainable tourism development by defining it as: “the management of all resources upon which tourism depends in such a way that economic, social and aesthetic needs can be fulfilled while maintaining cultural integrity, essential ecological processes, and biological diversity and life support systems” (Murphy, 1998, p. 179). From those mentioned above, we can see that sustainable tourism development is a multidimensional and interdisciplinary concept that needs to be embraced thoroughly. All these seven dimensions: resource management, economic activity, social obligations, aesthetic appeal of natural and cultural heritage, ecological parameters, biological diversity and life support systems, which Murphy emphasises, are linked and interdependent, so for their achievement a holistic approach must be incorporated.

Furthermore, based on many years of experience, UN Tourism created a Guidebook (Tourism, 2013) to enhance development capacities in developing countries. They elaborated on the key sustainability issues in a five-pillar fashion:

- Tourism policy and governance - The first pillar is acknowledging tourism within sustainable development policies and establishing strategies based on sustainability principles. It assesses the authority institutions and the private and public sectors involved in tourism.
- Economic performance, investment, and competitiveness - This pillar examines the business and investment environment, the role of trade liberalisation within the tourism sector and its impact on local economic sustainability.
- Employment, decent work, and human capital - The third pillar focuses on planning human resources in accordance with the sector demands, and on providing good

employment conditions. It emphasises skills assessment, training, and capacity building as essential.

- Poverty reduction and social inclusion - This pillar concerns tourism's role in reducing poverty by adopting a strategic approach to pro-poor tourism. It focuses on strengthening local supply chains, working with the informal sector, developing community-based initiatives, and securing collateral benefits from tourism.
- Sustainability of the natural and cultural environment - The last pillar considers policies and actions to protect natural and cultural heritage. It addresses the mitigation and adaptation of the tourism sector to climate change and evaluates mechanisms to enhance sustainability in tourism development and operations while monitoring the impacts.

These are the five crucial concerns that must be considered in developing sustainable tourism, especially for developing countries. For further elaboration and applicability of this framework, an additional 17 sub-pillars, 32 issues and possible solutions are additionally suggested by the UN Tourism. Through their assessment, each destination can determine whether these issues are adequately covered or any areas of weakness need to be addressed. Further on, the process may continue with additional research, and then, based on the obtained data, future strategic plans for development and management can be created.

2.3.3 Sustainable and responsible tourism

“The sustainable tourism paradigm is a “side by side” consensus on academic and socio-political interpretations validated by academics and economic, environmental, social and political actors in tourism” (Mihalic, 2022, p. 93). However, the paradigm, along with its conceptual definitions and actual policies, needs to evolve to enable the full conceptualisation of contemporary needs and understandings of sustainable tourism. Despite its broad acceptance and appearance in tourism strategies, the concept of sustainable tourism is criticised by the literature for its lack of practical application (Wheeller, 1993) and its slow pace of action which is associated with irresponsible tourism behaviour (Mihalic, 2016). Moreover, the sustainable tourism paradigm should consider the responsibilities of the tourism industry to create long-term business opportunities and residents' rights to maintain and enhance their quality of life. The socio-political environment, including ethics, governance, management, and politics, should also be a part of sustainable tourism development. Therefore, a paradigm shift towards responsible tourism is becoming relevant (Mihalic, 2016; Mihalic, 2022).

As defined in the European Charter for Sustainable and Responsible Tourism: “Responsible tourism refers to the awareness, decisions and actions of all those involved in the planning, delivery and consumption of tourism so that it is sustainable over time” (EC, 2012, p. 2). It's about all stakeholders taking responsible actions to make tourism more sustainable. The primary objective of responsible tourism is “making better places for people to live in and

better places for people to visit” (RTP, 2002). Correspondingly to the three pillars of sustainability, the Cape Town Declaration calls for economic, social and environmental responsibility. In addition, responsible tourism aims to establish a more balanced relationship between hosts and guests in destinations and to create better places. It also recognises that this can only be achieved by government, local communities and businesses cooperating on practical initiatives in destinations. The declaration particularly highlights the role of the local authorities. They need to provide strong leadership, through appropriate policies to create an effective destination management strategy and to ensure its implementation (RTP, 2002).

Furthermore, as stated by the leading thinker and change-maker in the field Goodwin (2011, p. 2): “The idea of responsible tourism has at its core the imperative to take responsibility, to take action; consumers, suppliers and governments all have responsibilities. The ambition of responsible tourism is to address the impacts of mainstream tourism, to enhance the positive and to reduce the negative”. According to Mohamadi et al. (2021), responsible tourism can be understood as a successful implementation of the sustainable tourism concept and depends on the responsible behaviour of everyone involved. It’s not a new form of tourism; it’s putting sustainability into practice, and it refers to tourism that acts in a sustainable manner (Mihalic, 2016). Moreover, it’s an approach that must be established in any form of tourism.

In essence, this means broadening the concept of sustainability and, in addition to the three pillars, adding sustainability triggers or enablers that will constitute sustainable and responsible tourism. Sustainability triggers include:

- Visitor experience: Ensuring quality visitor satisfaction.
- Residents' quality of life (assuring that tourism contributes to this) and Opportunities of the tourism industry (ensuring tourism economic opportunities).
- Awareness – Agenda – Action (activate awareness and ethics, agendas through strategic leadership, governance, management, media, cooperation, a critical mass, and consensus) (Mihalic, 2022, p. 129).

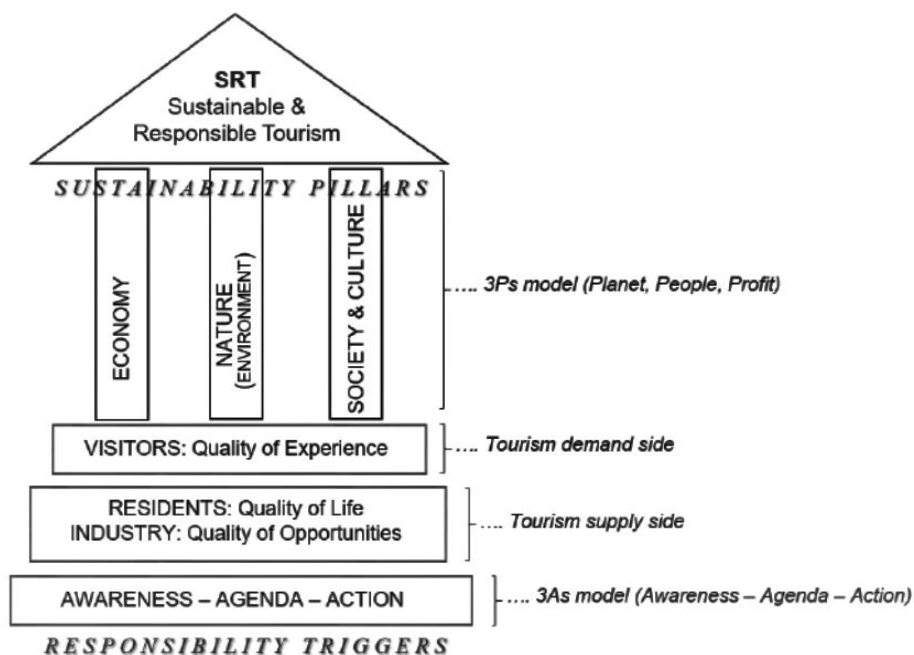
The first trigger is related to the implementation of socio-political sustainability. According to Mihalic (2022), responsible behaviour in tourism occurs when the stakeholders have sufficient awareness, information, and knowledge about fair (sustainable) behaviour, regardless of the current economic allocation system. Therefore, increasing social awareness and ethics about sustainability issues is the primary step. Then, these issues are addressed and incorporated into the destination's strategies and placed on their agendas and policy instruments. Finally, the final step is their implementation or responsible action. The following trigger refers to the supply side of tourism, including residents and the tourism industry. It addresses the rights and responsibilities of tourism concerning residents' quality of life and the rights to business opportunities in the industry. The last trigger refers to the demand side of the industry and the importance of quality visitor experience and satisfaction.

Only satisfied tourists would return to the same destination, while on the other hand, their negative experience will bring negative consequences.

In this regard, tourism stakeholders (businesses, governments, activists, residents, environmental organisations, and associations) have again emphasised the importance of sustainable and responsible tourism. On the one hand, they should be included in the decision-making and directly contribute to tourism performance. This means they have the power to influence tourism agendas and the responsibility to manage their businesses sustainably, with consideration of the possible impacts on the environment. On the other hand, they also depend on what happens in the destination and tourism has an influence on their economic, ecological, or social rights and well-being.

Therefore, sustainable and responsible tourism can be defined as “Quality of life centred tourism that takes full account of its current and future 1) economic, 2) socio-cultural and 3) natural impacts and responsibly addresses the 1) host communities and industry, 2) visitors, and 3) socio-political environment” (Mihalic, 2020, p. 6; Mihalic, 2022; UNEP, UN Tourism, 2005). The main idea of this concept is embracing responsible behaviour and sustainable values and principles within sustainable tourism development. Therefore, Mihalic (2016) suggested a new term that combines both concepts – ‘responsustainable tourism’. However, for a better understanding of the concept of sustainable and responsible tourism, based on the sustainability pillars and responsibility triggers, it can be presented as follows:

Figure 2: Sustainability pillars and responsibility triggers



Source: Mihalič (2022, p. 137).

This symbolic demonstration presents the steps (triggers) that need to be taken to enable sustainability across all three pillars that stand upon them. This kind of comprehensive approach is necessary to eventually achieve the ultimate goal of sustainable and responsible (responsustable) tourism. In order to reach this goal, it is essential for everyone involved in the tourism sector to take necessary actions. Therefore, The European Charter for Sustainable and Responsible Tourism suggests the following key actions for the successful implementation of sustainable and responsible tourism:

- To involve all stakeholders in the planning and management of tourism.
- To respect the rights of all citizens to safe and fulfilling holidays and travel.
- To ensure the competitiveness and viability of the tourism industry.
- To provide a wide range of well-supported and satisfying jobs.
- To mitigate and adapt to climate change.
- To control and manage the use of natural, scarce, or finite resources.
- To celebrate and conserve natural and cultural heritage and diversity.
- To ensure that tourism respects and benefits local communities.
- To monitor the impacts of tourism and seek continuous improvement.
- To promote awareness and commitment to responsible tourism (EC, 2012, pp. 3-7).

Given these points, any type of tourism can be sustainable if its development is based on sustainable and responsible tourism principles. Ultimately, it is all about creating better opportunities, improving the quality of life, enhancing the tourism experience, and working toward a better future for everyone involved. This requires management and governance of the impacts of tourism on nature, society, and the economy, with the assistance of effective social and political strategies, planning and policies, their implementation and constant monitoring of the whole process.

2.3.4 Destination management

A tourist destination is a place where visitors stay overnight, including their overall experience with a range of public services, private products, attractions and resources and community interactions. It's a central point of daily business in tourism and its strategic and sustainable development. Therefore, it's necessary to establish strategic coordination and management of all the different segments that make up a tourism destination. Destination management requires the cooperation of many organisations and interests to work towards a common goal, ensuring the tourist destination's competitiveness and sustainability. Efficient destination management brings together all stakeholders and enables destinations to enhance the value for tourists while ensuring local benefits and sustainability (UN Tourism, 2007; Mihalic, 2022).

The Destination Management Organisation (DMO) should be the strategic leader in destination management, marketing, and development, and it should be able to enhance industry partnerships and collaboration towards a collective destination vision. According to their competencies, DMOs generally can be defined as National Tourism Authorities (NTAs) or Organisations (NTOs), Regional Tourism Organisations (RTOs) and Local DMOs. However, it is crucial that they are strategically in harmony and that policies and actions at these different levels are complementary.

In addition, there are various options for destination management governance, as follows:

- Department of Single Public Authority;
- Partnership of public authorities, serviced by partners;
- Partnership of public authorities, serviced by a joint management unit;
- Public authorities outsource delivery to private companies;
- Public-private partnership for certain functions – often in the form of a non-profit making company;
- Association or company funded purely by a private sector partnership and/or trading for certain functions.

DMO has an important role in supporting the marketing, promotion, and service delivery of a destination to ensure the quality of the visitor's experience. However, the main role of the DMO is to establish the right economic, ecological and socio-political environment for tourism development by creating and implementing policies, legislation, regulations... (UN Tourism, 2007, pp. 2-6). Therefore, according to UN Tourism, there are three areas of key performance in destination management:

- Efficient Governance;
- Strategic Leadership;
- Effective Implementation.

Governance refers to the directive capacity of government, determined by coordination and collaboration as well as by the participation of stakeholders. The most relevant areas of tourism governance are tourism policy and strategic planning, vertical cooperation (the national-regional-local levels) and public-private partnerships (PPP). Strategic leadership involves the creation of strategies or agendas for development, while effective implementation entails specific actions necessary to achieve sustainable tourism development (UN Tourism, n.d.). The literature reveals that this is known as the GSLI destination management model, referring to its main elements: Governance –Strategic Leadership – Implementation (Mihalic, 2022).

Similarly, for better understanding and applicability in sustainable tourism management, a 3As model was developed referring to the three important stages:

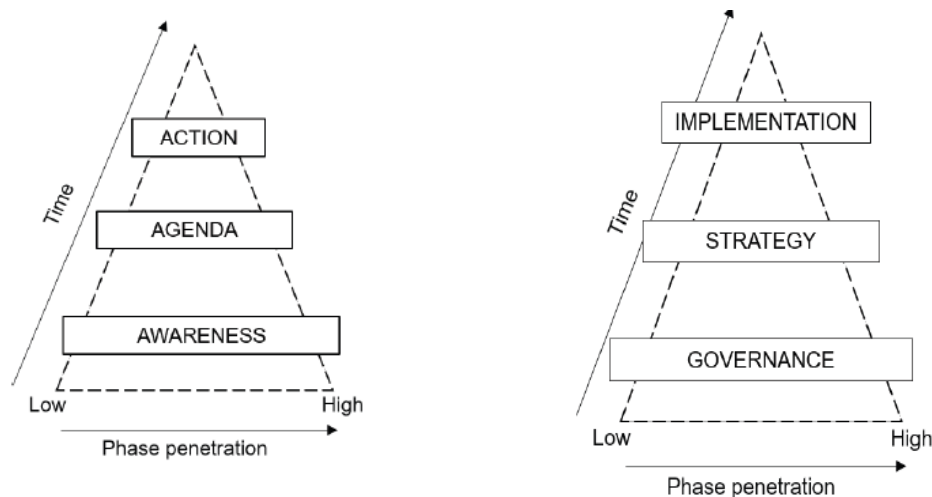
- Awareness;
- Agenda;
- Action.

It defines the socio-political stages of social and ecological responsibility and highlights the importance of the socio-political environment of the destination (Mihalic, 2022). This includes social ethics and awareness about tourism and its possible positive and negative impacts, as well as tourism politics (strategies, governance, management, agendas, actions, and behaviour) and collaboration of all stakeholders and institutions involved in the decision-making. As already mentioned, it is the first step toward sustainable and responsible tourism development.

The 3As model shows that when there is Awareness about sustainability issues, they start appearing in the political Agenda, and tourism policy becomes a matter of discussion. Then, the most important is the final step, Action, which means implementation of the policy and environmental responsibility driven by social-environmental ethics (Mihalic, 2022).

Correspondingly, according to Mihalic, both models can be presented as follows:

Figure 3: The 3As model and the GSLI destination management model



Source: Mihalič (2022)

Although the terminology differs, both approaches refer to destination management as a progressive and thoughtful process of development and guidance of the destination towards the desired goal of long-term sustainability. Destination management is not the same as management in an organisation. The development and management of tourism destinations require a holistic approach to policy and governance. Therefore, to ensure sustainable

development, fostering society to prioritise environmental friendliness and awareness is essential. This will enable effective management and development of tourism that respects and preserves the environment for future generations.

2.3.5 Tourism planning and policy

The planning and policies are profoundly interconnected and represent an integrated part of any strategic development process. Still, their significance is essential for sustainable tourism development to ensure continuous progress and long-term viability. According to UN Tourism, “they both serve a common purpose: to build and enhance the governance of the tourism sector as a means to achieve its ultimate goal – competitiveness and sustainability. Tourism planning and its outcome policy should be the result of a comprehensive and integrated constant and flexible process where all stakeholders collaborate” (UN Tourism, 2019, p. 5). Without effective planning and policy, achieving sustainable tourism and cultural heritage protection will be difficult. The purpose of the planning process and management actions is to prevent overdevelopment in destinations. These processes are recommended and designed to identify potential issues before they escalate to a point where the resource is significantly damaged, and access must be restricted or entirely stopped (NWHO, 1999).

Still, various definitions are provided for a better understanding of the terms. For planning one of the most commonly used is by Dror (1973, p. 330), who has defined it as “the process of preparing a set of decisions for action in the future, directed at achieving goals by preferable means”. While, policy in the context of tourism destinations is defined by Goeldner, Ritchie & McIntosh as: “a set of regulations, rules, guidelines, directives and development/promotion objectives and strategies that provide a framework within which the collective and individual decisions directly affecting tourism development and the daily activities within a destination are taken” (in Dodds & Butler, p.37).

In sustainable tourism development, planning is usually presented through a strategy as a sum of activities that need to be implemented. The negative side of the action plans is that they often remain on paper without being put into practice. As Murphy (in Hall, 2008) argued, “Planning is concerned with anticipating and regulating change in a system, to promote orderly development to increase the social, economic and environmental benefits of the development process”. This confirms the importance and applicability of planning in sustainable development. Furthermore, it is discussed that if properly planned, tourism can minimise the potential negative impacts and bring better economic returns to the destination. In order to do so, it must be planned as well towards the goals of improved visitor satisfaction, community integration, and greater resource protection (Hall, 2008).

Additionally, according to Hall (2008), planning as a tool can be used by both private and public sectors, although in tourism, planning is primarily a public sector activity. It’s a part

of the ‘planning-decision-action’ process. He also points out that the public sector, instead of predetermined strategies towards sustainability, often makes impulsive or ad hoc decisions and responses to the impacts of tourism. Such decision-making further leads to negative consequences on the sustainability of a destination and tourism growth.

Therefore, for effective planning, according to Inskeep (1991, p. 28), the process needs to be carefully carried through certain steps:

- Study preparation - defining guiding principles, organisation of the process, and allocation of duties and responsibilities.
- Setting goals and objectives according to which the further planning process should be carried out.
- Overview of the current situation of the destination, the existing tourism facilities and attractions, identification of relevant stakeholders;
- Analysis and synthesis of all the obtained qualitative and quantitative information as a base for plan and progress.
- Preparation and formulation of the plan and appropriate development policy, evaluation of possible outcomes and alternatives.
- Recommendation for additional aspects for improvement and future projects;
- Implementation of the plan and practical realisation of the objectives in a predetermined time frame (usually five years).
- Monitoring of the implementation process for continuous evaluation, early identification of complications and plan modification if needed.

We can conclude that for effective planning, it’s of great importance to pay close attention to each of the listed steps. There are plenty of economic, ecological, and political factors that must be considered while planning and creating a sustainable tourism policy (Mihalic, 2022). Therefore, sustainable tourism development requires a comprehensive planning approach that prioritises clear goals and strong leadership in order to satisfy all aspects and create tourism practice that benefits everyone involved.

On the other hand, public policymaking is a key governmental activity. It is influenced by the economic, social, and cultural characteristics of the society, as well as by the formal structures of government and other features of the political system in a destination. The policy should then be the outcome of the political environment, values and ideologies, the distribution of power, institutional framework, and the decision-making process (Hall, 2008, p.9). This means that sustainable tourism development depends on socio-political awareness, ethics, agreed agendas and implemented actions (Mihalic, 2022, p. 39).

Moreover, the right that the involved authorities possess to make important decisions gives them great power, but it also brings huge responsibilities. The creation of tourism policy and the support it gets are closely linked to the extent of the government’s recognition of the significance of the tourism industry. Therefore, for governments, tourism policies that

address economic, social and environmental issues, developed with an awareness of the potential both for harm and for benefit, can channel the forces resulting from the sector's dynamic growth in a positive direction (UNEP, UN Tourism, p. 10). In their guidebook, UN Tourism (2013) has specified that: "A Tourism Policy states the government's commitment to tourism and sets out objectives for its development and management. It should be agreed and approved with the tourism sector and other stakeholders". Whether it's in the form of a document, statement, part of a tourism strategy, or a plan, what is important is the content and its further implementation, so a Tourism policy should:

- Place tourism in the country's broader development policies while considering other policies that may impact employment, environment, education, culture, security.
- Addressing the financial implications of supporting tourism, including costs and benefits and fiscal and budgetary implications for the government.
- Reflect on the tourism position and potential of the country within a regional and global context.
- Identify various issues that the government needs to address in supporting tourism, including institutions, infrastructure, product development, marketing, human resources, knowledge, and the socio-cultural and environmental impacts of tourism.
- Create detailed strategies and plans and provide a basis for additional legislation and regulations (Tourism, 2013, p. 47).

Moreover, policies for sustainable tourism should evolve in two directions in which tourism policy can have an influence:

- Minimising the negative impacts of tourism on society and the environment;
- Maximising tourism's positive contribution to local economies, the conservation of natural and cultural heritage, and the quality of life of hosts and visitors.

According to Dodds & Butler (2009), not many tourist destinations use specific policies in the prevention of excessive use of resources, and those that do are mostly faced with some difficulties in their implementation. Because of the diversity within the private and public sectors and the complexity of tourism, policies need to be realistic from multiple perspectives and to be considered during the planning process in order to facilitate their implementation. They also recognised the lack of research and studies related to the evaluation of tourism policies and argued that most of the existing studies focused on what governments should do rather than offering some suggestions for improvement and higher achievement of policy implementation.

Additionally, Dodds and Butler believe that: "The focus of policies at the international and national levels will change as they are reinterpreted and implemented at a local level and each country or destination should establish an operational definition for sustainable development to achieve a bottom-up and top-down consensus approach". With this

statement, the role of the local authorities in planning and policy-making in terms of sustainable tourism development of a destination has been emphasised once again. Still, according to their research, a higher level of support (national or regional) is equally important and necessary in some cases of policy implementation. This means that tourism policy should not be considered in isolation but rather to ensure that tourism is integrated into the overall national policies and fully aligned with the national or regional objectives (UN Tourism, 2019). Moreover, tourism needs to be considered in the creation of policies related to other sectors, such as trade, labour, security, business, and the environment, due to their mutual impact (Tourism, 2013). For example, decisions regarding national tourism policy, such as visa requirements or country entry conditions, influence tourism on local and even international levels. So, it's suggested that: "tourism policy needs to be understood as occurring not only at different scales but also between institutions in different parts of the world" (Hall & Jenkins, 2004, p. 536).

Some of the identified limitations in creating and implementing sustainable tourism policies are the set of short-term objectives, focusing on economic growth and initiatives that bring fast, viable, and tangible results without devoting the same attention to social and environmental concerns (Dodds & Butler, 2009). Guo, Jiang and Li (2019), in their research, revived case studies of many different destinations and identified similar barriers to sustainable tourism policy implementation. They highlight the complexity of its interaction with other policies, as well as weak government leadership and too much focus on economic growth as the main issues. Additionally, it's discussed that often, there is an inconsistency between the priorities of officials and the goals of sustainable tourism policies in the national tourism strategies.

Nevertheless, the creation of sustainable tourism policies is of great importance, as they offer practical and effective guidelines and solutions to many sustainability challenges. A holistic approach and effective implementation of strategic planning and policies are needed for sustainable tourism to reach its full potential.

2.3.6 Place-oriented tourism planning and development

The conferences and reports from world organisations mostly serve as an incentive for international cooperation, presenting global problems and their possible solutions. However, in the end, when it comes to sustainable tourism development, each destination should create its own agenda. Therefore, planning, management, promotion, as well as the adoption of appropriate regulations should be in accordance with the current local situation and capabilities, as well as with the set long-term goals (Miller & Twining, 2005).

According to Kreag (2001), tourism planning should be based on a clearly defined community vision of tourism, and directed according to local needs, interests and limits, to raise tourism's value to the community and maintain sustainability of the industry. In this

way, planning can help in creating a growing industry with minimal cost and impacts on other aspects of community life.

Throughout the literature, this thinking is recognised as a place-based or place-oriented approach to sustainable development (Eligh et al., 2002). It is the desirable approach to discovering and diminishing the possible negative impacts resulting from tourism in certain destinations. Still, no matter how good a certain destination is in managing sustainability locally, it cannot influence tourists' behaviour in their onward travelling to other places. Furthermore, based on their research of two tourist destinations in Norway, (Eligh et al., 2002) concluded that successful sustainable tourism development and management remains very limited and dependent on the local or national socioeconomic and political development of specific destinations. They argue that besides destination size and coherence, some of the crucial success factors rely heavily on the local actors and their place-driven actions within the sustainability principles. This includes strong leadership, external funding by support agencies and the importance of consumer demand and subsequent supplier revenue generation (Eligh et al., 2002). Additionally, Wall (1997) theorised that given local differences, in order to provide an adequate response to each problem, the response must be designed at the local level. Hence, developing useful principles for tourism development that apply to all places and always will be a challenge.

In a similar fashion, Inskip suggests that a destination should adopt the product-led approach for more sustainable development. This means that tourism will be planned and developed in accordance with its capability and resources while maintaining its uniqueness, and focusing on desirable tips of tourists with appropriate interests. By doing so, it's easier to keep the balance between economic, social, and environmental objectives and provide long-term viability, instead of a market-led approach, which assumes that destination development should be based on tourists' desires and include in its offer any trending activity, even at the cost of environmental degradation. This may be more effective in short-term economic profitability but does not lead to sustainable tourism development (Inskip, 1991).

Moreover, the application of sustainable tourism development will certainly depend on the specific destination and its level of development. Namely, developing countries will always prioritise economic growth (Hunter, 1997). He emphasises the importance of strong authority guidance and involvement of local communities in the planning and decision-making activities as much as possible, but also that it must be both transparent and well-informed. When a wide range of community members are involved in the planning process and different perspectives are accounted for, it becomes easier to identify any concerns and resolve problems that may arise later on. The relevant stakeholders know best the issues they face, so they can contribute locally with their experience in the field. Furthermore, generally, the impacts on the local environment and communities are more apparent, so it is easier to gain support for policies that address local issues than those addressing global ones.

Therefore, everyone operating within the industry should strive to improve sustainability and mitigate the negativities as much as they can, and as stated by Butler (1998, p. 31): “Tourism in a specific area may have moved some way towards being more sustainable, and in reality, that may be the best that can be achieved”.

2.3.7 Monitoring of sustainable tourism development

In addition to the importance of planning and policies, for effective sustainable tourism development, the process needs to be constantly monitored and evaluated. This is achieved by creating and applying appropriate indicators as measurement tools. They can be used as a base for most of the already mentioned stages of the planning process, like assessing the current situation, setting goals and objectives, and providing data for analysis, as well as during the process of monitoring.

Indicators were defined by Hamilton and Attwater (1997) as: “variables that provide information about something so that appropriate management decisions can be made” (in Weaver, 2004, p. 517). The UN Tourism created a special guidebook which aims to assist tourism and destination managers as a comprehensive tool for the development and application of indicators for sustainable tourism in their destinations. Within this guidebook, indicators are defined as “measures of the existence or severity of current issues, signals of upcoming situations or problems, measures of risk and potential need for action, and means to identify and measure the results of our actions”, while in terms of sustainable tourism, they are considered as “time series information which are strategic to the sustainability of a destination, its assets, and ultimately, the fortunes of the tourism sector” (UN Tourism, 2004, p. 8). They are formally selected information sets for regular use to measure changes that are important for the tourism development and management of a given destination.

Various forms of measurement are used to present indicators. They are divided into qualitative (raw data, ratios, percentages) and qualitative or normative (category indices, normative indicators, nominal indicators, and opinion-based indicators) measurements. According to (UNEP, UN Tourism, 2005, p. 72) indicators can be used to show:

- The current state of the industry (e.g. occupancy rates, tourist satisfaction).
- Stresses on the system (e.g. water shortages, crime levels).
- The impact of tourism (e.g. changes in income levels in communities, rate of deforestation).
- Management effort (e.g. funding of clean-ups of coastal contamination);
- The effect of management actions (e.g. changed pollution levels, number of returning tourists).
- Early warning signs (e.g., decline in numbers of tourists who intend to return).

Moreover, one indicator may change its purpose over a more extended period. For instance, if the original use was to indicate stress on the system, the same indicator could further be used as a performance measure to evaluate the management efforts taken in response to the problems. Additionally, many current data sources of standardised tourism indicators, such as the number of tourists, can be repurposed to assess sustainability. If related to the use of natural resources, they can provide us with important information (average water consumption per tourist). Still, what is important is the indicator's effectiveness in addressing the intended key issue properly. They need to be feasible to gather and analyse and practical to implement. Essentially, any data can become a valuable indicator as long as it addresses the important issues of a destination.

Indicators can help evaluate the possible negative impacts of tourism on sustainability, by indicating any change as a warning sign and contributing to better decision-making and actions. This is particularly important for the sustainable development of tourism, as it often deals with sensitive environmental issues, so it's important to take preventive measures or respond quickly to any problem that arises. Therefore, two types of indicators can be applied:

- Impact indicators – measuring the positive and negative impacts on tourism;
- Environmental quality indicators – refer to the state of the environment in the destination (Mihalic, 2022).

On a destination level, the best indicators are those that address its primary risks and issues related to tourism sustainability while also offering data to clarify the main concerns and measure responses. Therefore, it is important for destination managers to carefully select and customise indicators that are the most relevant for their specific, current environmental, socio-cultural, and economic condition, and their future objectives. Additionally, as in the overall sustainable tourism development process, the involvement of the relevant stakeholders (including local communities, tourism industry professionals, and governmental organisations) in the identification and development of indicators is crucial. By using their personal knowledge and experience gained from operating in the destination, the local stakeholders can easily identify the key issues and the important future aspects of development. Engaging stakeholders ensures that the chosen indicators reflect the concerns and priorities of those directly affected by tourism activities. (UN Tourism, 2004).

In order to thoroughly analyse and monitor the process of sustainable tourism development, the principles of sustainability should be taken as a starting point in the creation of indicators. In other words, economic, social, and environmental sustainability must be evaluated.

Economic indicators assess tourism's contribution to the local economy, including employment opportunities by the tourism sector, income generation from tourism activities, and contribution to gross domestic product. By evaluating these indicators, destinations can understand the financial benefits of tourism and make informed decisions to allocate

resources effectively and ensure that tourism development promotes sustainable economic growth.

Socio-cultural indicators assess the effects of tourism on local communities, including changes in traditional customs and lifestyles, as well as the preservation of cultural heritage. By monitoring indicators such as the degree of community involvement in tourism planning, the level of education of residents, community or visitor satisfaction surveys, percentage of criminality and vandalism caused by tourism, etc., destinations can strive to ensure that tourism benefits local communities and respects indigenous cultures.

Environmental performance indicators play a crucial role in measuring sustainable tourism development. These indicators evaluate the environmental impact of tourism activities, such as energy and water consumption, waste generation, and greenhouse gas emissions. By implementing sustainable practices and monitoring environmental indicators, destinations can minimise their ecological footprint and contribute to the conservation of natural resources. This includes energy or water consumption per tourist or per capita, percentage of energy consumption from renewable resources, waste volume produced by the destination, level of pollution (water, sound, soil and air) due to tourism, actions undertaken to reduce pollution, etc. (Asmelash & Kumar, 2019; UNEP, UN Tourism, 2005).

This is the broader concept; still, in practice, the development of indicators is carried out on more detailed levels. This is mostly done by selecting multiple baseline issues and adding relevant indicators for each of them. For instance, the European Commission has created the European Tourism Indicator System (ETIS) to assist destinations in monitoring and measuring their sustainable tourism performance. The system is based on four groups (sections), and each of them is divided into additional sub-sections:

- Section A – Destination management, including sustainable tourism public policy, management in tourism enterprises, customer satisfaction and information and communication.
- Section B – Economic value, including tourism flow at the destination, tourism enterprises performance, employment, safety and health and tourism supply chain.
- Section C – Social and cultural impact, including social impact on the community, gender equality, accessibility and cultural heritage and local identity.
- Section D – Environmental impact, including transport, climate change, waste management, sewage treatment, water management, energy usage and landscape and biodiversity protection, light and noise management and bathing water quality.

On this basis, 27 core and 40 optional indicators are developed. They can be used individually or integrated into existing destination monitoring systems. The System can be customised to meet the needs of the destination, the interests of local stakeholders, and the specific sustainability issues that the destination faces. The basic principle of the ETIS is to foster shared destination responsibility, ownership, and decision-making (EC, 2013).

In a similar fashion, Asmelash and Kumar, in their research as a base, used ‘the twelve aims’ of sustainable tourism, plus an additional four as a description of a new dimension, institutional sustainability. In brief, they developed a comprehensive set of 53 indicators to assess sustainable tourism development (Asmelash & Kumar, 2019).

Once indicators for sustainable tourism development have been carefully selected and implemented, the next critical step is to ensure ongoing monitoring and evaluation of their application. Since sustainable development is an ongoing process, changes are a fundamental part of it, so the indicators and their use must be regularly revised over time. Some of them may not assess the relevant issue as expected, or additional ones may be required. By continuous monitoring, destination decision-makers can follow the developmental progress or use the obtained data for further actions (UNEP, UN Tourism, 2005).

This process is demanding as it requires ongoing commitment of resources. Different destinations may have varying data availability, monitoring capabilities, and resources for implementing and maintaining the whole operation over the long term. Therefore, it’s important to consider all these aspects at the beginning of the planning process and when selecting indicators for sustainable tourism development.

Although some may argue that sustainability as a complex concept is difficult to measure, the useful application of indicators has been proven through the years. According to Weaver (2004), the subjectivity of the construct of sustainable tourism, along with the complexities of the tourism system, the uniqueness of each destination, as well as their budgetary or political constraints, presents significant challenges in effectively selecting, measuring, and monitoring sustainable tourism indicators. On the other hand, the lack of a mutually accepted assessment methodology for measuring sustainability is considered one of the main barriers to achieving sustainable tourism (Cernat & Gourdon, 2012). There are multiple sustainability assessment models, but no one is perfect, so as discussed by Ko (2005), it’s better to focus on the practical use of the sustainability principles and monitor the process of improvement of people’s lives and natural environment in a certain period of time than to strive to achieve absolute and indefinite sustainable tourism development.

3 STAKEHOLDERS IN THE TOURISM INDUSTRY

In addition to the frequent mentions of the term ‘stakeholders’ and their importance in the whole process of sustainable tourism development, a more detailed elaboration is required. Therefore, we must first clarify its meaning. The most commonly used definition in the literature is Freeman’s, which defines stakeholders as “any group or individual who can affect or is affected by the achievement of the organisation’s objectives” (1984, p. 46). This refers to a broad range of entities which have a vested interest in or may be affected by the organisation’s actions, decisions, and policies. The stakeholder approach to strategic management, as described by Freeman, implies that strategic management, besides the

interest of the organisation's shareholders, should consider the rights and interests of all stakeholders within the management process. He emphasised their significance as a component of an organisation's environment.

Correspondingly, in terms of sustainable tourism development, stakeholders are defined as individuals, groups or organisations interested in or are affected by tourism and its impacts (Aas et al., 2005). Tourism literature provides various approaches to defining the different types of stakeholder groups (Niekerk, 2014; Turker, Alaeddinoglu, & Can, 2016). They can be divided into three broader and comprehensive groups: tourists (the demand side), the tourism industry (the supply side), and residents (Mihalic, 2022). However, tourism stakeholders are also often divided into narrower groups, including everyone who has an interest in or is affected by tourism and its impacts, as already mentioned in the definition. Sustainable tourism development as a multidimensional and complex concept requires participation and collaboration among various significant entities. Therefore, some of the main stakeholders identified in tourism are:

- Local communities - The residents in tourism destinations who may be directly affected by tourism activities.
- Government bodies - Local, regional, and national governmental agencies that regulate and promote tourism are often responsible for infrastructure, policy-making, and ensuring the welfare of the community.
- Tourism businesses or private sector - Operators, hotels, restaurants, activity providers, and others directly involved in offering services to tourists.
- Tourists: Visitors who consume tourism products and services.
- Non-governmental organisations - Environmental, cultural, social and community organisations concerned with the protection and preservation of environmental or cultural heritage (Waligo et al., 2013).

These groups can influence the supply and demand of tourism, create regulations, manage its impact on the environment and society, provide human resources, and conduct further research to enhance the sector's growth and sustainability. Additionally, each of the interested parties may influence the maximisation of tourism benefits and contribute to more efficient sustainable tourism development as long as they fulfil their responsibilities. On the contrary, their irresponsible behaviour and unsustainable practices will have a negative impact on the sustainable tourism development of the destination. Therefore, in order to move towards sustainable tourism, the relevant stakeholders in a destination must work together with the same vision and be included in the planning process and management. A more detailed list with all potentially involved stakeholders, directly or indirectly affected by tourism, along with their responsibilities in sustainable tourism development, is provided by UN Tourism (2013, pp. 19-20).

Table 2: Stakeholder and their role in sustainable tourism

Stakeholder type	Role in delivering sustainable tourism
<u>National Government:</u> Tourism Ministry Other Ministries Tourism agencies, e.g. Tourist Board Other government delivery agencies Resource management bodies e.g. National Parks Service	Tourism policy and strategy development and implementation Relating tourism to wider policies and strategies Legislation, standards, and regulation relating to the sector Infrastructure planning and development Resource management Communication, information, and marketing
<u>Local Government and destination bodies:</u> Regional government Local authorities e.g. District Councils Destination management organisations, e.g. public-private	Local strategic direction and planning Implementation of policy and regulations Local infrastructure development and management Stakeholder engagement, coordination, and support
<u>Private sector businesses:</u> Tourism trade associations, national and local Tourism service providers. e.g. hotel businesses Tour operators – international and incoming Suppliers to the sector, e.g. food producers Investors – international and domestic	Representation of, and influence on, the tourism sector Operation of tourism services Link to domestic and international markets Product development, investment, and improvement Employment creation and generating local income Reflecting economic, social, and environmental sustainability issues in development and operations
<u>Employees and related bodies:</u> Labour unions Individual workers in the sector	Representing interests of employees Human resources planning and development Provision of a reliable service in return for income
<u>NGOs – International, national, and local:</u> Sustainable development NGOs Environment, conservation, and cultural NGOs Social and community NGOs	Representing different stakeholder interests Engaging in strategic planning and development Stakeholder coordination and supporting implementation Capacity building and provision of expertise
<u>Education and training bodies:</u> Universities, colleges, and teaching bodies Research institutions Technical experts and advisory bodies	Knowledge gathering and dissemination Supporting policy and strategy development Capacity building and training Specific advice and expertise
<u>Local community:</u> Community councils and representative bodies Traditional structures –e.g. tribal chiefs/bodies Organised groups, e.g. women, youth Local formal and informal traders Individual households	Engaging in planning and decisions on tourism at a local level Representing and communicating local community interests Pursuing equitable benefit sharing within communities Interacting with tourists to mutual benefit Receiving income from tourist spending

To be continued

Continued

Table 2: Stakeholder and their role in sustainable tourism (cont.)

<p><u>Consumers/tourists:</u> Individual tourists Consumer networks, clubs, and societies Travel media and social media users</p>	<p>Providing the main source of income to the sector Behaving responsibly towards the environment and local communities in travel choices and actions Communicating information and opinions on destinations and sustainability issues accurately and fairly</p>
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Source: UN Tourism, (2013).

The stakeholder approach in sustainable tourism development is based on the principle that the interests, needs and impacts of all interested parties should be considered in the process of planning, developing, and managing tourism. Although it is impossible to satisfy all stakeholders all the time, efforts should be made to at least not harm them. This concept encompasses several key aspects:

- Engagement - Actively involving stakeholders in decision-making processes through consultation, collaboration, and partnership.
- Communication - Establishing open and transparent channels for information flow between stakeholders to build trust and support.
- Responsibility - Acknowledging the roles and obligations of each stakeholder group in contributing to sustainable tourism outcomes.
- Accountability - Holding stakeholders accountable for their actions and the impacts they have on the tourism destination and its inhabitants (Nicolaidis, 2015).

The involvement of stakeholders is crucial in the implementation of sustainable tourism and is gaining prominence in academic and industrial fields. As claimed by Nicolaidis (2015), if sustainable tourism development is a desired objective at any destination, destination stakeholders must be fully aware and informed of what is anticipated and what will be their role in benefiting their community and the affected tourism organisations.

Furthermore, it's of great importance to understand the relationship between stakeholders rather than considering them in isolation. This should be based on developing effective structures for coordination and partnership, which enables representatives of local authorities and non-governmental organisations to participate in the creation and implementation of national tourism policies and strategies (Tourism, 2013). With the aim of bringing together different interests, such structures should be established and managed by governments. Therefore, their main purposes are:

- Engaging stakeholders in the formulation of a strategy and policies for sustainable tourism.

- Ensuring effective coordination of actions and an ongoing dialogue between stakeholders (UNEP, UN Tourism, 2005).

Usually, this includes governmental agencies like tourist boards that have included private sector representatives, yet it is necessary to explore new ways to broaden the process with additional dedicated structures. There are countries which have established tourism councils as advisory bodies. These councils can be effective mechanisms for promoting the sustainability of tourism, as they allow for a diverse range of stakeholders to provide input and recommendations. However, it is essential to ensure that their membership is well-balanced and reflects the economic, social, and environmental dimensions of sustainability. Moreover, these structures are also required at the local level, where they are usually defined as destination management organisations. While they represent a partnership between local government and the private sector and are mainly dedicated to the management and promotion of tourism, DMOs need to fully consider the social and environmental aspects of sustainability by ensuring effective representation of the local community within their governing entities (UNEP, UN Tourism, 2005).

These structures are the usual mechanisms that governments use to enhance the involvement and cooperation between different stakeholder groups, but they are not the only way to achieve it. At the local level, various events can be organised, like conferences, seminars, and workshops, which will provide some educational content to raise awareness about sustainability issues of the destination, exchange of experience and knowledge, and opportunities for further collaboration between stakeholders. They can be organised by NGOs, different entities from the society like hotel associations etc., and supported by the local authorities.

The perspectives and actions of stakeholders have a profound impact on sustainability initiatives, so a stakeholder analysis is essential. Their recognition, engagement and participation are crucial for sustainable tourism. Therefore, by exploring stakeholder issues through a multi-stakeholder view, we can ensure the success of sustainable tourism development. Additionally, according to Waligo et al. (2013, p. 351), stakeholder involvement in sustainable tourism is influenced by several key factors including leadership quality, information quality and accessibility, stakeholder mindsets, stakeholder involvement capacity, stakeholder relationships and implementation priorities. All things considered, sustainable tourism development requires significant effort, knowledge, and engagement from everyone involved. A holistic approach is necessary to ensure economic growth, social well-being, and environmental protection in tourist destinations, especially in protected sites where the preservation of their cultural and natural heritage is imperative.

3.1 Barriers to stakeholder involvement and collaboration

Effective stakeholder involvement is often difficult to achieve since they all have distinct, individual values and perspectives on tourism, different goals and expectations. While some studies concentrate on how stakeholders can engage more effectively in the development and implementation of sustainable tourism policies, their differences in perception may cause challenges in the implementation of those policies. According to Guo et al. (2019), although stakeholders are often acknowledged as important, there are limited detailed studies on how to identify, participate, and collaborate with them. Moreover, descriptions of tourism stakeholders comprise several groups, but the most frequently included are large tourism companies and government tourism agencies.

Additionally, Ladkin & Bertramini (2002) in their research have identified several barriers that affect the collaboration between stakeholders in tourism development, including lack of expertise and training among tourism planning authorities, insufficient funding, lack of engagement and commitment of stakeholders, interest for the same resources, absence of common vision, clear leadership and long-term strategy. Moreover, Hatipoglu et al. (2014) discussed that despite their knowledge and awareness about the importance of sustainability, stakeholders tend to prioritise activities like marketing and tourism product development, which bring fast but short-term and mostly economic benefits. Although not all these hindrances will appear in any destination, and during the whole process of planning and development, they can still pose significant challenges to sustainable tourism development.

3.2 Role of stakeholders in tourism

Stakeholders play a vital role in sustainable tourism development by contributing to governance, collaboration, and resource management. In our research, we have focused on the supply side of tourism in Ohrid, therefore the roles of the Government, private sector, NGOs, and the local community are presented in more detail. Effective collaboration among these stakeholders is crucial for achieving sustainable tourism development.

3.2.1 Role of the Government

Tourism, as a growing and dynamic industry, is mainly driven by private-sector businesses. Still, the role of governments at both national and local levels is crucial for sustainable tourism development. As already mentioned in the previous sections, the government has the power to influence the planning and policy-making process directly and indirectly. Therefore, they have the responsibility to consider tourism when creating legislation and making decisions in various sectors such as the economy, political stability, transportation and infrastructure, environmental issues, natural and cultural heritage management... They have a responsibility towards the tourists, the tourism sector organisation, the community, and the environment and cannot function in isolation anymore (Niekerk, 2014, p. 714).

Additionally, governments influence some of the most important segments of sustainable development, such as land use management, education and labour legislation, environmental regulations, as well as the provision of all the necessary social services for the local community and visitors (UNEP, UN Tourism, 2005).

Therefore, in order to promote and enhance sustainable tourism development, the government need to provide an optimal environment to encourage the private sector to operate sustainably. They need to invest in good infrastructure and promotion of destinations in order to attract other private investors, meaning that primarily is important to provide significant budget funds dedicated to tourism development. However, according to UN Tourism (2000) instead of being a direct investor in the industry, governments see their role more as that of facilitator, or stimulator of private sector investment through fiscal and other incentives. Furthermore, they have a pivotal role in the formulation and implementation of tourism policies. By establishing clear guidelines and regulations, the government can ensure that all tourism activities correspond with the destination's environmental and social sustainability objectives. Additionally, given that the tourism sector includes many different types of businesses (small, medium, and large), they must be properly coordinated (UNEP, UN Tourism, 2005). As noted by Hall (2008), the most important role of the government is the coordination role, which is crucial for the successful implementation of policies and the whole developmental process.

As a means of encouragement, the government can use various forms of incentives or disincentives to enhance sustainability in the private sector. By offering low-interest loans, tax credits or subsidies for investments in renewable energy, water conservation, waste reduction initiatives, some training programs, etc., tourism businesses will be motivated to adopt sustainable practices. On the other hand, the government can implement regulations that will require certain sustainability standards or impose some disincentives like levies or penalties on businesses that fail to meet such requirements in order to minimise the negative impact of tourism (NWHO, 1999). These kinds of actions can contribute to the creation of a more sustainable and responsible tourism industry, encouraging the private sector to reduce their environmental impacts and increase the benefits to local communities. Therefore, government intervention should serve to balance the power and interests of the private sector and their own interest. According to Petrevska (2012) “the role of the government is to act as an economic power that will guide and manage tourism development. Its intervention is justified only when tourism by itself may not act efficiently”.

3.2.1.1 Government sector in tourism in North Macedonia

Based on their retrospective research regarding the historical development of tourism in North Macedonia through the years, Petrevska & Collins-Kreiner (2016) stated that after the independence of the state, the Government had a significant “influential developmental and operational role” in all the stages of tourism development. Therefore, the current organisational structure of the tourism governance in the country will be explained.

In Macedonia on a national level, the tourism sector is under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Economy and its Department for Tourism and Hospitality. Their focus is on promotion, increased number of tourists and the economic benefits of tourism. On the other hand, the environmental aspects of the country's sustainable development are competencies of the Ministry of Environment and Physical Planning. Therefore, they are responsible for environmental protection and implementation of the national legislation, management of natural resources, creation of the National Strategy for Nature Protection, as well as continuous monitoring of sustainable development (Ministry of Environment and Physical Planning, 2018). Although their focus is not tourism, its positive and negative impacts are constantly considered and monitored. Additionally, there is a Ministry of Culture responsible for the protection and management of cultural heritage, with a specific department for multilateral cooperation and cooperation with UNESCO.

Furthermore, tourism is legally defined by various legislations, of which the most significant are the Law on Tourism and the Law on Hospitality (both since 2004), and the Law on Taxes for Temporary Stay (since 1996, with its latest update in 2020) (Petrevska, 2012). The Ministry of Economy is responsible for the tourism policy, strategic planning, the creation of a National Strategy for tourism development, the annual Tourism development program, the proper distribution of the allocated budget funds by the state for the tourism sector, licensing, categorisation, as well as the adoption of many other important decisions (Ministry of Economy, 2016).

Additionally, since 2008, the government has established the Agency for Promotion and Support of Tourism in the Republic of North Macedonia (APPT). The agency is an independent legal entity and operates based on the rights, competencies, authorisations, and obligations defined in the Law on Establishment of the APPT and its regulatory Statute. However, the Government of the Republic of North Macedonia gives consent to the Statute of the APPT, the annual work programme and the annual financial plan, while the Ministry of Economy supervises the legality of the operations of the agency (APPT, 2013).

The APPT is headed by the agency's director and managed by two main bodies: The Management Board (consisting of 7 members) and the Council (consisting of 15 members). While the board members are representatives from the government and economy sector, the Council members are representatives of different sectors related to tourism, including tourism chambers of commerce, NGOs, tourist associations and federations, as well as representatives from higher education institutions in the field of tourism. This means that various stakeholder groups are involved and can contribute with their knowledge, experience and perceptions regarding the promotion and support of tourism in North Macedonia. The main responsibilities of APPT are the promotion of Macedonian tourism resources to foreign markets and the management and support of tourism development. They are actively working on various projects to enhance the destination's competitiveness, create recognisable branding of the country, and enrich its offer with high-quality tourism products.

Besides the role of creating legislation and promoting tourism, the government provides financial support to enhance tourism development. In the last ten years, subsidies have been introduced as encouragement for organised foreign tourist traffic. It is intended as an incentive for tour operators and travel agencies that bring foreign tourists to the Republic of North Macedonia. By organising a tourist group of at least 10 tourists and a minimum of 3 overnights at categorised accommodation facilities, they will be able to receive financial support that will cover part of the costs for organised air, road, and rail transportation of tourists. The amount of subsidy per tourist varies depending on the tourist's country of origin (Ministry of Economy, 2013). Moreover, the government was the major support for the tourism sector during the pandemic crisis in 2020. To boost domestic tourism, several measures were adopted and implemented, such as subsidies for the payment of the minimum wage to workers, vouchers to support domestic tourism and subsidies for organising conferences, seminars, and training in domestic tourism facilities. All the important decisions during the crisis were made with consultation and collaboration with representatives from the Tourism and Hospitality Association at the Chamber of Commerce of Macedonia in order to address the real needs of the sector (Ministry of Economy, 2020).

At the local level, there are several departments under the local government of the municipality of Ohrid which are related to tourism. Foremost is the Tourism department, which is responsible for the promotion of the destination and its values and ensures that tourist information and promotional materials are available to visitors. It is also responsible for creating and implementing programs to support the development of small-scale tourism and hospitality businesses. Additionally, there is an Environmental Protection and Waste Management Department, a UNESCO and European Integration Department, a Department for International Cooperation, a Local Economic Development Department, a Culture Department, etc. (Ohrid Municipality, n.d.). All these sectors have certain responsibilities, and although their competencies differ, they should operate with the same goal and by mutual collaboration to contribute to the sustainable tourism development of Ohrid.

3.2.2 Role of the private sector

As noted earlier, the private sector is the driving force of the tourism industry and their role is expected to grow even more given the increased globalisation, privatisation, and commercialisation. Most of the tourism activities are provided by private businesses; correspondingly, they are the main source of income generated from tourism and employment within the industry. Still, the private sector is often criticised for focusing on short-term goals and their activities are mainly driven by economic profitability, without considering their possible negative impacts on the environment like overuse of water, energy, waste management... (NWHO, 1999).

According to Mihalic (2016, p. 463), the private sector is less tolerant and receptive to sustainability agendas. They are much slower to discuss or address the environmental and

socio-cultural aspects of their business practices and are reluctant to talk about sustainability. Even when sustainable practices are implemented, they are motivated by the aim of lowering direct costs and improving their financial performance (Mihalic et al., 2012). The social aspects, such as the employment of the local population, regular pay, and good working conditions, should also be included in the sustainable practices of the local businesses. This will benefit the community and the businesses themselves. Investment in an efficient and reliable workforce through training and education is crucial to enhancing tourism industry productivity and is cost-effective in the long run (Armenski et al., 2017).

Moreover, private enterprises are in direct contact with tourists, which gives them the power to influence consumer behaviour, raise awareness about sustainability issues and provide possible action for improvement (UNEP, UN Tourism, 2005). This is particularly important in larger businesses like hotels. Since they welcome a significant number of tourists, they have the opportunity to trigger some positive changes in tourist behaviour, which is mostly done through pro-environmental appeals. Still, research from the field indicates that no significant improvements are noticed, at least in the matter of increased hotel towel reuse and decreased room electricity consumption (Dolnicar et al., 2016). Therefore, it's suggested that more tangible benefits in the form of incentives or rewards are more likely to motivate tourists to more responsible behaviour.

However, the private sector is an important stakeholder group in tourism and has a significant impact on its development. They need to be involved in the process of planning and decision-making of their destination and be open to collaboration with the government and other stakeholders. Their knowledge, perceptions and experience can contribute to a better understanding of the local issues and offer possible solutions for more sustainable tourism development. Eventually, their businesses operate and depend on that environment, so its long-term viability is in their interest, too.

3.2.3 Role of Non-Governmental Organisations

NGOs have a responsible and constructive role in society, so the importance of their involvement in sustainable development has been emphasised in Agenda 21, back in 1992. "Their well-established and diverse experience, expertise and capacity in fields are of particular importance to the implementation and review of environmentally sound and socially responsible sustainable development" (UN, 1992, p. 282). Hence, according to the UN, an NGO is defined as a non-profit organisation, group or institution that operates independently from a Government and has humanitarian or development objectives. This also applies in terms of tourism, as the same principles were reaffirmed during the World Conference on Sustainable Tourism (UN Tourism, 1995), as well as the importance of the involvement of all relevant stakeholders in the process of sustainable tourism development.

Moreover, NGOs can establish collaboration among stakeholders, by acting as bridges between the government, private sector, and local communities (NWHO, 1999; UNEP, UN Tourism, 2005). Due to their political independence, they can offer different and comprehensive perspectives, support sustainable tourism initiatives, or be the voice of critique when necessary.

NGOs can be established and dedicated to different areas and interests. However, the most relevant for sustainable tourism development usually represent environmental, cultural, social and community organisations concerned with the protection and preservation of the environmental or cultural heritage. NGOs are actively engaged in achieving their goals by providing cultural, educational, advisory, and organisational support while motivating, informing, and initiating public debates. Their actions are inspired by sincere concerns about the relative issues, without expectation of something in return.

3.2.4 Role of the residents

The well-being or the quality of life of the local population is part of any definition or discussion related to sustainable tourism development. They are affected by the positive or negative impacts of tourism in any aspect social, environmental, or economic. If properly managed tourism can contribute to the overall socio-economic development of the destination and improve the quality of life of the residents. On the contrary, if tourism only provides seasonal employment or poor working conditions, leading to overcrowding, congestion, and traffic, it will have negative consequences on the residents' quality of life.

On the other hand, the residents have a great impact and responsibility towards environmental and socio-cultural sustainability. Their awareness is crucial for the protection and preservation of the natural and cultural heritage of the destination. Additionally, residents play a vital role in maintaining and promoting the local culture, traditions, and heritage. Their involvement ensures that tourism development respects and preserves the community's identity, creating an authentic experience for tourists. Engaging residents in tourism allows for the promotion of unique cultural experiences that are not exploitative but rather educational and enriching for both tourists and the local community (World Economic Forum, 2024).

The residents' attitude towards tourism can influence tourism development and tourists' satisfaction. If the residents perceive tourism as beneficial to their quality of life, they would be more engaged, more friendly and welcoming towards the tourists and tourism development. According to Kreag (2001, p. 1), "For a tourism-based economy to sustain itself in local communities, the residents must be willing partners in the process. Their attitudes toward tourism and perceptions of its impact on community life must be continually assessed." Therefore, it's important that the residents are included in the tourism planning and development process, so they can contribute to its successful implementation. "It's

extremely difficult to imagine the formulation and implementation of any approach to sustainable tourism in the absence of strong local authority planning and development control, and without the involvement of the local communities in the planning process to some degree” (Hunter, 1997, p. 864). This statement at the same time highlights the need for cooperation between different sectors. The involvement of local communities often requires capacity building and institutional support. A crucial aspect of this is providing them with information and knowledge that will help communities comprehend tourism as an industry and its impacts. This will enable them to assess the desirability of and opportunities within tourism. As a result of these processes, communities will start cooperating with the tourism industry instead of becoming dependent on it (NWHO, 1999).

Still, in practice, the residents of a given community are often not sufficiently involved in the decision-making process on tourism development in their region. This activity may be imposed from the outside or by the capital holders in the community. It also depends on the destination's socio-political environment, and the power relations within the community, which influence residents' involvement in tourism development. However, their participation is highly recommended since it ensures that the image of the destination is aligned with the local vision and enhances the implementation of sustainable tourism development (Hatipoglu et al., 2014). Ultimately, it will result in a more visitor-friendly destination and tourism that benefits everyone involved.

4 UNESCO ORGANISATION OVERVIEW

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation is a specialised organisation of the United Nations founded in 1946 that aims to encourage the identification, protection, and preservation of cultural and natural heritage worldwide. On the UNESCO List of World Heritage Sites, there are 1,112 sites, of which 860 are cultural, 213 are natural, and 39 are combined and located on the territories in 167 states (Majhoshev, 2019). UNESCO's World Heritage sites are designated based on their OUV, and the organisation collaborates closely with the member states to ensure the conservation and sustainable management of these sites. The Outstanding universal value of a UNESCO area is determined through two essential criteria: authenticity and integrity. Authenticity refers only to the cultural heritage and is evaluated through the degree of preservation of the original, i.e., original forms that reliably confirm the OUV. Integrity is the overall coherence and wholeness of the uniqueness, the absence of a threat to the truths, that is, the intactness of the natural and cultural heritage and its properties. Places nominated as World Heritage sites hold exceptional importance for the entire human race. These locations are selected and preserved under the 1972 UNESCO Convention for the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage, part of the global agreements to safeguard heritage. The 1972 Convention stands out as one of the most effective treaties in this regard and has been ratified by nearly all nations—currently, 191 countries have become States Parties to this convention. It is the

only legal instrument in the world dedicated to protecting natural and cultural heritage (UNESCO, 1972).

4.1 Mission and vision of UNESCO World Heritage

UNESCO World Heritage's goal is to promote the recognition, safeguarding, and for the benefit of humanity conservation of globally significant cultural and natural heritage. UNESCO's goal, primarily through its World Heritage and Sustainable Tourism Program, is to promote the sustainable management and growth of tourism at World Heritage sites. This involves promoting awareness, building capacity, and fostering equitable participation among stakeholders to protect these sites. The aim is also to ensure that tourism contributes to conservation benefits, sustainable development for local communities, and a positive visitor experience. (UNESCO, n.d.)

UNESCO aims to preserve cultural and natural heritage by protecting and conserving sites of outstanding universal value recognised under the World Heritage Convention. These include monumental edifices, archaeological sites, and landscapes of natural beauty. By designating such sites as World Heritage Sites, the organisation seeks to ensure their preservation and pass them on to future generations.

UNESCO's role in heritage preservation is multifaceted and includes:

- Identification - UNESCO works to identify and list sites of cultural and natural heritage of exceptional importance to humanity.
- Preservation - The organisation promotes these sites' protection, conservation, and safeguarding.
- Support - It provides international support and assistance, which could be technical, scientific, or financial, to maintain these sites.
- Awareness and Education - UNESCO raises public awareness about cultural and natural heritage and educates younger generations on its importance through specific programs like the World Heritage Education Programme.
- Sustainable Development - UNESCO integrates heritage preservation with sustainable development. By promoting responsible stewardship and sustainable tourism, UNESCO ensures that the uses of heritage sites are not just economically viable but are also environmentally friendly and culturally appropriate.
- Monitoring - UNESCO monitors the preservation of World Heritage Sites and can include sites on the List of World Heritage in Danger when required to stimulate protective action (WHC, 2023).

UNESCO's vision is rooted in the belief that cultural and natural heritage are invaluable and irreplaceable assets essential to the communities from which they originate and must be protected and cherished for the benefit of present and future generations. This vision

encompasses fostering peace and security by promoting collaboration among nations through education, science, culture, and communication to further universal respect for justice, the rule of law, and the human rights and fundamental freedoms proclaimed in the UN Charter.

The vision emphasises:

- The shared responsibility of World Heritage and tourism stakeholders for conserving cultural and natural sites of Outstanding Universal Value.
- The balanced participation of all stakeholders, including local communities, in conserving heritage while ensuring tourism benefits for sustainable development.
- The importance of heritage for present and future generations.

UNESCO's vision of promoting cultural and natural heritage conservation in collaboration with stakeholders and local communities reflects the organisation's understanding of the shared responsibility in preserving these invaluable assets. Therefore, by facilitating sustainable economic development through appropriate tourism management, UNESCO ensures that heritage places will benefit, aligning with its enduring commitment to universal respect for justice, the rule of law, and human rights while fostering peace and security through collaboration among nations (UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2004).

Furthermore, UNESCO's support and assistance in maintaining these sites extend beyond technical and financial aid. The organisation also prioritises raising public awareness and education about the importance of cultural and natural heritage. By engaging in specific programs such as the World Heritage Education Programme, UNESCO strives to instil a sense of responsibility and appreciation for these sites in younger generations, ensuring their continued protection and conservation (UNESCO, n.d.).

Overall, UNESCO's vision is to safeguard the world's significant cultural and natural heritage while promoting sustainable societal growth and intercultural understanding.

4.2 Organisational structure of UNESCO

The UNESCO organisational structure started in 1945 and has 195 members and 8 associated members and is comprised of the General Conference, the Executive Board, and the Secretariat. The General Conference is the highest decision-making body of UNESCO, composed of representatives from member states. The Executive Board is responsible for implementing the decisions of the General Conference and overseeing the organisation's programs and activities. The Secretariat, headed by the Director-General, is responsible for the day-to-day management of UNESCO and the implementation of its programs.

The General Conference, the supreme decision-making body, plays a pivotal role in setting the overall direction and vision for UNESCO. It comprises delegates from all 195 Member

states. Convenes every two years to determine the organisation's policies and budget and elects members of the Executive Board and the Director-General. Represented by the member states, the General Conference debates and decides on cultural and natural heritage issues related to UNESCO's mission, including the World Heritage and Sustainable Tourism Program. The decisions and resolutions during these sessions provide a framework for the organisation's work and initiatives.

The Executive Board, as the implementing body of the General Conference, is responsible for translating decisions and policies into action. It oversees UNESCO's various programs and activities, including those related to preserving and promoting World Heritage sites through sustainable tourism. The Executive Board also evaluates the effectiveness of these programs and recommends strategies for improvement based on feedback and evaluations (UNESCO, 2024).

The Secretariat, led by the Director-General and 680 employees divided into 54 offices worldwide, serves as the administrative arm of UNESCO. It is tasked with the day-to-day management of the organisation and the execution of its programs, including the World Heritage and Sustainable Tourism Program. The Secretariat facilitates coordination among different departments and units within UNESCO, ensuring that initiatives are aligned with the overall goals and mandates of the organisation (Majhoshev, 2019).

These external organisations support the World Heritage Committee through scientific and technical advice and assessments:

- ICOMOS specialises in conserving and protecting cultural heritage places, evaluating the cultural significance of sites nominated to the World Heritage List and monitoring the condition of existing cultural World Heritage Sites.
- IUCN evaluates natural Heritage sites, ensuring that they meet the strict criteria of outstanding universal value from the points of view of science, conservation, and natural beauty.
- ICCROM - The International Centre for the Study of the Preservation and Restoration of Cultural Property offers comprehensive expertise on conserving cultural heritage. It evaluates the state of conservation of cultural World Heritage Sites, provides training on restoration techniques and strategies, and advises on issues related to the deterioration and preservation of heritage materials (Schmutz & Elliott, 2016).
- National Commissions - These are national bodies set up by each Member State of UNESCO. They are crucial for linking the programs and objectives of UNESCO to the national context, including the World Heritage Program. The commission works to identify potential World Heritage Sites within their borders, help prepare nomination dossiers, promote educational activities, and facilitate national initiatives that contribute to the goals of the World Heritage Convention. They may

also mobilise local and national resources to support the conservation and management of World Heritage Sites.

- **State Parties** - Countries that have ratified the World Heritage Convention are known as State Parties. Each State Party is responsible for the identification, nomination, conservation, and management of its World Heritage Sites. This involves providing adequate legal, scientific, technical, administrative, and financial measures to protect these sites and ensuring they are not threatened by development or neglect.
- **Site Management** - The management authorities of World Heritage Sites are at the lowest level of the organisational structure for heritage preservation. Whether public entities, private organisations, or partnerships, these bodies carry out the day-to-day conservation and management duties required to maintain the site's Outstanding Universal Value. This includes developing and implementing comprehensive management plans, ensuring the participation of local communities, and overseeing sustainable tourism and visitor management.

Overall, UNESCO's organisational structure for the World Heritage Program represents a multi-tiered approach involving international, national, and local stakeholders. Each level plays a specific role in pursuing UNESCO's cultural and natural heritage preservation vision to foster understanding, cooperation, and peace among nations (Yusuf, 2007).

4.3 The UNESCO World Heritage List

The World Heritage List is a compilation of properties with 'outstanding universal value' as part of the cultural and natural heritage. It plays a crucial role in global heritage governance, as the World Heritage Convention under UNESCO outlines. The primary goal of the World Heritage List is to acknowledge, document, and safeguard sites that hold significant value for humanity, whether cultural, historical, scientific, or environmental. Doing so helps preserve important cultural and natural sites, promotes international cooperation in conserving our shared heritage, and fosters greater awareness and appreciation of these sites worldwide. The process of categorising and standardising criteria for heritage sites involves making critical decisions about which material and immaterial elements are relevant to consider. These classifications are not just academic exercises; they can have real-world consequences, shaping how countries and communities understand and value their cultural and natural assets. The ongoing challenge for organisations responsible for maintaining the World Heritage List lies in carefully considering and balancing numerous intricate factors to objectively determine a site's universal value (Farias, 2022).

The World Heritage List promotes international cooperation and awareness in the preservation of cultural and natural heritage sites through several vital avenues:

- Shared Responsibility - By ratifying the World Heritage Convention, countries acknowledge that protecting significant cultural and natural heritage is a collective responsibility transcending national boundaries.
- Identification and Documentation - Listing heritage sites involve detailed documentation, which increases international knowledge and understanding of these sites.
- Assistance and Support - The Convention encourages international assistance, including financial, scientific, technical, and expertise sharing, to help States Parties conserve listed sites.
- Education and Engagement - Initiatives like the World Heritage Education Programme and the World Heritage in Young Hands Kit aim to educate young people and engage them in heritage conservation, thus fostering a future generation that values and protects heritage.
- Capacity Building - Training and capacity-building efforts aim to enhance the skills of those involved in site management and conservation globally.
- Tourism Management - The visibility of World Heritage sites can promote sustainable tourism, drawing attention to the need for preservation and providing resources for conservation efforts.
- Forum Creation - The World Heritage Committee and associated Youth Forums serve as platforms for dialogue and exchange of best practices among different countries and stakeholders (Pierre et al., 2016).

Through these strategies, the World Heritage List promotes and facilitates cooperation, education, and awareness globally, aiming to protect and preserve the world's most precious cultural and natural heritage for present and future generations. It is a prestigious list, as is the WH status itself. However, the designation process is not that simple.

As the Convention implies, the World Heritage Committee (WHC) plays a pivotal role in coordinating the process of site designation, from its suggestion to the final inscription. Working in conjunction with the advisory bodies ICOMOS and ICUN, the Committee holds the responsibility of determining which site will be part of the prestigious WH list, a decision of great significance in the world of heritage preservation.

Initial is the nomination process, which begins with the submission of an application by the State Party. The application document should outline the inscription criteria, describe the site's values, and the importance of inscribing it to the WH list. Additionally, a plan detailing how the integrity of the site and its universal values are presented, managed, and protected should be included (Leask & Fyall, 2006). Then the submitted file is reviewed by the WH Centre which will transmit it to the advisory bodies. Furthermore, the nominations are correspondingly evaluated by the advisory bodies: cultural by the ICOMOS, natural by the IUCN, and mixed properties jointly by them both. After several panel meetings and collaboration, they will eventually present the outcomes of their assessment, along with a

further recommendation for the WH Committee which should decide whether to inscribe, not inscribe, refer, or defer a proposed site.

The WH Committee has also implemented selective and restrictive mechanisms to establish “a representative, balanced and credible World Heritage List”. Therefore, in order to give priority to new States and reduce the number of nominations from well-represented countries like China, India, Spain and Italy, each State Party may nominate only one new site per year or two if one was previously referred or deferred by the Committee. Moreover, only 35 nominations annually will be considered and reviewed by the Committee, if there are more nominations, they will be selected according to the defined priorities (WHC, 2023, pp. 24-26).

This is only a short description, however, it’s a demanding and comprehensive process which usually lasts 18 months. After the official inscription, the WH site is committed to being managed in accordance with the Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention (Galland et al., 2016).

The prestigious WH list is a composition of the world's most exceptional natural and cultural heritage sites of great importance for humanity and future generations. Therefore, the listed properties must meet the key principle of the Convention to be of OUV, meaning the inscribed sites must fulfil at least one of these ten criteria defined by the WHC:

- (i) Represent a masterpiece of human creative genius.
- (ii) Exhibit an important interchange of human values, over a span of time or within a cultural area of the world, on developments in architecture or technology, monumental arts, town-planning, or landscape design.
- (iii) Bear a unique or at least exceptional testimony to a cultural tradition or to a civilisation which is living or which has disappeared.
- (iv) Be an outstanding example of a type of building, architectural or technological ensemble or landscape which illustrates (a) significant stage(s) in human history.
- (v) Be an outstanding example of a traditional human settlement, land-use, or sea-use which is representative of a culture (or cultures), or human interaction with the environment especially when it has become vulnerable under the impact of irreversible change.
- (vi) Be directly or tangibly associated with events or living traditions, with ideas, or with beliefs, with artistic and literary works of outstanding universal significance. (The Committee considers that this criterion should preferably be used in conjunction with other criteria).
- (vii) Contain superlative natural phenomena or areas of exceptional natural beauty and aesthetic importance.
- (viii) Be outstanding examples representing major stages of earth's history, including the record of life, significant ongoing geological processes in the development of landforms, or significant geomorphic or physiographic features.

- (ix) Be outstanding examples representing significant ongoing ecological and biological processes in the evolution and development of terrestrial, freshwater, coastal and marine ecosystems and communities of plants and animals.
- (x) Contain the most important and significant natural habitats for in-situ conservation of biological diversity, including those containing threatened species of Outstanding Universal Value from the point of view of science or conservation.

Additionally, to be considered for OUV, the site must also satisfy the conditions of integrity and authenticity and have an adequate protection and management system to ensure its preservation (WHC, 2023, pp. 29-30).

Although the inscription on the WH list is the main objective of the State Parties, keeping the obtained status is even more important. It requires the commitment and engagement of all interested parties to protect and preserve the site's OUV. If not adequately managed, or some of the criteria are threatened, the Committee may decide to place the property on the list of World Heritage in Danger. Even though this is not a desirable outcome, this listing does not diminish the value or importance of the site. On the contrary, it can be used as a positive conservation tool, as it attracts significant international attention and generates the support needed to address such challenges. It also helps to gather political and public support for the conservation of the endangered site at the national level. However, the WH status may be jeopardised if the threatening issues are not taken seriously and addressed appropriately at the local and national levels. Moreover, if the site loses its OUV, the Committee can decide to permanently remove the property from the WH list (Pedersen, 2002).

4.4 Sustainable tourism in World Heritage sites

While the complexity of sustainable tourism development and the need for a comprehensive approach are demanding for any destination, in WH sites the achievement of the same objectives is even more challenging. The natural and cultural heritage sites which are inscribed in the WH list has the obligation to preserve and protect their outstanding universal value and at the same time to present and make it publicly available. However, by the very fact that they are accessible to the public, they become exposed and susceptible to the negative impacts of tourism. On the other hand, the meaning of cultural heritage without its audience loses its significance (NWHO, 1999). The public promotion of natural and cultural heritage can raise the awareness of its importance, increase the appreciation, and foster their protection and preservation. Also, tourism can directly (through entry fees) or indirectly (international funds, investments, tax revenue...) provide finances to enable its future conservation. According to research based on analysis of 12 natural WH sites, there are indications that the tourism impacts highly depend on the destination's development. The study included sites that, according to IUCN, are having tourism-related issues, as well as sites that showed exemplary tourism development. The key negative impacts observed in the

sites facing tourism-related problems were visitor pressures from unsustainable growth, harmful infrastructure development, pollution and social impacts deriving from unrealised expectations. Conversely, well-planned tourism resulted in positive impacts including enhanced infrastructure and development that improves the OUV of the site and supports conservation and community development goals (Borges et al., 2011). This means that like everything in life, tourism and WH status have their positive and negative sides. Therefore, when it comes to sustainable tourism development it's often discussed if the WH status is 'a blessing or a burden' (Caust & Vecco, 2017).

Moreover, the UNESCO convention emphasises sustainability, but at the same time, there is a lack of specific tools and actions to implement and monitor it, particularly in developing countries. This creates a paradox: while the goal is to protect the WH sites, the UNESCO designation may worsen their sustainability unless specific heritage management practices are developed to prevent that. Therefore, according to Caust & Vecco, increased awareness should be the first step in any management process in order to avoid such conflicts and create appropriate developmental strategies (Caust & Vecco, 2017, p. 4).

Additionally, Boccardi (2007) critiques the current policies in the Convention, by arguing that UNESCO's main concerns are related to heritage conservation, without consideration of the possible impacts on the overall social, economic and environmental sustainable development at a given destination. Since the conservation objectives don't correspond with the developmental needs of the site, many conflicts may arise between the heritage managers and the local communities. Consequently, it leads to the loss of heritage values and unsustainable practices. Another issue that may arise with the designation of a WH site is the risk that it takes away the power and the rights of the locals to make decisions based on their own needs (Caust & Vecco, 2017). Although the responsibility for preserving the OUV for humanity lies with the local environmental management plan, it often became a subject of international interest, neglecting the rights of residents to pursue sustainable development that balances their economic, ecological and social needs (Petrevska et al., 2023).

Furthermore, the WH label by itself is a recognisable brand. It increases the attractiveness of the site and of the destination as a whole, which usually leads to an increased number of visitors, degradation of the sites, and exploitation of local communities and cultural practices (Widodo, 2023). Consequently, if not properly managed, the tourism pressure on the site will affect and degrade its OUV, and it becomes even more difficult to follow the sustainability principles and establish balance in all its aspects (Petrevska et al., 2023). However, based on Widodo's research on various case studies, UNESCO's branding has been controversial since it often leads to the commercialisation of cultural heritage, unsustainable development practices, and the displacement of local communities. Therefore, to approach these issues, it is crucial to ensure the balance between economic development and heritage preservation. Priority should be given to sustainable development practices that

respect and safeguard the cultural and natural heritage, as well as the identity of the city's local communities (Widodo, 2023).

On the other hand, according to UNESCO, an additional concern is the lack of integration of WH policies in the comprehensive planning programs and strategies. By knowing all the possible threats, it is worrying to see that heritage is not always a legally binding component of decision-making processes (Galland et al., 2016). Therefore, to ensure long-term viability, effective protection and management mechanisms, adequate national legislation is crucial for conserving the natural and cultural heritage. This involves adopting a comprehensive and integrated approach that considers environmental sustainability, inclusive social development, inclusive economic development, and fostering peace and security. The World Heritage and Sustainable Development Policy requires from the State parties “not only to protect the OUV of World Heritage properties but also to ‘recognise and promote the properties’ inherent potential to contribute to all dimensions of sustainable development and to ensure that their conservation and management strategies are aligned with broader sustainable development objectives” (Logan & Larsen, 2018, p. 6).

However, if the destination’s managers and the government focus only on the economic benefits and use the WH label only as a marketing tool, it will have negative consequences on the destination’s sustainable tourism development. Whereas, if they adhere to UNESCO’s instructions and fully implement all the requirements to protect the natural and cultural heritage, a positive impact of tourism will prevail. The aim is to ensure the preservation of the world’s natural and cultural heritage for future generations while providing them with a more sustainable world to live in.

4.5 UNESCO sustainable tourism program

The UNESCO World Heritage and Sustainable Tourism Program has been instrumental in promoting responsible travel and fostering a deeper appreciation for cultural and environmental heritage. As sustainable tourism becomes increasingly critical in preserving World Heritage sites, UNESCO has focused on developing strategies and best practices to ensure that tourism at these sites is sustainable and beneficial for all stakeholders.

The impact of the programme on heritage conservation and tourism development can be summarised in several key areas:

- Conservation - By promoting sustainable tourism, the program seeks to safeguard the Outstanding Universal Value of heritage sites and ensure their maintenance for future generations.
- Local Economic Development - The program recognises the potential of World Heritage sites as travel destinations that can contribute to local economies when managed appropriately.

- **Stakeholder Engagement** - It emphasises the importance of dialogue and cooperation among stakeholders, including local communities, governments, and the tourism industry. This collaborative approach ensures that all parties are invested in the sustainable management of World Heritage sites.
- **Capacity Building** - The program also focuses on building awareness and capacity among stakeholders to manage tourism sustainably, equipping them with the necessary tools and knowledge.
- **Policy Advocacy** - It advocates for policies and frameworks that recognise sustainable tourism as key to managing cultural and natural heritage effectively.
- **Empowering Local Communities** - Ensuring that local communities take pride in and feel a sense of responsibility towards World Heritage properties, contributing to conservation efforts and benefitting from sustainable tourism.
- **Quality Visitor Experience** - The program aims to foster responsible behaviour among tourists and promote quality tourism services that enhance the visitor experience while respecting the heritage and Outstanding Universal Value of sites.
- **Cultural and Natural Heritage Integration** - By integrating the management of natural and cultural assets, the program ensures that both are valued and protected (UNESCO, n.d.).

Overall, UNESCO's programme aims to balance the conservation needs of World Heritage sites with the economic benefits of tourism, ensuring that tourism contributes positively to heritage conservation and benefits local communities and visitors

5 DESTINATION OF OHRID

In the following chapters, we will present the destination of Ohrid, a city in North Macedonia, renowned for its rich history, cultural significance, and natural beauty. Recognised as a UNESCO, WH site, both for its cultural and natural attributes, Ohrid holds Outstanding Universal Value.

Tourism in Ohrid is diverse, encompassing cultural tourism focused on historical landmarks, coastal tourism centered around Lake Ohrid, and nature-based tourism exploring the region's biodiversity. While tourism contributes significantly to the socio-economic development of the region, challenges such as unsustainable practices, overcrowding, and environmental degradation threaten its sustainability. Addressing these issues is vital to preserving Ohrid's unique heritage and ensuring its future as a sustainable destination.

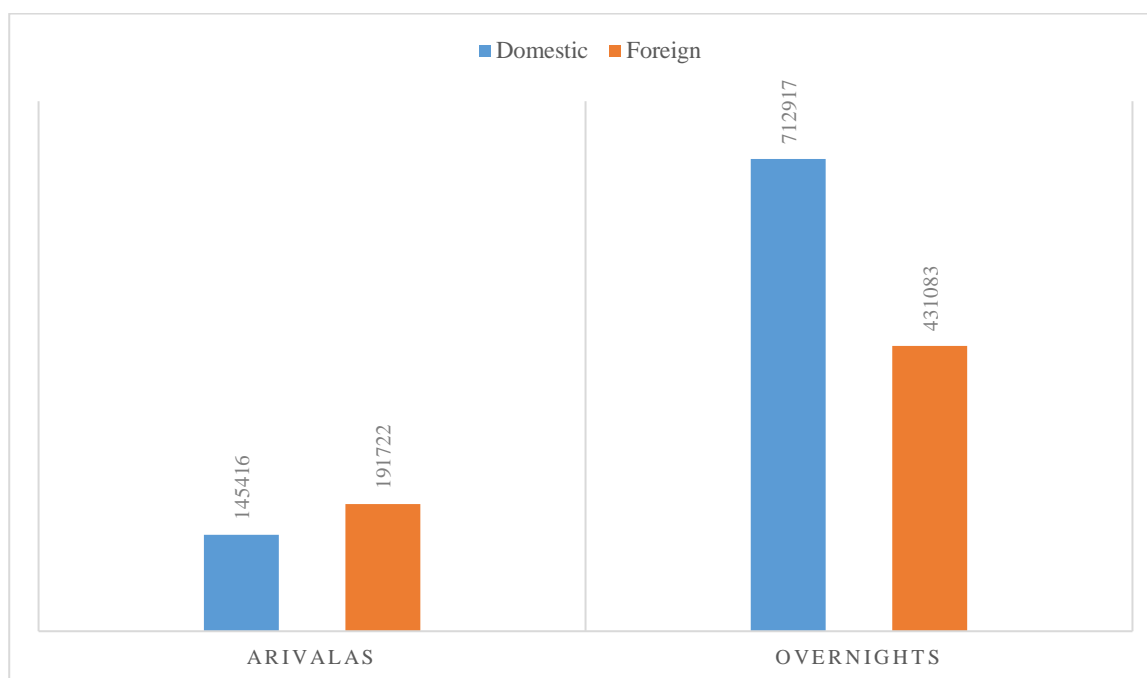
5.1 Demographic characteristics

Ohrid, an enchanting city in the scenic southwestern region of North Macedonia and one of Europe's oldest settlements, has gained widespread recognition for its captivating historical heritage and thriving cultural milieu (Petrevska & Noga, 2019). With over 51,000

inhabitants, Ohrid embodies harmony between tradition and contemporary life. The city's demographic makeup is primarily comprised of ethnic Macedonians; however, it also embraces diverse communities such as Albanians, Turks, and Vlachs - each adding to the tapestry of the city's vibrant cultural diversity. This blend creates an intricate social fabric contributing to Ohrid's unique character and ambience. The population's age distribution indicates a relatively older demographic, with a significant portion of people older than 60 years old (State Statistical Office, 2022). This demographic represents a major problem for future entrepreneurs in the tourism sector or other branches of the industry in the country.

Tourism plays a pivotal role in Ohrid's demographic dynamics. During peak tourist season, especially in the summer, the number of visitors often surpasses the local population. In 2023 alone, Ohrid recorded 337,138 tourist arrivals, resulting in 1,144,000 overnight stays, accounting for more than a third of all tourist nights in North Macedonia. Most arrivals belong to foreign tourists, with 191,722 arrivals who spend approximately 2-3 overnights in Ohrid. On the other hand, domestic tourists count more overnights, 712,917 or, on average, 5-7 overnights depending on the season (State Statistical Office, 2024). Meaning that both segments are equally significant for tourism in Ohrid. This influx of tourists not only boosts the local economy but also introduces a diverse array of cultural influences, further enriching the city's demographic profile.

Figure 4: Tourist inflow in Ohrid, 2023



Source: Designed from State Statistical Office (2024).

5.2 Historical background

Ohrid is a city with one of the most historically significant cultural heritages spanning millennia. It is believed to be one of the oldest human settlements in Europe. There is archaeological evidence that the Ohrid region has been inhabited since prehistoric times, and the early human settlements existed as far back as the Neolithic period. The city's historical significance is accentuated by its ancient churches, monasteries, and a significant medieval fortress, making it a crucial site of religious and cultural development in the region. The city was known as Lychnidos in antiquity, translating to "the city of light," a reference to its prominent position as a beacon of culture and education in the ancient world. Ohrid's strategic location on the Via Egnatia, an ancient trade route, further enhanced its historical and cultural prominence. (UNESCO, 2021).

Ohrid is a religious centre that played a pivotal role in spreading Christianity in the Balkans. The Byzantine period had a large share of the urban part of the city, and it is a testimony of the different artistic achievements of that period. There are churches with over 2,500 square meters of frescoes and over 800 icons of worldwide popularity. Saints Cyril and Methodius contributed to the Christianization of the Slavic peoples, aiming to establish a Centre for Slavic literacy and culture. Saint Clement established The Ohrid Literary School in the 9th century, where the Bible was studied in the Old Slavic literary language with Cyrillic letters. It was one of the first and most influential centres for Slavic literary and ecclesiastical education. Slav culture spread from Ohrid to other parts of Europe (Wikipedia , n.d.).

Seven basilicas have thus far been discovered in archaeological excavations in the old part of Ohrid. These basilicas were built during the 4th, 5th and beginning of the 6th century, and contain architectural and decorative characteristics of the town itself. The structure of the city nucleus is also enriched by many archaeological sites, emphasising early Christian basilicas, also known for their mosaic floors. A particular accent must be placed on Ohrid's old urban architecture and masonry heritage. Ohrid's traditional local influence can especially be seen among its well-preserved late-Ottoman urban residential architecture dating from the 18th and 19th century. The limited space for construction activities has led to a very narrow network of streets.

The region was part of the Tsar Samoul empire in the medieval era, and Ohrid was the capital. The fortress was built for his purposes, and according to the findings of the ancient Greeks, it was built in the fourth century BC and later used by the Ottoman Empire. It has a strategic purpose because it is the city's highest point.

The lake dates from pre-glacial times and represents a significant natural phenomenon due to its geographic position and uninterrupted biological activity. The Lake of Ohrid shelters more than 200 endemic species, including turbellarian flatworms, algae, diatoms, snails, crustaceans and 17 endemic types of fish.

In modern history, Lake Ohrid and the Ohrid region were designated as a World Heritage UNESCO site in 1979 and 1980, recognising their outstanding universal value by acknowledging the city's historical, cultural, and natural significance. The Ohrid region is one of only 39 UNESCO areas worldwide and 8 in Europe in the mixed category of world natural and cultural heritage. Today, this region is known as the cultural capital of Macedonia, hosting numerous festivals, cultural events, and academic conferences, attracting countless visitors from around the world (WHC, 2019).

5.3 Ohrid as a World Heritage site

The Ohrid region is one of the first mixed property regions recognised as a UNESCO World Heritage site for its outstanding universal value, which contains natural and cultural elements. To be included in the UNESCO World Heritage list of properties with outstanding universal value, the site must meet at least one of ten natural and cultural criteria. The Ohrid region meets four of them, but more importantly, it meets both natural and cultural criteria, which gives it the privilege of being one of 39 countries with dual significance.

The region was first inscribed for its natural values in 1979 and, one year later, for its cultural values. The Lake is a natural shelter for numerous endemic and relict freshwater flora and fauna dating from the tertiary period. The lake meets the (vii) criteria from the World Heritage List, which is regarded as an area that contains superlative natural phenomena or areas of exceptional natural beauty and aesthetic importance. The city is one of the oldest human settlements in Europe, having passed different periods and changed the cultural and architectural path of the town. Some are preserved in good condition, so the transition from other eras is visible today. The city is protected for its cultural significance, and the town meets three criteria of the list: (i) it represents a master piece of human creative genius; (iii) it bears a unique or at least exceptional testimony to a cultural tradition or to a civilisation which is living or which has disappeared; the (iv) that need to be an outstanding example of a type of building, architectural or technological ensemble or landscape which illustrates (a) significant stage(s) in human history (WHC, 2023). This dual recognition highlights the interconnectedness of the cultural and natural heritage in the region and the need to protect both aspects comprehensively.

The UNESCO designation honours Ohrid's historical and natural value and serves as a call to action to preserve these treasures for future generations. Efforts to address these challenges have included stricter regulations on construction, initiatives to protect the lake's ecosystem, and measures to promote sustainable tourism that respects the cultural and natural heritage of the region. Several institutions are responsible for the protection of Ohrid natural and cultural heritage: The Ministry of Culture and The Ministry of Environment and Physical Planning, the Institute for Protection of Cultural Monuments and Museums in Ohrid have the authority to protect cultural heritage, and the Natural-historical Museum in Struga is responsible for the protection of movable heritage. The National park Galicica is

authorised to manage the park's natural heritage as a whole and as part of the cultural heritage located on the park's territory. The Institute of Hydrobiology in Ohrid is responsible for continuously monitoring the Lake Ohrid ecosystem and researching and caring for the flora and fauna of Lake Ohrid. UNESCO's designation imposes significant responsibilities on local and national authorities to preserve and protect the site's integrity. This includes managing the impact of tourism, which has been both a boon and a challenge for the region. (Majhoshev, 2019). While tourism brings economic benefits, it also threatens conserving the site's cultural and natural assets, requiring careful planning and sustainable management practices.

There are different challenges that any country faces when trying to preserve its heritage. This is especially difficult in developing countries where many competing issues need attention, like not having enough money for conservation efforts and the pressure to save historic buildings from the modern touch. Getting the public to understand the value of preserving the environment and the past is also challenging. Therefore, educating people about these issues and getting everyone involved in conservation efforts is essential. It is crucial to raise public awareness about these issues and involve everyone in the conservation efforts (Timothy & Boyd, 2003).

Ohrid faces several challenges in maintaining its World Heritage status. Urban development, environmental degradation, and the pressures of mass tourism are significant threats to the site's integrity (UNESCO, 2021).

5.4 Tourism in Ohrid

Ohrid is the most attractive tourist destination in North Macedonia, with one-third of tourist arrivals and overnights in the country (Petrevska & Collins-Kreiner, 2020). This place is a treasure trove of ancient history, and religious significance, and a natural wonder that earned the prestigious status of UNESCO World Heritage Site. Dual recognition of UNESCO underscores Ohrid as a unique place, encompassing its cultural and natural heritage.

The city's tourism industry determines the economy's flow in the municipality, attracting visitors worldwide. Ohrid's variety of tourist offerings makes it a versatile and vibrant destination. The city is home to some of the region's oldest and most significant churches and monasteries, including the Church of St. John at Kaneo and the Monastery of St. Naum, which are architectural marvels and important religious sites that draw pilgrims and tourists alike.

This UNESCO World Heritage site is an interconnection between cultural heritage and tourism. The city is rich with historical and cultural assets and is a destination for cultural tourism. Cultural leverages in this place include its archaeological splendours, historical narratives, religious sites, and summer festivals, which attract people worldwide.

Additionally, the city's blend of ancient historical sites, vibrant cultural events, and breathtaking natural wonders has established it as a prime destination for various tourism experiences, including cultural exploration, beach getaways, and eco-friendly adventures.

5.4.1 Cultural tourism

Cultural tourism has long been recognised as a vital component of the global tourism industry, with a significant focus on heritage sites that offer unique historical, architectural, and cultural experiences (Griffin et al., 2013). In Ohrid, a UNESCO World Heritage site, cultural tourism is particularly relevant due to the city's rich history, religious significance, and architectural masterpieces. Ohrid is home to numerous ancient churches, monasteries, and fortresses, which attract visitors interested in exploring the cultural and spiritual heritage of the region. The city has 365 churches, one for each day of the year, which led to its nickname "the Jerusalem of the Balkans" (Petrevska & Noga, 2019). Tourists are drawn to Ohrid's cultural attractions for their historical and artistic value and the spiritual experience they offer. These 'cultural attractions' have been instrumental in attracting tourists to Ohrid, as they provide a unique glimpse into the city's rich history and heritage.

Key religious sites include the Church of St. John at Kaneo, perched on a cliff overlooking Lake Ohrid with breathtaking views, and the Monastery of St. Naum on the lake's southern shores. Both structures are architectural masterpieces of Byzantine and post-Byzantine art, featuring intricate frescoes and carvings (MacedoniaTOP, 2024).

The Church of St. Sophia and the Church of St. Panteleimon are other notable landmarks. St. Sophia, dating back to the 11th century, served as the cathedral of the Ohrid Archbishopric and the house of some of the most significant frescoes in Byzantine art. St. Panteleimon is associated with Saint Clement of Ohrid, a disciple of Saints Cyril and Methodius, and is considered a cradle of Slavic literacy and culture (UNESCO, 2021).

The city's medieval Ohrid Fortress, attributed to Tsar Samuel, offers panoramic views of the city and the lake, and represents a testament to the city's historical military significance. The fortress, with its well-preserved walls and towers, has been a focal point of defence and governance throughout various historical periods.

In addition to its ecclesiastical architecture, the city boasts many archaeological sites, including the Ancient Theatre of Ohrid, which dates to the Hellenistic period. This theatre, which once hosted gladiatorial combats, is still used for various cultural events, illustrating the city's seamless blend of ancient and modern cultural practices (Petrevska & Noga, 2019). On the other hand, Ohrid's museums and galleries play a crucial role in preserving and showcasing the city's rich heritage:

- National Museum of Ohrid- Located in the Robevci House, a traditional Ottoman building, the museum exhibits artefacts from Ohrid's long history, including archaeological finds, ethnographic items, and religious icons.
- Icon Gallery of Ohrid- This gallery, located next to the Church of the Holy Mother of God Perivleptos, contains one of the most significant collections of Byzantine icons worldwide. It is a must-visit for art historians and cultural tourists interested in medieval religious art.
- House of Robevci- Apart from being a museum, this 19th-century house exemplifies traditional Macedonian architecture and provides insights into the domestic life of a wealthy Ohrid family during the Ottoman period.
- Water museum- Archaeological and tourist complex dating from prehistoric times. It is a fisherman village located 16 km from Ohrid town that represents a replica of the prehistorical wooden houses narrating the everyday life of the people of this village.

Ohrid hosts several cultural festivals that enhance its appeal as a cultural tourism destination:

- Ohrid Summer Festival- Held annually since 1961, this festival features performances by renowned artists in music, theatre, and dance, held in various historic venues around the city, including the Ancient Theatre and St. Sophia Church. It attracts cultural tourists worldwide and showcases Ohrid as a vibrant cultural hub.
- Ohrid Choir Festival- This international choral competition, held annually, draws choirs from various countries, promoting cultural exchange and enhancing Ohrid's reputation as a centre for musical arts.
- Ohrid Wine Festival- This entertainment festival with local musical artists, complemented by tasting Macedonian wines and delicious food.
- Ohrid troubadours- The international music festival is one of the oldest in the country and the only one that has exceeded regional and European borders. It has a visibility of over 200 million viewers and 200 hours of live broadcast on twenty television and music channels.
- Poetry Night in Velestovo - One of the oldest international poetry festivals in the country, it takes place in the village of Velestovo in Ohrid (Municipality of Ohrid, n.d.).

In Ohrid, cultural tourism is deeply intertwined with the city's identity and economic sustainability. The preservation of Ohrid's cultural heritage is essential for maintaining its historical significance and ensuring the continued attraction of tourists. The challenge lies in balancing conserving the cultural assets and making them accessible to visitors. Proper management and planning are crucial to protect Ohrid's heritage sites from the potential negative impacts of mass tourism while allowing for meaningful and educational tourist experiences.

Cultural tourism in Ohrid has economic benefits by creating jobs, supporting local businesses by generating revenue, and collecting tourist tax, which helps with investments for conservation. Therefore, the tourism industry in Ohrid plays a dual role in promoting the cultural heritage and ensuring its preservation for future generations. The more diverse people there are sharing the benefits of Ohrid's cultural expression, the more contributors it will have to its preservation (WTO, 2004).

This synthesis of cultural tourism's role in Ohrid highlights the importance of strategic planning, collaboration between conservationists and tourism professionals, and the need for ongoing efforts to balance tourism development with heritage preservation.

5.4.2 Coastal tourism

According to UN Tourism, coastal tourism refers to activities such as swimming, surfing, sunbathing and other coastal leisure, recreation and sports activities which take place on the shore of a sea, lake, or river (UN Tourism, n.d.). The shore of Lake Ohrid is an attraction for many tourists during the summer. Very diverse shores attract both domestic and international visitors. Some beaches are natural paradises for tourists. The clear and calm water is perfect for activities like paddle boarding, kayaking, and boating, which makes the destination attractive to various tourists. The lake's crystal-clear waters, serene beaches, and picturesque landscapes provide an ideal setting for relaxation and outdoor activities.

One of the villages 12 km from Ohrid, Trpejca, is an extraordinary place near the water springs of the lake. It has the most beautiful beaches with small rocks that can be reached only by boat. There is also the monastery of St. Naum, which has become an elite tourist centre in the Ohrid region. Two car camps, Ljubanista and Eleshec, have more than 1200 beds and locations for more than 300 cars. They have their sand beaches with a restaurant, grill shops and markets. The biggest attractions for domestic tourists are crowded beaches such as Metropol, Lagadin, and Slavija, which have a long shoreline with sandy beaches and many bars, restaurants, and hotels. The largest hotels are located on those shores (Evans, 2009).

This type of tourism is typical during the summer when seasonality is high. The warm Mediterranean climate and long sunny days make Ohrid a typical city for leisure. This type of tourism leads to a large influx of tourists during the summer; in Ohrid's case, there is very high seasonality from June to August. During the season, the economic benefit is significant.

The local businesses see a substantial increase in revenues and employment opportunities during this period, producing seasonal jobs for many residents. However, this short peak season can lead to challenges like finding seasonal workers or income instability.

Also, the influx of tourists during the summer months can lead to pressure on the natural environment, especially on the lake and its surroundings. During that period, issues with

waste management, water pollution and environmental degradation should be taken with significant concern. Thus, it is crucial for local authorities to cooperate with tourism operators to implement sustainable practices that protect the lake's ecosystem.

5.4.3 Nature-based tourism

In addition to its cultural heritage, Ohrid is renowned for its natural beauty. The city is situated on the shores of Lake Ohrid, one of Europe's oldest and deepest lakes, estimated to be about three million years old. The lake's pristine waters and diverse ecosystem have earned it a place on UNESCO's list of Natural World Heritage sites.

Lake Ohrid's exceptional biodiversity includes over 200 endemic species, making it a vital natural reserve. The lake and its surroundings offer a variety of recreational activities, such as boating, fishing, and diving, which attract local and international tourists.

Ohrid's natural attractions, especially its picturesque lake, also contribute to its appeal as a tourist destination. The pristine waters of Lake Ohrid, known for their clarity and biodiversity, make it a popular destination for water-based activities such as swimming and sailing. Tourists can also explore the surrounding natural landscapes, such as the Galichica National Park, which offers hiking and cycling trails with stunning views of the lake and the surrounding mountains.

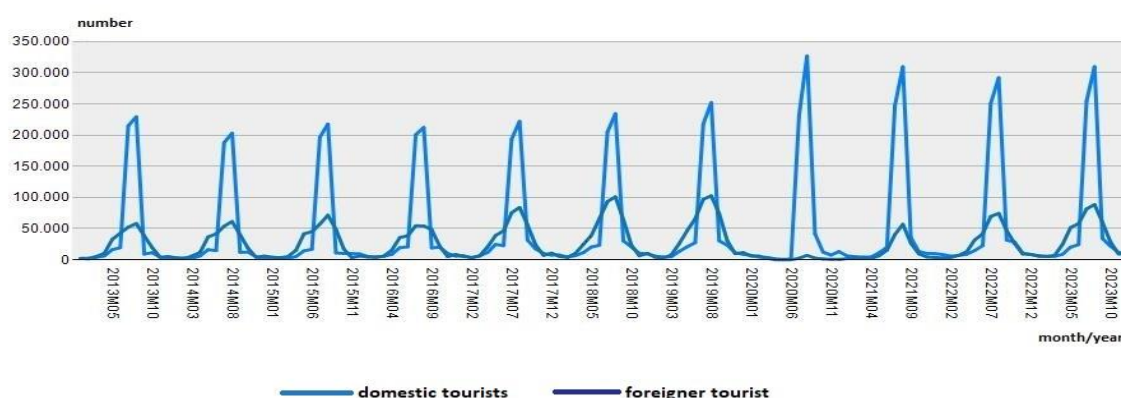
National Park Galichica, between Lake Ohrid and Lake Prespa, features a unique combination of alpine landscapes, endemic flora and fauna, and numerous caves and archaeological sites. The park is a popular destination for eco-tourism, providing opportunities for bird watching, mountain biking, and exploring its rich biodiversity (Petrevska & Noga, 2019).

5.4.4 Seasonality

Seasonality, or the fluctuations caused by seasonal changes, is a crucial tourism characteristic, including Ohrid. It can be defined as an imbalance of tourist activities in a certain period of the year that is repeated yearly, with significant activities of the tourists seen through arrivals, nights spent, consumption, etc. It is often regarded as one of tourism's most undesirable aspects due to its significant adverse impacts and the considerable concerns it raises among tourism managers and policymakers. Seasonality is closely tied to tourism development, representing a pattern where tourism activity is concentrated within a specific time frame. This intense focus over a short period imposes various limitations on social and physical environments, leading to inefficiencies (Getz & Nilsson, 2004). One of the definitions that is most used for seasonality has been given by Richard Butler. It sounds like „...seasonality is a temporal imbalance in the phenomenon of tourism, which may be expressed in terms of dimensions of such elements as numbers of visitors, expenditure of

visitors, traffic on highways and other forms of transportation, employment, and admissions to attractions” (Butler, 1994). According to Butler, there is natural and institutional seasonality. The Natural is often related to cyclic climate conditions. The institutional is caused by religious, social, cultural, or organisational factors such as traditional school holidays, religious holidays and summer or winter vacation periods. The figure below shows a high seasonality in the summer months (July and August), especially from domestic tourists. This is due to factors such as weather conditions, summer holidays, and local cultural events that have been shown in these two months. On the other hand, in the winter months, we have the total opposite. We can see a sharp decline in tourist arrivals from November to March. The colder weather and fewer daylight hours limit outdoor activities, important attractions to visitors. Also, many of the cultural events and festivals are concentrated. In the summer period, it further contributes to the drop in tourists during the off-season period.

Figure 5: Monthly tourist flow in Ohrid, for a period of 10 years (2013-2023)



Source: State Statistical Office of the Republic of North Macedonia (2024).

If we analyse the fluctuation of foreign tourists, we will see that the curve is slightly more stretched and the concentration of tourists is not only in the peak period. When we look at the total tourism demand, there are significant yearly fluctuations and considerable seasonality. Ohrid is primarily known as a summer destination, with tourism being the main contributor to the local economy. This reliance on tourism creates several challenges, especially during the peak season. Ohrid's physical infrastructure and social systems are stretched to their limits during this time. The seasonal nature of the tourism economy places significant anthropogenic pressure on the area, leading to issues such as heavy traffic, congestion, and the overuse of the coastal regions (Boshkov, 2022).

5.4.5 Socio-economic impact of tourism

Tourism has a significant role in keeping the economy of the Ohrid region thriving. Tourism brings with its numerous benefits, but also a lot of challenges, especially in a sustainable way of resource management of the destination. Tourism contributes to different parts of the economy such as increased economic growth and revenue in local economies, job generation and opportunities, support for local business, foreign exchange earnings, and infrastructure development. Apart from the positive sides, tourism brings negative impacts - on the prices of the touristic destination, seasonality, dependence of the local economy on tourism, high infrastructural cost, and leakages.

The Ohrid region significantly contributes to economic growth from tourism by generating income. According to the (State Statistical Office) Ohrid regions generate revenues from tourism an average of 1.5 % of the total GDP of the country. That is a significant amount of money that stimulates the local economy through spending on services and goods and other tourism-related businesses. Tourism gives a boost to the local businesses, by selling tourist services or products related to the place. For example, in Ohrid local stores are making handmade jewellery - the Ohrid pearl, which is unique and only made in Ohrid. The economic impact of tourism is not limited to the tourism industry but is spread across the various sectors of the economy thus the multiplier effect appears (Truyols, 2023).

Tourism plays a role in providing employment opportunities, directly through tourism-related jobs such as hotels, restaurants, and entertainment providers, and indirectly through goods and service-business employment. Infrastructure development as a result of tourism can add to the life quality of the residents by improving the roadways, pedestrian areas, lakeside promenades, railway, airport infrastructures, also communal infrastructure, waste management, water supply and so on. But in the case of Ohrid, this infrastructure development is taking place very slowly, in some places this process has not even started. This is because there is lack of government collaboration with the local authorities and bad management of the processes.

Another negative impact is the prices of services and goods in Ohrid which are higher than in the other cities even in the capital, which is considered to be one of the most expensive cities in the country. This affects the quality of life of the residents. Seasonality has a negative impact on the prices of accommodation. They increase because the occupancy of the facilities in these 3 months of the season is also high. Jobs that are related to tourism are also seasonal and insecure. The tourism sector in Macedonia is suffering from a lack of employees, particularly notable in the southwest part of the country, in the cities that lie on the shore of Lake Ohrid. Only in Struga and Ohrid, there is a need for around 2,000 employees in the hospitality sector. The workforce needs are due to the migration of labour to other tourist countries whose salary for a season can be bigger than the salary for the whole year in the home town. Also, another reason for a lack of labour is due to the decreasing interest of youth in studying tourism-related schools (Euro News, 2023). Additionally,

Macedonia is an import-dependent country and a negative consequence is leakages of foreign earnings from tourism to satisfy the local inhabitant's need for imported goods. (Stefanova & Petrovska, 2020; Mihalic, 2022). The percentage of leakages of foreign earnings can be reduced with the production of agricultural goods in the country that are very important to the gastronomical sector. This is due to the bad management of the agricultural sector which has a big potential to rise, because of the good climate of the country. To improve this situation, it is necessary to make changes at the local and national levels, through cooperation between the different sectors and support of the authorities.

In Ohrid, the full potential of economic benefits from tourism is underutilised for the long-term prosperity of the destination. On the one hand, the local economy is dependent on tourism, on the other the industry is focused on short-term profit without consideration of the negative consequences on the overall sustainable tourism development.

5.4.6 Tourism challenges of the Ohrid region

Ohrid is facing significant pressures that challenge the sustainability of its cultural and natural heritage, which is the outcome of the tourism industry. When this pressure exceeds the natural capacity of the landscape, places can face an ecological disaster and unsustainable development of the site. Various human activities, including tourism, can cause significant losses of natural assets. At the same time, the emergence of tourism activity in different forms can lead to adverse effects related to air pollution, land use, availability and quality of water resources, and biodiversity (Gogonea et al., 2017). World heritage places often lead to higher tourist influx and the risk of endangering socio-cultural and environmental resources. Ohrid has the delicate task of balancing tourism growth and preserving its outstanding value. Several critical tourism pressures are putting its cultural and natural heritage in danger and impacting the sustainable tourism development of Ohrid. Most of the pressures are recognised by UNESCO, which recommends conserving Ohrid's natural and cultural sites. The main reason lies in the complexity of its governance, as the Ohrid Lake is a transboundary property of two states, North Macedonia, and Albania. Additionally, the territory of North Macedonia includes three municipalities: Ohrid, Struga, and Debarca. Several different institutions on national and local levels are involved in the management process of the WH site, the management of Ohrid as a tourist destination, and other related sectors, which only contribute to the ineffective management of the Ohrid region. This includes a lack of knowledge and skills for managing the property, untimely and inadequate conservation of the protected areas and sites, as well as the constant unsustainable tourism development, which additionally negatively impacts the site's integrity and authenticity (Government of the Republic of North Macedonia; Government of the Republic of Albania, 2024). In addition, according to the Strategic recovery plan for the Natural and Cultural Heritage of the Ohrid region (2024, p. 18), all the threats (factors with a negative impact on the OUV) recognised and indicated by UNESCO can be categorised into the following categories:

- Inadequate management of the site.
- Insufficient human and financial capacities.
- Excessive and inadequate urbanisation.
- Mass tourism.
- Low quality of buildings in urban and coastal areas.
- Loss of traditional and vernacular architecture.
- Large infrastructure projects.
- Loss and fragmentation of habitats.
- Pollution (of soil, water, air, light and sound pollution).
- Eutrophication of water.
- Climate change.
- Overfishing and loss of fish stock.
- Replacement of autochthonous species with invasive and allochthonous species, etc.

Uncontrolled urbanisation is one of the primary challenges that Ohrid faces due to increasing visitor demand, thus creating a need for more effective management by the local authorities. This results in the uncontrolled construction of buildings and facilities that spread out on the lake shore, historic town, and natural protected areas. The expansion of urban areas and the construction of new tourist facilities often happen without proper planning or consideration for preserving cultural and natural heritage. Lack of harmonisation of the Management Plan for the Cultural and Natural Heritage of the Ohrid region with the amendments of Detailed Urban Plans in Ohrid usually leads to uncontrolled construction. This occurs because, usually, the amendments are made due to the requirements of local self-government or private initiatives rather than for strategic reasons. Also, in 2017 and 2020, the World Heritage Center, together with the IUCN and ICOMOS, conducted site visits to the Ohrid Region in the form of Reactive Monitoring Missions, which came up with the identification of numerous threats that pose a danger to the authenticity and integrity of the site and its OUV. They also provided strict recommendations regarding those issues related to the preservation and management of the site, which are expected to be implemented by the state party. The endangerment of the Ohrid region is a consequence of various factors that have influenced the site's sustainability over the years, and they can be summarised as ineffective management of the Natural and Cultural Heritage of the Ohrid region. The UNESCO monitoring mission also highlighted in their reports that there are illegal constructions and a lack of effective management in controlling urban development, eroding the site's integrity and authenticity. With numerous international reports, there are still violations of the law, and a minimal number of sanctions are imposed against individuals who are impacting negatively on the OUV of the site (WHC, 2020).

Environmental degradation is expressed in the summer when there is a significant influx of tourists. Water pollution, untreated waste management, habitat destruction and overuse of natural resources are crucial issues that manifest in Ohrid due to mass tourism. The water

quality of the Lake is facing a significant threat due to tourism-related activities. As tourism increases, the pressure on the local infrastructure, especially water treatment facilities, is enormous. In the summer, there are almost double as many tourists as locals. Hence, the water treatment facilities, which were made in Yugoslavia and are predicted to be in service for 30-40 thousand people, are under enormous pressure and cannot serve that amount of people. Also, unregulated construction of the coastal area, increased use of motorised boats, uncontrolled agricultural activities and unregulated pollution from hotels and other tourist facilities contribute to rising levels of nutrients and chemicals in the Lake that lead to eutrophication. The lack of adequate programs for recycling and handling solid waste exacerbates the problem and leads to environmental degradation that impacts local biodiversity and tourism sustainability.

Tourism seasonality and overcrowding are interrelated pressures that significantly impact the management and sustainability of tourism in Ohrid. The sessional nature of tourism in Ohrid leads to overcrowding in the peak summer months, considerably damaging the city's cultural heritage site, local community, and natural environment. Having many visitors during summer accelerates the degradation of historical and religious monuments and increases foot traffic, leading to structural damage and erosion of the pathway. The natural environment faces degradation and pollution of the natural habitat along the shoreline and water pollution from motorised boats, threatening the lake's fragile ecosystem. During peak season, the local community can feel the negative impact of overcrowding, including access to public spaces and services, road congestion, transportation jams, and rise in prices for goods and services, which can negatively affect the way of life. Seasonality is a big challenge in the tourism industry that requires a strategic approach with proper planning and management of the site. According to the state statistics office, Ohrid, as a tourist destination, has a vast seasonality during the summer months from June to August, which represents a big problem for the catering sector. Income spikes during peak season, followed by dramatic drops during off-season, which creates economic instability and limits year-round investments. Employment instability is another challenge from seasonality that leads to fluctuations in employment rates and temporary jobs during the season, contributing to economic uncertainty.

As tourism in Ohrid continues to grow, unsustainable practices are beginning to emerge. The weak Regulatory framework and mechanism designed to protect Ohrid's natural and cultural heritage have severe gaps. Even with excellent environmental and heritage laws, weak or inconsistent enforcement exists. Illegal developments, irresponsible tourism practices, and environmental violations frequently go unpunished because of the lack of local authorities' resources and political will to solve the problems. Also, without financial or regulatory stimulus for businesses to adopt sustainable practices, businesses are unlikely to invest in eco-friendly infrastructure or sustainable tourism services.

Finally, the most crucial challenge and the beginning of all problems is the lack of self-awareness and education among tourists and local stakeholders. Most tourists and even locals are unaware of the sensitivity of Lake Ohrid and its surrounding areas. Irresponsible behaviour, such as littering, disturbing wildlife, or disrespecting cultural monuments, plus without clear guidelines or education about sustainable practices, has a harmful impact on the surroundings. Local businesses, particularly in the catering sector, often overuse natural resources, generating excess waste without proper management, which can lead to irreparable consequences for the site. At the very least, local authorities and the government must be more rigorous in imposing penalties on negligent citizens and respecting the law. Despite all of these threats from the World Heritage Committee Decisions 43 COM 7B.36 (2019) and 44 COM 7B.77 (2021) to place the Ohrid Region on the List of World Heritage in Danger have not been carried out (Scarry, 2024).

6 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND DATA

The purpose of this research is to analyse the impact of World Heritage status on sustainable tourism development in Ohrid, focusing on the perspectives of key stakeholders. The study aims to assess stakeholder knowledge, perceptions, and challenges related to sustainable tourism and its management. By identifying the economic, environmental, and socio-cultural impacts of tourism, the research seeks to provide actionable recommendations for improving governance, fostering collaboration, and enhancing sustainability practices in Ohrid and similar destinations.

To thoroughly address our research questions, we incorporated primary data collection into our research. This approach enabled us to gather first-hand information, directly relevant to our research. In the following chapters, we will provide a detailed account of the specific methods used for data collection and analysis. Each of these steps has significantly contributed to our overall research objectives.

6.1 Description of data collection methods

The initial step in our research was the literature review. The gathering of secondary data is a very important step for any researcher to gain better insight into the area of interest, but it also is a time and resource-saving method. For our research, the secondary data was collected by reviewing the existing literature regarding the most relevant themes of the thesis like the tourism industry, sustainable tourism development, the importance of UNESCO's WH status and Ohrid as a WH site. This includes books, different articles, publications, journals, and academic research papers mostly collected from scientific databases, such as Google Scholar, Sage Journals, EMERALD, Springer Link, Science Direct, Taylor & Francis etc. They provide us with information on various significant theories, explanations, and research findings to enhance our knowledge and understanding of the whole concept of the

sustainable tourism paradigm. Additionally, relevant documents like UNESCO's reports, conferences, national and local tourism strategies, etc. were also analysed for the thesis.

In order to achieve the aim of our thesis and answer the leading research questions, we used a qualitative research approach for the primary data collection. According to Veal, (2018), the best way for people to describe and explain their experiences, feelings and views, is in their own words, and not with predefined and suggested answers as in quantitative surveys. Since the purpose of our research is to explore and understand the stakeholders' perception of the subject (their personal thinking, knowledge, and awareness), we considered that this is the most appropriate method. Additionally, an interview is often discussed as one of the most important and popular ways of conducting tourism research (Rudell, 2011; Picken, 2017; Veal, 2018). As claimed by Picken (2017, p. 4), "In tourism research, the method of interviewing is most useful for gaining an in-depth understanding of a topic where differences in perception, attitude, impacts, behaviours and practices are anticipated, possible or important. These differences can be noted between groups of people (like stakeholders) or between individuals." Therefore, for our empirical research, we applied a qualitative analysis, by using a non-standardised, semi-structured interview as the most suitable qualitative technique (Saunders et al., 2009).

This means we had previously prepared a list of open-ended questions that correspond with our research questions. However, we also had the possibility and freedom to follow the flow of the conversation and adjust the questions accordingly. Additionally, the semi-structured interview as a research method, provided us with an opportunity to collect valuable and relevant data. It also led to discussions of some additional subjects and interesting information that weren't considered before and are significant to the research objectives. The interview guide structure was designed to provide us with new insights and answers to our research questions. Two to three interview questions were dedicated to each of the four research questions already presented. We used the same framework of questions for all participants, which contributed to the knowledge of different perspectives on the same issues.

6.2 Sampling

As participants in our research, we identified three main target groups of stakeholders directly involved in tourism in Ohrid. Since the perceptions of the tourists and residents in the destination of Ohrid were already explored in recent studies (Petrevska & Matlievska, 2018; Petrevska & Mihalič, 2020), in our research we will focus on the perceptions of the government, the private sector and the NGO's of the region. All of them have an important role in sustainable tourism development. The private sector as the main driver of tourism, the authorities as legislators and policymakers and the non-governmental organisations an objective critic (Petrevska, 2012). In a specific case like the destination of Ohrid, apart from their role in sustainable tourism development, the stakeholders are also directly or indirectly

related to the WH status of Ohrid. They can have an impact on its maintenance, while at the same time, the status can affect their work.

Non-probability sampling was used, meaning, the wider population does not have an equal chance of being selected in the sample (Saunders et al., 2009). Instead, respondents are chosen based on their convenience and availability. In our research, a non-probability, purposive sampling technique was employed and individual participants of each stakeholder group were selected, based on their involvement in the tourism sector in Ohrid. This type of sampling ensures that the collected data is highly relevant to the research objectives. The sample is not representative of the broader population, findings from purposive sampling cannot be generalised.

Out of the 24 initially contacted potential participants, only part of them were willing to participate. This resulted in a total of eight interviews being conducted, as presented in the table below.

Table 3: Interview participants

Stakeholder group	Contacted	Interviewed
Governmental sector	9	2
NGOs	5	3
Private sector	10	3
In total	24	8

Source: Own work

The respondents belong to different tourism stakeholders' groups in Ohrid, which provides us with insight into different perspectives. Additionally, each of the respondents was intrigued by the topic and gave their best by answering the questions honestly and comprehensively. On the other hand, some answers begin to become repetitive, which is a sign that the sample size is enough. The table below presents a more detailed description of the interviewees' occupations and the assigned codes that will be used in the further analysis of the data. The reason why we've decided to operate with codes instead of full names is because they are not relevant information for our research. The anonymity also allowed the participants to express themselves freely, even regarding some sensitive issues. Therefore, we will analyse the answers by their professional position.

Table 4: Interviewees data

Interviewees	
CODE	Occupation
GOV-1	Head of the Department for the Protection of Cultural Heritage in North Macedonia- Ministry of Culture
GOV-2	Head of the Department of Tourism and Local Economic Development in Ohrid
NGO-1	President of Tourist Association of Ohrid - Biljana
NGO-2	Executive director of the association- Europe House Struga
NGO-3	Representative of Citizens' Initiative Ohrid SOS
Private-1	Hotel manager
Private-2	Tourist guide
Private-3	Tour operator representative

Source: Own work

All respondents except for one (GOV-1) are residents of the city of Ohrid, which gives them additional value as they are part of the local community, experiencing all the positive and negative impacts of tourism, and observing its development through the years. Furthermore, all respondents are part of the active population in the age group 34-55 years old and have a university degree education level.

6.3 Description of the interview process

The interviews took place in July 2024. All participants were previously contacted by e-mail or phone, the purpose of our thesis was explained in order to introduce them to the subject, as well as the estimated time for the interview. They had the possibility to choose between in-person or online face-to-face interviews, according to their arrangements and possibilities. Therefore, all interviews were carried out via video call through the platform Zoom, with an approximate duration of 30-45 minutes. With consideration of the ethical aspect of the research, during the interview, the respondents were asked for audio recording permission of the conversation. Additionally, on our part, we have guaranteed them anonymity (no personal information will be used, only the name of the organisation or their role) and confidentiality (the data will be only used for the purpose of this research). The advantage

of working as a team on our research was the ability to divide the roles during the interview and capture all the details. While one of us was reading the questions and leading the conversation, the other one was more of an observer, taking notes about the respondents' reactions and key interesting parts of their answers that we discussed later.

The interviews were conducted in the native language (Macedonian) of the respondent which gave them the opportunity to really express themselves with their own words and added authenticity and value to the data. On the other hand, this made the process of transcription a little bit more difficult since all answers needed to be translated into English. All interviews have been transcribed manually by the research team. No computer programs or other methods were used for transcription. According to Silverman (2001), the process of transcription is not just about data gathering, but it's the initial step in data analysis. It's a time-consuming process, but still, carefully reading and going through the provided answers allows the researcher to make sense of the social world as perceived by the respondent. In the transcripts, we only incorporated the answers to the interview questions. The beginning of the interview was aimed at getting to know each other with the participants in order to feel more comfortable during the conversation. However, we considered those pieces of information irrelevant to our research, so we excluded them from the transcripts.

6.4 Data analysis

Data analysis is a continuous process during research, encompassing the organisation and preparation of data, initial review, coding, thematic analysis, and making sense of textual and visual data. It involves conducting various analyses, delving deeper into understanding the data, representing the data, and interpreting its larger meaning. Reflection, asking analytic questions, and writing memos are essential throughout the study (Creswell, 2009).

We followed the general steps in qualitative data analysis as proposed by Creswell (2009, pp. 172-176):

- Organise and prepare the data for analysis;
- Read through all the data;
- Begin detailed analysis with a coding process;
- Use the coding process to generate a description of categories or themes for analysis;
- Description and representation of themes in the qualitative narrative;
- Making an interpretation or meaning of the data.

Through the literature, coding is seen as the first step in conceptualising the data and a key process since it organises the copious notes, transcripts, or documents that have been collected. It includes organising the material into chunks or segments of text to develop a general meaning for each segment (Bryman & G.Burgess, 1994; Creswell, 2009).

First, we started reading the transcripts, one by one, to get familiar with the data. As the reading flowed, we highlighted the most interesting parts of the answers, some similarities, or unexpected information. Since the questions were open-ended, some of the answers were

very extensive or descriptive, and some of them included information that was not in focus of our research. Therefore, the coding process helped us conceptualise the data. We performed the coding manually, without using software programs. In this process we used ‘in vivo’ codes, meaning they were derived from the actual terms used by the participants. Then the codes were grouped into categories, which were further analysed and discussed through the main themes of our findings (Saunders et al., 2009). A sample of this process will be demonstrated in the table below, while the rest of it can be found in Appendix 2.

Table 5: Example of the coding process

Theme 1. Stakeholders’ knowledge and perspectives about sustainable tourism	
Codes	Category
-enjoy the natural beauty -balanced use of resources -preservation of natural resources -no negative impacts on nature -protecting the environment -environmental responsible behaviour	- Priority of environmental sustainability
-mutually dependent -mutually connected -complementary	- Importance of all three aspects

Source: Own work

We used our research questions as a basic framework for defining the main themes. The literature review also assisted in this process. Through their elaboration, we will endeavour to provide answers to the research questions and to achieve the purpose of our thesis. The analysis of the themes will be presented in the following chapters.

6.5 Limitations of the research

As a limitation of the qualitative research approach, we can say that it was a time-consuming process, especially since the transcription and coding of the interviews were performed manually. Another important limitation of the research process is that it was conducted during the peak season in Ohrid. It’s a period of the year when everyone is somehow engaged with tourism and busy. Therefore, establishing the initial contact itself, and then the additional scheduling of an exact appointment, was difficult due to the constant professional commitments of the stakeholders. This affected their willingness to participate and resulted in a lower response rate than expected. If the research is repeated in different periods, it may result in different outcomes. Additionally, the research only included 2-3 representatives of each sector including only stakeholders from Ohrid, while further research may also include stakeholders from the other two municipalities or from the Albanian part, to get additional perspectives and a comprehensive understanding of the subject. The interpretation and

analysis of the obtained data are derived from our knowledge and point of view; therefore, the results cannot be generalised.

7 FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The research findings are elaborated and discussed in the subsequent chapters. They are organised into six broad themes, which address the stakeholders' knowledge, perspectives, and recommendations regarding Ohrid's World Heritage status and its impact on sustainable tourism development.

7.1 Stakeholders' knowledge and perspectives about sustainable tourism

This section refers to RQ1: How knowledgeable are the local stakeholders about the principles of sustainable tourism, and how do they perceive tourism in Ohrid? Here, we will focus on stakeholders' perspectives on sustainable tourism. The other part of the research question, related to tourism in Ohrid will be analysed in the following chapter (7.2.2).

The stakeholders are an integral part of any society; therefore, they have an important role in the sustainable tourism development of any destination. Their understanding and attitude towards sustainability, directly or indirectly, determine and influence the direction of tourism development. For the successful implementation of sustainable tourism, the informed participation of the stakeholders is essential (UNEP, UN Tourism, 2005). Therefore, we've found it extremely important to first assess their knowledge and perspectives regarding sustainable tourism in general.

At the beginning of the interview, the participants were asked how they define and understand the concept of sustainable tourism. By analysing the answers we've concluded that at the first mention of the term sustainability, the main association is the protection of the natural environment. Therefore, sustainable tourism is mainly described as tourism that doesn't harm natural beauty, natural resources, or the environment. The term balance, which is also often emphasised in the literature as an important segment of sustainability, was used in relation to the positive and negative impacts of tourism, and the use of natural resources. For instance, Private-3 stated that:

“Sustainable tourism should be based on balanced usage of natural resources and environmentally responsible behaviour. To preserve the natural resources for future generations, to make them accessible to tourists, but at the same time properly protected”.

Or from a different perspective, but still equally accurate, according to GOV-2: “Sustainable tourism should maximise tourist satisfaction, while at the same time doesn't affect the local community and the natural environment”. In a similar fashion but a little more comprehensively, GOV-1 defined sustainable tourism as "a concept which tries to establish a balance between the needs of visitors, the environment, and local communities in order to

minimise the negative impacts of tourism and maximise its contribution to the destination. This only confirms the theory of Butler (1999) that sustainable tourism can represent different things to different entities and that there is a lack of uniform definition of this complex concept.

In addition, the next question was formulated as a complementary to the first one for better understanding, so the three pillars (economic, environmental, and sociocultural) were emphasised by asking which one is the most important. This made a little bit of a shift in their thinking. Most of them still identified environmental sustainability as the most important in terms of tourism by stating that, for example, “if the natural environment isn’t preserved it will affect the attractiveness of the destination” (NGO-2), and “there will not be an opportunity for economic and socio-cultural development” (Gov-2). On the other hand, the economic aspect was also recognised as the most important, not in terms of ‘fast profit’, but as a benefit for the local community. GOV-1 explained this thinking as follows:

“The economic because it is vital to ensure that tourism benefits the local communities and contributes to their prosperity. This aspect enables the creation of jobs, support of local businesses, and revenues that will later be reinvested into the development and infrastructure of the destination. Without this aspect, tourism may not be sustainable in the long term; if local communities don't see tangible benefits, they may resist tourism development and threaten the economic stability of the area”.

Another interesting thought was that although, in theory, all three pillars should be in balance, in reality, this is very challenging to achieve. Therefore, NGO-1 explained that it depends on the overall situation “In rural areas the priority may be economic development, while in urban cities the ecological aspect is more important, so that tourism benefits everyone, the residents and the stakeholders”.

However, everyone agreed that all three aspects are important and connected. Moreover, they were described as mutually dependent and complementary. From the discussion, it became evident that the stakeholders are familiar with the fundamental principles of sustainable tourism. Despite having different points of view, they all acknowledge the significance of implementing this concept.

7.2 Stakeholders’ perspective on tourism in Ohrid

“Currently, tourism in Ohrid presents a mixed picture when it comes to sustainability. Ohrid, which is often called the “Jerusalem of the Balkans”, is known for its historical and ecclesiastical significance, especially for its ancient elements, monasteries and certainly the Ohrid Lake. As a UNESCO WH site, it attracts many visitors, which is important for the local economy. However, in addition to the economic benefits of tourism, Ohrid should take steps towards improving environmental sustainability to achieve a fully sustainable tourism model.” This was the most subtle answer provided by GOV-1 when we asked about the

current situation of tourism in Ohrid and whether would they describe it as sustainable. Maybe, since this participant isn't a resident of Ohrid, so his/her opinion is more objective.

All other participants agreed that currently, tourism in Ohrid is unsustainable. This was especially emphasised by the NGOs by stating that it is “out of control” (NGO-3) and that “there is no sustainable tourism in Ohrid in any sense” (NGO-1). In addition, various perspectives regarding this problem were expressed, along with several reasons contributing to such a situation. The figure below illustrates some of the most frequently used expressions by the respondents, explaining the issues encountered by Ohrid as a destination. Some of them were already elaborated in the previous chapters, and also recognised by other researchers (Petrevska & Mihalič, 2020) and by UNESCO as main threats to the natural and cultural heritage of Ohrid as a WH site.

Figure 6: Unsustainable Tourism of Ohrid



Source: Own work

The most comprehensive statement, encompassing all three pillars of sustainability, concerning the current condition of Ohrid, is the following:

“It’s hard to say and define it as sustainable since tourism in Ohrid has a very short active season of a few months. It’s hard to ensure economic and social sustainability when most of the population depends on tourism, and it brings only seasonal work, which means the hospitality sector should pay for workers off the season or provide only seasonal work, which again affects the quality of life of the locals. On the other hand, the ones not involved in tourism immigrate from Ohrid to more developed cities. In terms of ecological sustainability, there is poor waste and wastewater management, and a small number of hotels have implemented energetic efficiency. Therefore, it can be said that sustainable tourism in Ohrid is developing at a very slow pace” (Private-1).

One of the main issues discussed by the respondents was mass tourism and a very short season. We have already discussed that tourism in Ohrid is limited to a summer season of a few months only. Still, according to NGO-1, the active tourist season in Ohrid lasts even less, approximately 45 days. “It begins with the Ohrid summer festival on 15 July and finishes at the end of August. There are individual visitors after that, but their number is much smaller.” That’s the period when there are a lot of additional concerts, and events, the water of the lake is warm for swimming. Additionally, in the same period, there are several national holidays and the number of domestic tourists is very high, so mass tourism reaches its maximum. “I think the number of tourists exceeds the city’s capacity in terms of providing adequate communal and sanitary services, for example in managing the waste and responding to the needs of the tourists and the locals. There are too many events in a short period and too many visitors at the same place” (NGO-2).

Consequently, there are a lot of issues regarding the infrastructure, heavy traffic, congestion, noise, crowding on the beaches, etc. which affect the quality of life of the local population, but also lead to “dissatisfaction of the visitors who are primarily visiting Ohrid for cultural tourism” as pointed out by Private-3. He/she also explained that while on the one hand, Ohrid is experiencing constant growth in tourism”, meaning it brings economic benefits, on the other, it leads to mass tourism and “mass tourism and sustainability are not compatible. Increased number of tourists means increased endangerment of the environment.”

Although, in theory, any form of tourism, even mass tourism can be sustainable if properly managed, Ohrid is far from achieving it. Still, with the implementation of more strategic planning and management, tourism in Ohrid can progress towards more sustainable development.

In addition, another critical point in tourism in Ohrid is the negative pressure on the natural environment. The natural heritage of Ohrid, Ohrid Lake, and the national park Galicica are the main tourist attractions. At the same time, they are protected and fragile areas with rich biodiversity and endemic flora and fauna. However, these inspiring natural beauties are also under constant pressure from the tourism industry, which poses a significant threat to their delicate ecosystems. This issue was especially triggering for our respondent NGO-3, who took enough time and dedication during the interview and provided us with comprehensive and detailed answers, with some concrete examples from the field.

The tourism industry is visibly out of control, while tourism visitations are steadily increasing. Self-evidently, it will not be possible to have a sustainable approach until a well-maintained wastewater system is extended to all settlements in the area, but, recent promises for a treatment plant in the village of Trpejca notwithstanding, this is nowhere close to being achieved. Even in the areas where there is sewerage coverage, concerns remain about leaks and overcapacity during the peak summer months.

Then there are issues like the Springs of Saint Naum, which are supposed to be home to several animal species that are unique in the whole world. Not only have restaurant facilities been allowed to expand and subsume an island in the centre of the springs, destroying it as

a natural habitat and refuge for other species, but parties are being rafted with poles around the springs, sometimes with live music, which is an additional disturbance of the nature. In theory, St. Naum Springs is in a Zone of Strict Protection of National Park Galicica, the highest level possible under the law. Carrying capacity has not been established and there is no control of visitor volume. And this is just one example where visitation is obviously and measurably unsustainable.

Tourism has also driven a construction expansion, with many apartments, villas, café-bars, and hotels being built far exceeding the needs of the local population, which is suffering out-migration. This is happening both inside National Park Galicica and immediately adjacent to hotspots of biodiversity.

Then you have all the other unsustainable activities and behaviours that are part of or emergent from the tourism industry. Transport is a particular issue. Poorly controlled boating on the lake is both a danger to swimmers and a serious disturbance to fish, whose movement patterns are being altered and breeding grounds destroyed. New off-road activities in the national park are erosion, disturbance, collision, fire, and pollution risk. Some are even driven in the shallow waters of the lake. Air travel, which Macedonia is seeking to increase both with the provision of subsidies and possible plans to expand the local airport, is a driver of pollution (air and water), noise and climate change as well.

On top of that, the failure to properly educate locals and tourists that they are visiting the most biodiverse lake on the planet when measured by endemic species to surface area and some of the most species-rich mountain habitats in all of Europe results in irresponsible behaviour. For example, there have been incidents of visitors releasing sky lanterns from the lakeshore in National Park Galicica, which is extremely dangerous because it can cause wildfires and, even if it doesn't, inevitably leads to needless trash. Meanwhile, in the summer, large volumes of people party every night in the Studenchishte Marsh wetland, which is unwelcomed by the birds, mammals, amphibians, and fish who would otherwise live there.

Realistically speaking, there will always be some negative impact from visitors and it is neither possible nor desirable to wall Ohrid off from the rest of the world. However, the current approach to tourism is maximising threats, not mitigating them.”

Most of these challenges were also recognised by UNESCO, but still in practice little has been done to prevent further destruction of Ohrid's natural heritage and ensure its adequate protection. Unfortunately, the economic benefit from tourism comes at the cost of the natural environment.

7.3 Destination management of Ohrid

This section relates to the second research question RQ2: How effective is the current destination management of Ohrid in promoting sustainable tourism development, and who are the key responsible decision-makers in this process?

To assess the effectiveness of the management of Ohrid, as a destination and a WH site, the respondents were asked about their opinion regarding its current management. Who are the responsible decision-makers, and what are the critical issues in its sustainable tourism development? The question about stakeholders' involvement and collaboration was also brought into discussion.

The analysis of the interviews showed similarities in the stakeholders' thinking. They all acknowledged that tourism management falls under the responsibility of national and local authorities. Some of them even identified specific institutional departments and ministries, such as the Tourism Department on the local level, the Ministry of Economics and The Ministry of Environment and Physical Planning on a national level. Moreover, they were all dissatisfied with the current management of Ohrid, and it was described as “alarming” (GOV-2), “not ideal” (Private-3), and “highly ineffective” (NGO-3). Additionally, they pointed out some of the many things that need to be improved.

According to NGO-1, “The key responsible are the national governmental institutions which don’t have clear strategy and vision for sustainable tourism development, or in what direction they want to develop the tourism in Ohrid. Then the local authorities, are mainly focused on their political agenda with no consideration of sustainable tourism development. Ohrid, as a natural and cultural heritage and an important tourist destination, should be unpolitical and governed towards economic development. However, the cost of their politics is paid by the local communities.”

Although coming from different sectors, GOV-2 shared similar thinking: “The main responsibility is of the authorities on a national level. The government makes the legislation, and then different institutions on national and local levels must implement those regulations. Currently, I think the regulations and legislation are in place, but there is a lack of their implementation. However, in great part, there is responsibility in the moral and ethical behaviour of each individual of the local population, and increased awareness about the environmental consequences is essential.” The last sentence refers to an additional aspect that needs to be considered when talking about responsibility, which was also emphasised by the respondents: the low level of awareness.

Indeed, the governmental sector has a legal obligation and is the most influential in decision-making and creating tourism policies and regulations. Besides that, even more important is the role of the authorities in the enforcement of those legislations. They should apply equally to everyone, especially in a protected area such as the Ohrid region. Nevertheless, in the opinion of NGO-3, “laws are routinely flouted”, especially when it comes to illegal

constructions. Further, was explained that they, as a Citizens' Initiative often do report such illegalities, but "local and national inspectorates do little to remediate law-breaking when it is reported to them, which has created a culture of impunity". In addition, "the Commission for the Management of the Natural and Cultural Heritage of the Ohrid Region, which was established to review construction and other plans within the World Heritage Site and block them if they are inappropriate, has not proven fully effective", stated NGO-3.

However, when it comes to sustainable tourism development, everyone involved has responsibility for their actions." The responsible authority is the local Tourism Department. Still the responsibility of sustainable tourism development depends on the decision made by the national and local authorities as well as the consciousness of everyone involved in tourism, the local population and tourism providers" (Private-2). By knowing that the first step towards responsible tourism is awareness (Mihalic, 2016), its enhancement is essential. If the moral and ethical behaviour of every person is more conscientious regarding his natural and cultural heritage, then the whole process of sustainable tourism development would be much easier. In this regard, NGO-2 suggested that: "Increased awareness is necessary at local and national levels to develop strategies for long-term sustainability, but also on the demand side of tourists."

According to GOV-2, "There is no sustainable tourism development strategy on local or national level. It's necessary to work on that issue." Furthermore, the stakeholders also recognised the need for the development of a better strategy to reduce seasonality, improve the distribution of tourists, and reduce overcrowding with better organisation of cultural events. By doing so, "the overall experience of the visitors will be better, and the negative impacts of tourism will be minimised", says NGO-2.

On the other hand, there was also one contradictory point of view regarding this issue. Namely, as claimed by NGO-3 the main issue is not the lack of strategy, but that there are too many of them with no implementation. The discussion was as follows: "On top of all these institutions, there are numerous strategies and plans, all of which are nominally intended to improve the management of the Ohrid Region from a sustainable tourism perspective. Some of these, including the strategy for tourism development, are yet to reach beyond the draft stage or, like the Lake Ohrid Watershed Management Plan, have not been adopted. Others are either behind the schedule they have outlined in their action plans or contain major deficiencies. Naturally, with so many plans and strategies, lines of responsibility are often quite vague, and there is no obvious hierarchy between the various documents."

The analysis of these answers only indicates how important it is to consider the different perspectives of stakeholders when discussing issues like sustainable tourism development and destination management. Stakeholders should be involved in the process of tourism planning, creating strategies, and implementing them. Their participation and collaboration are crucial for the long-term sustainability and prosperity of the destination.

Regarding this issue, the overall impression of the analysis is that cooperation between stakeholders exists only in theory. There were different opinions, with some positive and negative practices being presented. Only NGO-1 stated clearly that: “No, there is no collaboration between the stakeholders, especially between the government and NGOs like ours, since we often critique the government's decisions. We are actively trying to protect the lake, while the government which has the legal power and responsibility doesn't do that.” However, almost all respondents agreed that the cooperation between the stakeholders in Ohrid exists, but it should be at a higher level.

Private-2 stated that: “The collaboration exists, but there is a lack of implementation. I have personally been involved in many such workshops where all stakeholders take part.... From local authorities, associations of tourist organisations, private sector representatives, university of tourism representatives... Often, there are different opinions about certain issues, and the discussion ends up with some conclusions and further recommendations, but without real implementation further on...”

Surprisingly, some individuals even mentioned political interference with this issue. For that, the local government of Ohrid wasn't supported enough by the national government due to political differences (NGO-2), or most attempts of collaboration are made for political purposes before the elections, and afterwards, everything is forgotten (Private-1).

The involvement of the private sector is mainly seen through some initiatives like eco-actions, campaigns for raising awareness, support of events... As a positive example, NGO-3 mentioned the initiative of the local Diving Center Amfora and the Hydrobiological Institute of Ohrid, together with other international diving groups to clean up the lake and remove ghost nets. Besides the ecological significance of this action, it also contributed to raising awareness and enhancing stakeholders' cooperation by organising a roundtable event in collaboration with the Hydrobiological Institute of Ohrid. By bringing together government officials and environmental organisations, they brainstormed solutions to the ghost fishing problem and paved the way for future conservation projects that actively engage the local community (Healthy Seas, 2024). “The problem is that these kinds of very positive activities tend to happen sporadically on a project basis, not a permanent, systematic one”-said NGO-3. On the other hand, according to NGO-3, negative examples of collaboration between different sectors are “the contracts between National Park Galicica and off-road entities to allow access to the protected area for ATVs and 4x4s as a tourist attraction, and the concessions for coastal café-bars that are revenue generators for local municipalities”.

Overall, the involvement of all relevant stakeholders in the development and management of tourism in Ohrid needs to be improved. At least on a local level, they all must work on better communication and collaboration and be more initiative to enhance the destination's sustainability.

Furthermore, if we analyse the discussion of this section through the perspective of the already mentioned destination management models, we can see that the current management of Ohrid is failing in all three stages: awareness, agenda and action (Mihalic, 2022). Since according to the answers of the stakeholders, there is a lack of efficient governance, strategic leadership, and implementation (UN Tourism, n.d.), it can be considered neither effective nor responsible.

7.4 Stakeholder perspectives regarding the World Heritage status of Ohrid

To fulfil the main purpose of our research and find out what impacts the WH status has on the sustainable tourism development of Ohrid, we first investigated the stakeholders' thinking about this subject. In this section, we will provide an analysis of the next research question, RQ3: What is the significance of the World Heritage status of Ohrid from the stakeholders' perspective?

Generally speaking, the respondents expressed a positive attitude about the WH title in general and in terms of Ohrid's status. They were all well-informed and aware of the current situation in Ohrid as WH site, the values, and responsibilities that this title represents. The stakeholders explained their interpretation and how they feel as residents of a WH site city. The most frequently used attributes were pride, prestige, satisfaction, honour, and privilege. Moreover, honour and enhanced prestige were also highlighted as the principal benefits of inscription expressed by States Parties across Europe during the periodic reporting (Galland et al., 2016).

For instance, Private-3 stated: "For me, is the most prestigious worldwide title that a site or region as Ohrid, can achieve. I feel very proud every time I share this information with tourists, it means that we have an important natural and cultural heritage of which we should be proud, but also take care of it. It means it is of outstanding value and needs to be protected for future generations." This indicates that when there is awareness about the significance of something, such as the WH status, or the natural and cultural heritage in general, there is also awareness about the responsibility to protect it.

Similarly, GOV-2 declared that the WH status signifies pride and privilege. "I'm very proud to live in a place that has such recognition as mixed natural and cultural heritage because it's really rare and significant. However, I would say that generally, there is a low level of awareness and interest about this subject in the local population and some improvements and promotions should be implemented in order to protect this heritage."

Furthermore, it was discussed that the WH status adds competitive value to the destination and contributes to its attractiveness. Also, the status brings global recognition, financial and technical support, and assistance in preserving Ohrid's cultural and natural heritage. On the other hand, "Ohrid has strong attributes and values and deserves the designation as WH site" (Private-1). "It is a prehistoric lake with rich biodiversity and a city with a significant cultural history. It surely deserves to be on the WH list, but it is up to us to protect and preserve it.

This means that Ohrid is a significant heritage for the whole world and civilisation, not just Macedonian or Balkan heritage,”-said NGO-1.

In addition, from a professional perspective, the WH status was mainly perceived as a potential for new opportunities in any sector. Therefore, for GOV-1, “the status of Ohrid as a WH creates opportunities for cooperation with international organisations, experts and other strategic partners. This includes the exchange of knowledge, resources and experiences in order to protect and sustainably develop these important sites.”, NGO-2 consider that “as an NGO, there are a lot of issues that can be addressed and work on different projects for improvement”.

7.5 World Heritage status impacts on sustainable tourism development

This section relates to the final research question, RQ4: What are the perceived benefits and challenges of Ohrid’s WH status for sustainable tourism development? To provide a comprehensive answer and evaluation of the impacts of WH status, we formulated three interview questions to obtain the stakeholders’ opinions on each aspect of sustainability (economic, social, and environmental). Therefore, each dimension will be elaborated as a separate theme.

7.5.1 The economic impacts of World Heritage status of Ohrid from stakeholder’s perspective

To gain a better insight into the impacts of the WH status on economic development in Ohrid the following question was asked: Does the World Heritage status influence tourism demand and economic opportunities in Ohrid?

In this regard, most of the answers suggested that there is a positive impact. The economic benefits from the WH status of Ohrid were primarily seen as a promotion tool and therefore increase in the number of tourists, and as a source of additional financial funding.

According to NGO-1: “The status significantly benefits tourism; it's like having the brand Coca-Cola. It contributes to the recognition and attractiveness of the destination by presenting its natural and cultural heritage and increasing its visitation rate. On the one hand, it is beneficial for the economic development of Ohrid and on the national level as well. On the other hand, it is like some limitation or handicap since, during the season, it results in overcrowding.” Additionally, in the opinion of GOV-1: “The status of WH has a significant positive impact on tourist demand and economic opportunities in Ohrid. It increases the visibility of the destination, attracts new tourists, and creates new economic opportunities through revenue growth, job creation and investment attraction.” From the perspective of NGO-2 the positive economic impact of the WH status is observed through the UNESCO funds, and its attraction of many foreign investments, funds, or donations from various

European organisations. “These resources are dedicated to preserving Ohrid’s natural and cultural heritage, which is valuable to everyone” (NGO-2).

Furthermore, it was discussed that the WH status as a brand has great potential that hasn’t been completely and adequately used in the promotion of Ohrid as a tourist destination and a WH site. Although the WH label is a part of any promotional material for Ohrid, it is intended only to attract a higher number of tourists, and not as a promotion of its outstanding natural and cultural values. “It should be highlighted on all promotional materials that Ohrid is a rarity since there are only around 30 mixed properties in the world, and it is worth visiting”-stated GOV-2. In addition, most tourists are not even aware of the significance that the Ohrid Lake poses as a habitat for numerous unique species or the volume of birdlife that visits the lake. For this natural heritage to be “well-protected it must also be well-presented”-explained NGO-3. Therefore, the WH brand can be utilised to diversify the tourist offer in Ohrid and shift from mass tourism (mostly in the form of sun and sand tourism), towards more environmentally friendly forms of tourism and activities.

An unexpected outcome of our research was that all three private sector respondents emphasised that most of the tourists in Ohrid are unfamiliar with the fact that it is a WH site, or at last, it’s not their primary reason for visitation. This was the only case where all representatives of a sector shared the same opinion, which is contrary to the thinking of the rest of the participants: that the WH status of Ohrid attracts a significant number of tourists. However, we do consider this information relevant since, unlike the other two stakeholder groups, they are the ones who are in direct contact with tourists every day.

Private-1 expressed his thinking as follows: “I don’t think that it influences the tourism demand. From my experience the status of Ohrid is not the primary reason for the visitation of any tourist, most of them are not even aware of that fact. Once they are here, it leaves a positive impression about the destination. Although it is used as a label on any promotional brochure for Ohrid.” The other two representatives of the private sector had the same observation and shared their opinions based on their working experience. Therefore, Private-3 declared: “I haven’t noticed a direct impact on tourism demand, it all depends on destination marketing. Macedonia is still an unrevealed destination and the WH status of Ohrid is the best way to present it to the world and attract tourists, meaning there is something worth visiting. This fact has great potential but hasn’t been used enough since a lot of tourists don’t know that Ohrid is WH site until they come here.” Similarly, Private-2 said: “I don’t think it is directly impacting the economy and economic opportunities. From professional experience, I have noticed that the WH status of Ohrid is not the primary reason for visitation, most of the tourists are not even aware of that fact. Although it is highlighted in all marketing propaganda.” This indicates that there is a need for changes and improvements in Ohrid’s marketing and promotion strategy as a tourist destination and WH site.

From the analysis is evident that although the WH status of Ohrid is a valuable attribute that supports the international recognition of the site and contributes to the attractiveness of the destination, its direct impact on tourism demand and economic opportunities cannot be determined. Moreover, since Ohrid was inscribed in the WH list a long time ago (1979/80), it is not possible to compare the data and see if there has been an increase in tourist arrivals due to its inscription. This issue was also analysed by Cellini (2011). Based on his research and econometric results the inclusion of sites on the WH list appears to have unclear effects on tourism.

7.5.2 World Heritage status impact on environmental protection

The most highly perceived was the positive impact of the WH status on the environmental protection of Ohrid. All stakeholders acknowledged that UNESCO has a significant role in the preservation of the natural and cultural heritage of Ohrid and in maintaining its OUV. This is achieved by following the UNESCO's principles and recommendations.

According to Gov-2: "It absolutely has an impact since most of the regulations are based on UNESCO's requirements, and they are based on the best practices. We need to adapt and accept those norms for further protection of the natural and cultural environment."

"Yes and no. Yes, in terms of their recommendations for different unsustainable practices, still their implementation depends on the destination management on local and national levels. For example, although some of them were accepted and implemented for some time, after a while the beaches are again under private concession without controlling their work or following the recommendations of UNESCO. Also, the same principles should be established in the Albanian part of the lake for effective protection and preservation"- said Private-2. This was mainly related to the recommendations of UNESCO in the last few years since the status of Ohrid is questionable and there is a possibility to be placed on the List of WH in Danger (WHC, 2019). There are a lot of pressures that threaten the OUV of Ohrid, most of them associated with tourism growth, and they were already elaborated in the previous sections. Through their reports, UNESCO has warned the authorities of Ohrid about the possible danger and consequences and offered further recommendations and appropriate measures to resolve these issues. However, their implementation depends on the State party and the awareness of everyone involved.

Additionally, as pointed out by NGO-3: "UNESCO has also been an important voice to prevent damaging proposed developments like an express road and ski-resort in National Park Galicica. Through recommendations from Reactive Monitoring Missions, it has further offered advice to guide management and governance in a positive direction."

On the other hand, some of the respondents besides the acknowledgement of the positive impacts of the status, have also expressed their dissatisfaction with UNESCO's

procrastination of the decision to put Ohrid on the List of WH in Danger. Namely, NGO-1 and NGO-3 believe that it is the best way to effectively protect the natural and cultural heritage of Ohrid from further destruction.

In this regard, NGO-1 stated: “Yes, the status of WH surely has a positive impact on environmental protection. But we as a civil association are not satisfied with the treatment of UNESCO, and we think that it would be a lot better if Ohrid had been put on the list of danger almost 10 years ago, since the initial warnings of UNESCO began. In that way, the necessary measures would be implemented on time. Now the problem is dragging on without specific measures taken to correct the situation and preserve the values of Ohrid.” In addition, according to NGO-3 “UNESCO has failed to follow up on its own recommendations from Reactive Monitoring Missions.” The same opinion, that Ohrid should be listed on the List of WH in Danger was shared by Haemus (Center for Scientific Research and Promotion of Culture) after their experts visited Ohrid (HAEMUS, 2023).

In essence, the list of dangers is not necessarily a bad thing. It may be regarded as negative publicity in the short term, but it does not diminish the value or importance of the site. On the contrary, this listing can help in the site’s preservation and conservation (Pedersen, 2002). Various mechanisms from UNESCO, access to international tools and the necessary assistance can help the state to deal with significant threats. It can also be used as a mechanism for raising awareness. Therefore, the governments of Ohrid should consider this option (OhridSOS, n.d.). However, given Ohrid's unsustainable tourism and inefficient management, its overall environmental condition would be much worse without the WH status.

7.5.3 Benefits and challenges for the local community

The benefits of Ohrid’s WH status were generally discussed from the perspective of subjective, symbolic value for the residents and as economic benefits from tourism. This was also confirmed by recent research about the perceptions of residents of Ohrid, where findings showed that no matter their differences, all residents are proud to live in WH destination, and strongly perceive that due to UNESCO’s status, Ohrid benefits economically (Petrevska et al., 2020).

The most significant values are the honour and pride to live in a WH site with exceptional natural and cultural heritage, and the opportunity and satisfaction to enjoy them. The economic benefit is also very important since a lot of the local population depends on tourism, or is in some way involved in the tourism and hospitality sector. Therefore, the contribution of the WH status in this aspect is seen through attracting a larger number of tourists and job opportunities which will improve their quality of life. On the other hand, due to tourism seasonality, there is also a negative effect on the local community, which results in the emigration of the young population. Although this issue is not a direct effect of the

WH status it was still mentioned by NGO-1 saying that: “The local community enjoys the economic benefits of tourism. Still, there is a large emigration of the young population of Ohrid because they do not have permanent work throughout the year and opportunities for prosperity and advancement in other sectors except tourism and hospitality.”

Furthermore, Ohrid’s residents appreciate the WH status due to these economic benefits, and not because of the values that it stands for, such as natural and cultural heritage protection and conservation (Petrevska et al., 2023). Correspondingly, in the opinion of NGO-3, “Although there is local pride in the UNESCO status and people do not want to lose it, most do not understand what it signifies, not to mention the benefits they do and could receive from it. Some even consider the World Heritage label as an inconvenience that holds back megaprojects.” In this regard, the analysis showed that the impacts of WH status are often perceived as a challenge or limitation for the local community. “Generally speaking, except for the privilege of living in a WH site, they face many more challenges than benefits. Especially in the core of the old city, they are restricted in terms of building and reconstruction. There are regulations from UNESCO that need to be respected to preserve the authenticity of the city”-explained GOV-2. Moreover, according to Private-2: “If you ask the local population, I believe they would say none, especially in the old city protected area where people can't renovate their houses without genuine materials, so their preservation and maintenance are more difficult, which also affects their finances... There is much more frustration than benefits...” Adding to the discussion NGO-2 said: “The main limitation of the status are the strict rules and paperwork for renovation and conservation of properties in the protected area. However, controlled urbanisation should be established in any place and especially at WH sites.”

This emerges from the fact that Ohrid is a very specific WH site. It refers to a whole region, not just one property, museum, archaeological site etc. It encompasses private properties and houses that people live in or use as tourist accommodation units, which on the other hand, hold historical and architectural significance. It’s hard for the residents to understand that it is not a regular property and that they cannot do whatever they want with it, because it has greater importance and value. Concerning this issue Private-2 said: “I think the focus should be put on educating the local population about the significance of the WH status and its maintenance, so that they can understand and follow the recommendations.” Additionally, it’s necessary to raise awareness about the ecological significance of Ohrid Lake as well. Its unique ecosystem and biodiversity, its importance for humanity and science, and the consequences of unsustainable tourism practices. In any case, Ohrid is not like any other tourist destination. Once again, we’ve concluded that low awareness and lack of implementation of regulations are the main reasons for any issue. Concerning this GOV-2 said: “I don’t think that the UNESCO regulations and requirements are limitation, although their implementation is challenging mostly because they are often violated especially by the construction industry... I think that the overall condition and appearance of the city itself would be much better if all laws were respected both by the institutions and by the citizens.”

Other limitations from Ohrid's WH status were mainly related to interrupted projects like the road to St. Naum complex, as a significant tourist attraction, which according to Private-3 "it's of great importance to reduce the traffic congestion, and no alternative to that road has been established". Similarly, Private-1 even considered that these kinds of restrictions from UNESCO are limitations for the development of Ohrid as a tourist destination. "In my opinion, although UNESCO is very significant for the protection of this natural and cultural heritage, in its current structure and way of operation, it's a limitation for the development of tourism in Ohrid and further investment in the tourism industry. I think that UNESCO doesn't take into consideration the necessary tourism development of the destination"-said Private-1. This statement is driven by a purely business perspective. However, this issue was brought up in the literature by Boccardi (2007), who discussed that the main focus of UNESCO is heritage protection and conservation, without taking into account the developmental needs of the site in any other aspect.

Therefore, the management of Ohrid must take into consideration all these issues when creating strategies and making decisions, and make an effort to balance tourism development and protection of the natural and cultural heritage. Improving the economic, social, and environmental aspects of sustainability is essential for enhancing the residents' quality of life. UNESCO can only support and assess this process.

7.6 Stakeholders' recommendations for a better future for Ohrid

At the end of the interview, we asked the respondents to share their thoughts about how they see Ohrid as a destination in the future, and some suggestions for more effective management. Therefore, in this section, they will be analysed and we will present some of them.

Primarily, the stakeholders emphasised the need for more strategic management of Ohrid and strong leadership by the local authorities. Improvement of the road infrastructure, and detailed urbanistic plan and strategy for the Ohrid region, according to the UNESCO regulations." This is necessary so that the local community and investors know their possibilities and prevent the illegal construction"-said Private-1. Moreover, it's important to develop a strategy which will be aligned between all three municipalities and implemented in practice, not just on paper. Private-1 also added: "I hope the authorities will implement a legal framework that will enable the destination to reach its full potential of development, which will bring more benefits to the local community and retain the young population of the city."

Additionally, better communication and collaboration between everyone involved in tourism, and support of the local community were listed as priorities. Educational initiatives for raising awareness and education of the residents are needed in order to achieve more sustainable tourism development and heritage preservation.

In terms of sustainable tourism development, the stakeholders suggested that Ohrid should move from the concept of mass tourism focused on beaches and parties. Instead, to aim towards the promotion of cultural tourism and some even said elite tourism (Private-2; Private-3, GOV-2). In other words, to reduce the number of tourists and attract more qualitative ones. This will also require improvement in the quality of services and enhanced tourist experience.

On the other hand, in terms of management and protection of the natural and cultural heritage of Ohrid as a WH site, NGO-3 recommended reforms of the legal framework to provide effective protected area zoning and to establish formal, legal protection for the entire World Heritage Site. They also suggested establishing and respecting the carrying capacity of Lake Ohrid, Saint Naum, and National Park Galicica. Additionally, to insulate protected area managers from political pressure, and to completely reform the process for staffing, conducting, and reviewing environmental impact assessments. Finally, a central management team headed by appropriately qualified experts should be put in place, and the central government should provide funds to implement and oversee the protection model. Secondary sources of revenue, not dependent on over-exploitation of the heritage should also be explored (NGO-3).

One pessimistic and alarming thought regarding the future of Ohrid was shared by NGO-1: “If Ohrid is not put on the List of World Heritage in Danger, it will be devastated and become a dead city. Due to the current urban chaos, Ohrid will be a block of buildings, used for a month, and a city without a young population.” It indicates how the different dimensions of sustainability are connected. It is hard to constantly balance the needs of everyone, however, they need to be taken into consideration. If the priority is only fast profit from urbanisation and construction, the negative consequences on the environmental and social aspects will be inevitable.

There is an urgent need for changes on many levels for the successful implementation of sustainable tourism development and the protection and preservation of the natural and cultural heritage of Ohrid. Both aspects are equally important, and interrelated and depend on efficient, strategic management and responsible behaviour of everyone involved.

Overall, according to GOV-1: “The future of Ohrid as a tourist destination with WH status can be successful if a balance is achieved between tourism development and the protection of natural and cultural resources. With strategic plans, infrastructure investments, local community support, innovation, and cooperation, Ohrid can continue to be an important and sustainable tourist destination that preserves and promotes its unique values.” This was the most comprehensive answer, encompassing all relevant aspects discussed by the respondents. Additionally, they expressed hope for a better future for Ohrid, with the vision that with the utilisation of its full potential Ohrid will be a worldwide famous destination. And finally, we would like to share one inspirational thought by GOV-2, as a message to everyone:

“Let us appreciate, preserve and improve this heritage that we have without further devastation of nature. Ohrid has existed for thousands of years and should continue to exist for future generations, as a place endowed by God with strong natural and cultural characteristics that will be invaluable in the future, even the clean water that we take for granted. Let us be more aware of what we own and try to preserve it.”

8 CONCLUSION

The purpose of this study was to analyse the WH status impacts on the sustainable tourism development of Ohrid. Through an in-depth discussion with representatives of three stakeholder groups (governmental sector, private sector, and NGOs), we completed our objective and successfully answered our research questions. Their different perspectives, based on personal and professional experience, provide us with a better insight into the current state of tourism in Ohrid and raise several topics for further discussion. The findings showed that the local stakeholders of Ohrid are well informed about this subject, and all of them expressed engagement and interest during the interview.

First, the stakeholders showed satisfactory knowledge of the concept of sustainable tourism development, which confirmed their competency for further discussion. They were aware of the significance of all three dimensions, still, they shared a similar understanding and emphasised the environmental aspect of sustainability as the most important for tourism development.

Furthermore, we focused on the specific case of Ohrid as a destination and a WH site. Although coming from different sectors, the stakeholders agreed that currently tourism in Ohrid cannot be defined as sustainable. For this to be achieved various changes and improvements are needed. The initial step in this process would be raising awareness about sustainability, on local and national levels, including all relevant stakeholders in tourism (government, residents, private sector, tourists, NGOs). They all must be aware of the values of the natural and cultural heritage of Ohrid, and responsible for their behaviour and decision-making. Despite that the environmental aspect has been identified as the most important, from the analysis is evident that the driving force in the development and management of Ohrid is the economic benefits from tourism. This has resulted in poorly managed mass tourism with a very short active season, which has put significant pressure on the natural environment and the carrying capacity of the destination, and consequently on the OUV of the WH site. Without strategic leadership, effective implementation of regulations, and lack of cooperation between different sectors, the current management of Ohrid has been identified as ineffective and irresponsible.

Given these circumstances and the complexity of the Ohrid region as a transboundary, mixed WH site, it's hard to define the WH status influence on its sustainable tourism development. From the stakeholders' perspective, it has a positive impact on many aspects. They all

expressed themselves as proud and honoured to live and operate in a city with such a prestigious title. Additionally, the WH status is perceived as a significant promotion tool, which gives added value to the destination and contributes to its attractiveness and international recognition. It is also seen as an important source of additional funds, international investments, and donations. Still, its potential hasn't been completely used in terms of monetizing the WH status through entry fees or some additional tourist attractions, so that it can contribute to the local economy. Moreover, the management of Ohrid needs to explore new ways of promoting the site's values. The research shows that, from the stakeholders' perspective, Ohrid's status has a positive economic impact. However, it cannot be determined if the WH status has a direct impact on increased tourism demand in Ohrid.

In terms of the environmental aspect, UNESCO's primary objective is the protection and conservation of natural and cultural heritage which is valuable for humanity. This means ensuring that the OUV of the site, along with its authenticity and integrity are well preserved. In the case of Ohrid, these values have been endangered for several years. From the stakeholders' perspective, the WH status has an important role in the environmental protection of Ohrid. The findings indicate that the overall condition of the site would be a lot worse without it. Through its monitoring missions, UNESCO has identified various threats (uncontrolled urbanisation of the coastal area, heavy traffic and congestion, environmental degradation), including also a lack of implementation of the regulations and their frequent infringement. The main reasons for this situation are ineffective management, unsustainable tourism, and low level of awareness, on an institutional level and among the local population.

In addition, UNESCO establishes the basic principles for the protection and preservation of the site. It offers suggestions and recommendations for improvement and provides warnings about some alarming issues. However, the regulations are created at the national and local levels of the destination, so their implementation depends exclusively on their institutions.

The study has also evaluated the social impacts of the WH status in terms of benefits and limitations for the local community. From the research is evident that even though the residents appreciate the symbolic value and the economic benefits of the status, they are unaware of its real meaning and the responsibilities that come with it. Unfortunately, the local population is insufficiently informed. They are unfamiliar with the actual reasons behind UNESCO's decisions, with the whole process of recommendations or alternative solutions to the problems. They only experience the negative consequences of mismanagement without seeing the bigger picture. This lack of understanding leads them to perceive that the WH status is imposing more limitations than providing benefits.

We can conclude that although UNESCO, through the World Heritage List as an instrument, has a significant role and some positive impacts on the development of tourism in Ohrid and the preservation of its natural and cultural heritage, it is not a crucial factor in achieving sustainable tourism development. This issue should be addressed on a local level. A more

holistic approach is needed in all segments of the developmental process. With improved efficiency of management, leadership and implementation, enhanced stakeholder involvement and cooperation and increased awareness, the negative impacts of tourism in Ohrid can be minimised. This is necessary to be implemented as soon as possible. Only in this way will Ohrid, a WH destination, avoid the List of World Heritage in Danger and the natural and cultural heritage of Ohrid will be preserved, the destination will remain attractive to visitors, and tourism will continue to benefit the economy, society, and the local community.

The thesis findings provide valuable insights into stakeholders' perspectives and add to the knowledge of both, sustainable tourism development and the WH status impacts. Hopefully, it may also contribute to creating more effective tourism policies and improving the current management practices in Ohrid. Eventually, this could lead to more sustainable tourism development in the future and preservation of its natural and cultural heritage.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Povzetek (Summary in Slovene language)

Analiza vpliva statusa Svetovna dediščina na trajnostni razvoj na primeru Ohrida

Medtem ko sta kompleksnost razvoja trajnostnega turizma in potreba po celovitem pristopu zahtevna za vsako destinacijo, je trajnost na območjih svetovne dediščine še večji izziv. Za našo raziskavo smo izbrali destinacijo in regijo Ohrid, ki je bila uvrščana na listo svetovne kulturne in naravne dediščine v letih 1979/1980). Netrajnostni razvoj turizma v Ohridu ogroža njeno pozicijo na listi, potencialno ji grozi premestitev na seznam ogrožene svetovne dediščine, kar zahteva takojšnje ukrepanje in izboljšanje managementa destinacije.

Glavni namen najine diplomske naloge je raziskati in analizirati vplive, ki jih ima status svetovne dediščine na trajnostni turistični razvoj destinacije Ohrid. Najin cilj je z oceno osebnega razmišljanja in izkušenj različnih deležnikov iz turističnega sektorja pridobiti boljši vpogled v trajnost Ohrida in ugotoviti, kako lahko UNESCO status pomaga pri izboljšanju učinkovitost destinacijskega managementa po principih trajnostnega razvoja oziroma po principih s trajnostnim razvojem skladnega standarda za management svetovne dediščine. Pri raziskavi je bil uporabljen kvalitativni raziskovalni pristop. Za zbiranje primarnih podatkov smo izbrali polstrukturirani intervju. Zastavila sva si naslednja raziskovalna vprašanja:

1. Kako dobro so lokalni deležniki seznanjeni z načeli trajnostnega turizma in kako dojemajo turizem v Ohridu?
2. Kako učinkovit je trenutni destinacijski management Ohrida pri spodbujanju trajnostnega razvoja turizma in kdo so ključni odgovorni odločevalci v tem procesu?
3. Kakšen je pomen statusa Ohrida kot svetovne dediščine z vidika deležnikov?
4. Kakšne so zaznane koristi in izzivi statusa Ohrida kot svetovne dediščine za razvoj trajnostnega turizma?

V razgovorih je sodelovalo 8 udeležencev iz različnih skupin deležnikov: trije iz zasebnega sektorja, dva iz vladnega sektorja in trije iz nevladnih organizacij. Intervjuji so potekali v juliju 2024 preko video klica preko platforme Zoom, v okvirnem trajanju 30-45 minut. Z upoštevanjem etičnega vidika raziskave so bili med intervjujem anketiranci zaproseni za dovoljenje za zvočni posnetek pogovora. Dodatno smo jim z naše strani zagotovili anonimnost in zaupnost. Podatke smo nato prevedli in prepisali. Potem smo uporabili tehniko kodiranja 'in vivo' za konceptualizacijo podatkov v kategorije, o katerih smo nadalje razpravljali in analizirali v šestih temah.

Z vidika deležnikov je trenutno turizem v Ohridu netrajnosten, njegovo destinacijski management je neučinkovit in neodgovoren, lokalno prebivalstvo pa ni zadostno ozaveščeno o trajnosti. Glavne ugotovitve raziskave kažejo, da ima status svetovne dediščine Ohrida več

pomembnih pozitivnih vplivov na razvoj turizma. Status svetovne dediščine je bil obravnavan kot močno promocijsko orodje, ki daje destinaciji konkurenčno vrednost. Ekonomske koristi so zato zaznali kot povečan obisk, dodatna sredstva in investicije ter zaposlitvene možnosti. Anketiranci so izpostavili vlogo statusa pri varovanju naravnega okolja. UNESCO ima s svojimi predpisi in priporočili možnost opozarjanja na določene nevarnosti. Njihova izvedba pa je še vedno odvisna od lokalnih in državnih oblasti ter zavesti vseh vpletenih. Študija je ovrednotila tudi družbene vplive statusa svetovne dediščine v smislu koristi in omejitev za lokalno skupnost. Ugotovitve so pokazale, da so domačini po eni strani zelo ponosni na status svetovne dediščine Ohrida, po drugi strani pa predpise in zahteve dojemajo kot izziv in omejitve.

Zaključimo lahko, da čeprav ima UNESCO preko instrumenta Liste svetovne dediščine pomembno vlogo in nekatere pozitivne vplive na razvoj turizma v Ohridu in ohranjanje njegove naravne in kulturne dediščine, ni učinkovito sredstvo pri doseganju trajnostnega razvoja turizma. To vprašanje je treba reševati s (kriznim) management planom destinacije. Z izboljšano učinkovitostjo upravljanja, vodenja in implementacije, z okrepljenim sodelovanjem vseh deležnikov in večjo ozaveščenostjo in zavezanostjo trajnostnemu razvoju turizma. Samo na ta način se bo Ohrid to destinacija svetovne dediščine izognil Listi svetovne dediščine v nevarnosti in se bo ohranila naravna in kulturna dediščina Ohrida, destinacija bo ostala privlačna za obiskovalce, turizem pa bo še naprej koristil gospodarstvu, družbi in lokalni skupnosti.

Appendix 2: Coding

Theme 1. Stakeholders' knowledge and perspectives about sustainable tourism	
Codes	Category
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -enjoy the natural beauty -balanced use of resources -preservation of natural resources -no negative impacts on nature -protecting the environment -environmental responsible behaviour 	- Priority of environmental sustainability
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -mutually dependent -mutually connected -complementary 	- Importance of all three aspects

Theme 2. Stakeholders' perspective on tourism in Ohrid	
Codes	Category
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -out of control -short season -peak seasonality -mass tourism -poor waste and wastewater management -no sustainable tourism strategy -mixed picture -exceeds the city's capacity -ad hoc decisions -congestion and crowding 	- Unsustainable tourism of Ohrid

Theme 3. Destination Management of Ohrid	
Codes	Category
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -not ideal -highly ineffective -it's alarming -needs a better strategy -better distribution of tourists -need to improve efficiency 	-Ineffective management
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -local Tourism department -National Ministry of Economy -local and national authorities -everyone involved -lack of implementation of regulations -lack of collaboration between stakeholders - increased awareness is necessary 	-Irresponsible management

Theme 4. Stakeholders' perspective regarding the WH status of Ohrid	
Codes	Category
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -pride and privilege -Honor and satisfaction -proud -prestigious worldwide title -significant title -professional opportunities 	-High symbolic value
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ohrid is a significant heritage -it is of outstanding value and needs to be protected -it deserves the designation of WH site -gives competitive value to the destination -adds value to destination attractiveness 	-The significance of the WH status

Theme 5. WH status impacts on sustainable tourism development	
<i>The economic impact of WH status of Ohrid</i>	
Codes	Category
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -significant positive impact -attracts new tourists -provides funds for conservation -investments and donations -promotional tool -it's like having the brand Coca-Cola 	-Positive economic impact
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -no direct impact on tourism demand -not the primary reason for visitation -tourist are not even aware of the fact 	-Uncertain impacts on tourism demand
<i>WH status impact on environmental protection</i>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -positive impact -significant impact -regulations and recommendations -yes and no -direct and indirect impacts -system and principles - voice for prevention and protection 	-Positive environmental impact
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -not satisfied with UNESCO -UNESCO has failed -threats -List of WH in Danger 	-UNESCO's procrastination
<i>Benefits and challenges for the local community</i>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - honour and pride -privilege -enjoys the economic benefits -improves the quality of life -sustainable regional development -safeguard for the ecosystem 	-Benefits

-inconvenience -many more challenges than benefits -strict rules and paperwork -can't renovate -no direct benefits -limitations -restrictions in building and reconstruction	-Challenges
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Theme 6. Stakeholders' recommendations for a better future for Ohrid	
Codes	Category
-more strategic management -move from mass tourism -reduce the number of tourists -implementation of regulations -collaboration between stakeholders -awareness and education -strong leadership -infrastructure management -legal protection of the entire WH site	-Recommendations for improved management
-improved quality of services -minimise the seasonality -priority to cultural tourism -elite tourism -important and sustainable destination -famous world destination	-Vision for a better future

Appendix 3: Interview transcripts

Private-1: Hotel manager –Unique

- How do you define and understand the concept of sustainability and sustainable tourism?**

Tourism brings economic benefits without a negative impact on nature.

- Which aspect of sustainable tourism development would you describe as most important (socio-cultural, economic, environmental)?**

All aspect is connected and important. For example, in the last few years, tourists have become more conscious and prefer hotels which implement ecological practices, which impact both the economic and the environmental aspects. From a sociocultural aspect, the main issue currently is the lack of qualified workforce, especially in tourism and hospitality where employees are in direct contact with the guests... Therefore, is challenging to maintain the sustainability in tourism industry.

**3. How would you describe the current situation of the tourism industry in Ohrid?
Would you describe tourism in Ohrid as sustainable?**

It's hard to say and define as sustainable since tourism in Ohrid has a very short active season of a few months. It's hard to ensure economic and social sustainability when most of the population depends on tourism and it brings only seasonal work, which means the hospitality sector should pay the workers off the season, or provide only seasonal work which again affects the quality of life of the locals. On the other hand, the ones not involved in tourism immigrate from Ohrid to a more developed city... In terms of ecological sustainability there is poor waste and wastewater management, small number of hotels have implemented energetic efficiency. Therefore, it can be said that sustainable tourism in Ohrid is developing in a very slow pace.

4. In your opinion, how effective is the current management of Ohrid as a World Heritage site?

The participant didn't answer

5. Who is responsible and what are the key issues regarding the management of tourism in Ohrid and the implementation of sustainable tourism development?

I think everyone involved has some responsibility...The state provides some measures as support for tourism, on the local level the authorities are doing as much as they can with the means at their disposal, although it is difficult to meet all the needs in the season because the number of visitors exceeds the capacity of the city.

6. Is there cooperation between different stakeholders (government, private sector, community) in the management process?

Generally speaking, there is a lack of collaboration in practice. Most attempts at collaboration are made with political purposes before the elections, and afterwards, everything is forgotten

7. What does the World Heritage status of Ohrid mean to you personally and professionally?

It's an honour and satisfaction to live in such a city that is a WH, and it's a benefit in any case.

8. What is the significance of the fact that Ohrid is part of UNESCO's world cultural and natural heritage?

Ohrid has strong attributes and values and it deserves the designation of WH site, and UNESCO contributes to the protection and preservation of its natural and cultural beauties.

9. Does the World Heritage status has influence on tourism demand and economic opportunities in Ohrid?

I don't think that it influences the tourism demand. From my experience the status of Ohrid is not the primary reason for the visitation of any tourist, most of them are not even aware of that fact. Once they are here, it leaves a positive impression about the destination. Although it is used as a label on any promotional brochure for Ohrid.

10. Do you think that the WH status impacts the environmental protection of Ohrid?

It has a positive impact, especially in the national park Galicica where there are strict regulations on what and how can be built.

11. What do you see as the main benefits of Ohrid's World Heritage status for the local community?

There are no direct benefits for the local community, moreover, they are faced with a lot of limitations due to the WH status

12. What challenges or limitations do you associate with Ohrid's World Heritage status? Do they impact the implementation of sustainable tourism development?

In my opinion, although UNESCO is very significant for the protection of this natural and cultural heritage, in its current structure and way of operation it's a limitation for the development of tourism in Ohrid and further investment in the tourism industry... A lot of projects are interrupted due to UNESCO regulations, like the construction of the road to SV. Naum, some reconstructions and renovation processes like the renovation of the quay and lakeside promenade... I think that UNESCO doesn't take into consideration the necessary tourism development of the destination. I agree that some limitations and restrictions must exist, but UNESCO should also provide alternatives to how things can be done.

13. What kind of changes would you suggest for more effective management of Ohrid?

Improvement of the road infrastructure, as well as a detailed urbanistic plan and strategy for the region of Ohrid, according to the UNESCO regulations, so that the local community and investors know their possibilities and prevent illegal buildings.

14. How do you envision the future of Ohrid as a tourism destination with its World Heritage status?

I hope the authorities will implement a legal framework that will enable the destination to reach its full potential of development, which will bring more benefits to the local community and retain the young population of the city.

15. Is there anything you would like to add regarding this subject?

No, I think you've covered it all.

Privat-2 - Tourist guide

1. How do you define and understand the concept of sustainability and sustainable tourism?

Sustainable tourism is an approach of developing tourism which in the long run won't have negative impacts on the environment in broader terms of the destination.

2. Which aspect of sustainable tourism development would you describe as most important (socio-cultural, economic, environmental)?

Is not easy to choose one of the aspects, they are mutually dependent... However, I would say that first economic sustainability should be established, which will further lead to socio-cultural and ultimately environmental sustainability. The faster this transition goes the better will be.

3. How would you describe the current situation of the tourism industry in Ohrid? Would you describe tourism in Ohrid as sustainable?

I wouldn't describe it as sustainable tourism, we are still in the stage of mass tourism. There is overbooking of capacity, large groups of visitors and individually organized tourists are coming in the same period.

4. In your opinion, how effective is the current management of Ohrid as a World Heritage site?

In the last few years, there has been improvement in the management of Ohrid. In terms of sustainable tourism development, I think Ohrid is moving in that direction, but is difficult to manage tourism in the city, however, a positive example is the development of rural tourism which is primarily based on sustainability principles.

5. Who is responsible and what are the key issues regarding the management of tourism in Ohrid and the implementation of sustainable tourism development?

The responsible authority is the local tourism department, still in reality the responsibility of sustainable development depends on the decisions made by national and local authorities as well as the consciousness of everyone involved in tourism, the local population and tourist providers.

6. Is there cooperation between different stakeholders (government, private sector, community) in the management process?

The collaboration exists, but there is a lack of implementation. I have personally been involved in many such workshops where all stakeholders take part.... From local authorities, associations of tourist organizations, private sector representatives, university of tourism representatives... Often there are different opinions about certain issues and end up with some conclusions and further recommendations, but without real implementation.

7. What does the World Heritage status of Ohrid mean to you personally and professionally?

For me, I think it's a very significant title. I'm very proud of the status of Ohrid as a WH site. From professional experience, I have noticed that the WH status of Ohrid is not the primary reason for visitation, most of the tourists are not even aware of that fact. Although it is highlighted in all marketing propaganda.

8. What is the significance of the fact that Ohrid is part of UNESCO's world cultural and natural heritage?

The participant didn't answer

9. Does the World Heritage status have an influence on tourism demand and economic opportunities in Ohrid?

I don't think it is directly impacting the economy and economic opportunities. However, it can bring some additional funding for projects of conservation... for example, in the protected area of the old city there are lots of old buildings that I believe if the population is educated on how to prepare projects and applications for their conservation UNESCO will find a way to finance them

10. Do you think that the WH status impacts the environmental protection of Ohrid?

Yes and no. Yes, in terms of their recommendations for different unsustainable practices, still their implementation depends on the destination management on local and national level. Although some of them were accepted and implemented for some period of time, after a while the beaches are again under private concession without controlling their work or

following the recommendations of UNESCO. Also, the same principles should be established in the Albanian part of the lake for effective protection and preservation.

11. What do you see as the main benefits of Ohrid's World Heritage status for the local community?

If you ask the local population, I believe they would say none, especially in the old city protected area where people can't renovate their houses without genuine materials, so their preservation and maintenance are more difficult, which also affects their finances... there is much more frustration than benefits.

12. What challenges or limitations do you associate with Ohrid's World Heritage status? Do they impact the implementation of sustainable tourism development?

This is some kind of limitation, and I think the focus should be put on educating the local population about the significance of the WH status and its maintenance so that they can understand and follow the recommendations.

13. What kind of changes would you suggest for more effective management of Ohrid?

Better communication and collaboration between everyone involved in tourism, raising awareness and education about sustainability, starting from the youngest population which hopefully will bring some changes and improvements.

14. How do you envision the future of Ohrid as a tourism destination with its World Heritage status?

To reduce the number of visitors to more quality visitors, and give priority to cultural tourism over leisure tourism.

15. Is there anything you would like to add regarding this subject?

I think we covered all, thank you.

Private-3: Representative of tour operator TUI

1. How do you define and understand the concept of sustainability and sustainable tourism?

Sustainable tourism should be based on balanced usage of natural resources and environmentally responsible behaviour. To preserve the natural resources for future generations, to make them available for tourists but at the same time properly protected.

2. Which aspect of sustainable tourism development would you describe as most important (socio-cultural, economic, environmental)?

All three aspects are important, they are complementary and should be balanced. However, for sustainable tourism most important is environmental sustainability,

3. How would you describe the current situation of the tourism industry in Ohrid? Would you describe tourism in Ohrid as sustainable?

Ohrid is experiencing constant growth in tourism, especially in 2019 before the pandemic, and afterwards every year there are increased number of tourist arrivals. There are a lot of repetitive tourists, (especially Dutch and Polish tourists) who have been coming for several years, and really enjoy Ohrid. Also, there is an increased number of tour operators. Which on the other hand is worrying since it leads to mass tourism, and mass tourism and sustainability are not compatible. Increased number of tourists means increased endangerment of the environment. With mass tourism is harder to maintain and protect the cultural and natural heritage. Unfortunately, tourism in Ohrid is heading in that direction, especially in the peak season (2 August). There are a lot of issues regarding the infrastructure, congestion, crowding at the beaches...

4. In your opinion, how effective is the current management of Ohrid as a World Heritage site?

From my perspective, the management is not ideal, but according to my 16 years of experience, there are a lot of changes and significant improvements in tourism in OHRID. However, for better management, the collaboration among stakeholders must be enhanced. Although there have been some workshops and forums, in practice their implementation is very low.

5. Who is responsible and what are the key issues regarding the management of tourism in Ohrid and the implementation of sustainable tourism development?

Recently there has been a tourism department, while previously it was under the local economy department and some responsibilities are of the Ministry of Economy.

6. Is there cooperation between different stakeholders (government, private sector, community) in the management process?

There is some collaboration between stakeholders but it should be on a higher level.

7. What does the World Heritage status of Ohrid mean to you personally and professionally?

When talking about WH with the local population it doesn't seem very important, but for the foreign tourists, it is (wow). For me is the most prestigious worldwide title that a site or

region as Ohrid, can achieve. It means it is of outstanding value and needs to be protected for future generations.

8. How do you perceive the importance of Ohrid being a UNESCO World Heritage site?

I feel very proud every time I share this information with tourists, it means that we have a really important natural and cultural heritage of which we should be proud but also take care of and protect.

9. Does the World Heritage status have an influence on tourism demand and economic opportunities in Ohrid?

I haven't noticed a direct impact on tourism demand, it all depends on destination marketing. Macedonia is still an unrevealed destination and the WH status of Ohrid is the best way to present it to the world and attract tourists, meaning there is something worth visiting. This fact has great potential but hasn't been used enough since a lot of tourists don't know that Ohrid is a WH site until they come here.

10. Do you think that the WH status impacts the environmental protection of Ohrid?

Regarding environmental protection, there are direct and indirect impacts. With the fact that Ohrid is on the WH list, there is a system and principles that we need to adhere to, and by doing so we protect the environment and contribute to sustainability 28.08min.

11. What do you see as the main benefits of Ohrid's World Heritage status for the local community?

The participant didn't answer

12. What challenges or limitations do you associate with Ohrid's World Heritage status, and how do they impact the implementation of sustainable tourism development?

Tourism itself is challenging, especially the pollution, and the infrastructure... in Ohrid, there is a lot of uncontrolled illegal construction, privatization of the beaches, and uncontrolled fishing, UNESCO only points out those challenges and warns us, and we are the ones who don't comply enough with their requirements. There will always be some challenges, and how we respond and manage them is up to us. However, Ohrid has been WH for so many years, meaning that we are still doing something right. As a limitation, maybe the fact that they interrupted the very much-needed road to St. Naum. No alternative to that road has been established and it is of great importance to reduce the traffic congestion.

13. What kind of changes would you suggest for more effective management of Ohrid?

The main issues are now, during peak season, which is managed but has its consequences. The mass tourism, crowding, the noise from concerts lead to the dissatisfaction of the visitors who are primarily visiting Ohrid for cultural tourism. I'm not against domestic tourists but it seems that they make the crowding and congestion the bigger issue. And redirecting the domestic tourist to other destinations in the country. Or at least to minimize the seasonality. To properly manage and plan the events, better organization, better infrastructure and parking.

14. How do you envision the future of Ohrid as a tourism destination with its World Heritage status?

I think that Ohrid as a WH site destination should move in the direction of elite tourism and not mass tourism.

15. Is there anything you would like to add regarding this subject?

The participant didn't answer.

Gov-1: Head of the Department for the Protection of Cultural Heritage in North Macedonia

1. How do you define and understand the concept of sustainability and sustainable tourism?

I think sustainable tourism is a concept which tries to establish a balance between the needs of visitors, the environment and local communities in order to minimise the negative impacts of tourism and maximise its contribution to the destination.

2. Which aspect of sustainable tourism development would you describe as most important (socio-cultural, economic, environmental)?

The economic because it is vital to ensure that tourism benefits the local communities and contributes to their prosperity. This aspect enables the creation of jobs, support of local businesses, and revenues that will later be reinvested into the development and infrastructure of the destination. Without this aspect, tourism may not be sustainable in the long term; if local communities don't see tangible benefits, they may resist tourism development and threaten the economic stability of the area.

3. How would you describe the current situation of the tourism industry in Ohrid? Would you describe tourism in Ohrid as sustainable?

Currently, tourism in Ohrid presents a mixed picture when it comes to sustainability. Ohrid, which is often called the "Jerusalem of the Balkans", is known for its historical and ecclesiastical significance, especially for its ancient elements, monasteries and certain Lake Ohrid. As a UNESCO World Heritage Site, it attracts many visitors, which is important for the local economy. However, in addition to the economic benefits of tourism, Ohrid should take steps towards improving environmental sustainability to achieve a fully sustainable tourism model.

4. In your opinion, how effective is the current management of Ohrid as a World Heritage site?

The management of Ohrid as a world heritage site has made progress in certain areas, although there are still significant challenges that need to be addressed to improve efficiency. Balancing tourism growth with conservation needs, improving environmental protection and maintaining cultural integrity are key areas where management efforts must continue to improve.

5. Who is responsible and what are the key issues regarding the management of tourism in Ohrid and the implementation of sustainable tourism development?

The local authorities, the national government, the world heritage management sector, and other local stakeholders are responsible for tourism management in Ohrid. Key problems encountered in implementing sustainable development are overcrowding, environmental pollution, commercialization and erosion of cultural heritage, and a lack of finance and coordination.

6. Is there cooperation between different stakeholders (government, private sector, community) in the management process?

Yes, there is cooperation between the various stakeholders in the process of managing tourism in Ohrid, but the intensity and efficiency of that cooperation should be enhanced.

7. What does the World Heritage status of Ohrid mean to you personally and professionally?

The status of Ohrid as a natural and cultural world heritage is of great importance. Personally, it helps me deepen my awareness of the importance of heritage protection and the obligation to preserve it for future generations. These sites are living witnesses of our history and culture, and their protection is crucial for the global heritage culture.

Professionally, the status of Ohrid as a world heritage creates opportunities for cooperation with international organizations, experts and other strategic partners. This includes the exchange of knowledge, resources and experiences in order to protect and sustainably develop these important sites.

8. What is the significance of the fact that Ohrid is part of UNESCO's world cultural and natural heritage?

The status of Ohrid as a UNESCO world cultural and natural heritage is of great importance for the preservation of its uniqueness and significance. That status brings global recognition, and financial and technical support, supports sustainable tourism and helps in preserving the cultural and natural heritage value of Ohrid.

9. Does the World Heritage status has an influence on tourism demand and economic opportunities in Ohrid?

The status of world heritage has a significant positive impact on tourist demand and economic opportunities in Ohrid. It increases the visibility of the destination, attracts new tourists, and creates new economic opportunities through revenue growth, job creation and investment attraction.

10. Do you think that the WH status impacts the environmental protection of Ohrid?

Yes, the status of world heritage has a significant impact on the environmental protection of Ohrid.

11. What do you see as the main benefits of Ohrid's World Heritage status for the local community?

Ohrid's status as a world heritage site brings numerous benefits to the local community. These benefits help create stronger and more sustainable regional development, which improves the quality of life for residents and encourages the protection of important natural and cultural resources.

12. What challenges or limitations do you associate with Ohrid's World Heritage status? Do they impact the implementation of sustainable tourism development?

Ohrid's status as a world heritage site brings many advantages, but at the same time challenges and limitations that can affect sustainable tourism development. Managing these challenges requires careful planning, coordination and application of strategies that balance the interests of heritage protection and tourism development.

13. What kind of changes would you suggest for more effective management of Ohrid?

For more effective management of Ohrid and improvement of sustainable tourism development, integrated strategies are needed that include infrastructure management, protection of natural and cultural resources, improvement of tourism management, support

of the local community, educational initiatives and coordination between different stakeholders.

14. How do you envision the future of Ohrid as a tourism destination with its World Heritage status?

The future of Ohrid as a tourist destination with world heritage status can be successful if a balance is achieved between tourism development and the protection of natural and cultural resources. With strategic plans, infrastructure investments, local community support, innovation, and cooperation, Ohrid can continue to be an important and sustainable tourist destination that preserves and promotes its unique values.

15. Is there anything you would like to add regarding this subject?

No.

GOV-2: Head of the Department of Tourism and Local Economic Development.

1. How do you define and understand the concept of sustainability and sustainable tourism?

Tourism developed in such a manner that can't be influenced by external impacts like economic, and political... to maximize the benefits of tourism and the local resources. To do so, tourism needs to be carefully and strategically planned to maximize tourist satisfaction, while at the same time doesn't affect the local community and the natural environment.

2. Which aspect of sustainable tourism development would you describe as most important (socio-cultural, economic, environmental)?

All three aspects are important and mutually connected, if we don't protect the natural environment, there will not be an opportunity for tourism development and economic and sociocultural benefits.

3. How would you describe the current situation of the tourism industry in Ohrid? Would you describe tourism in Ohrid as sustainable?

Currently, I couldn't describe it as sustainable, although it has sustained a long period of time due to its natural and cultural attributes. There is no sustainable tourism development strategy on a local or national level, it's necessary to work on that issue

4. In your opinion, how effective is the current management of Ohrid as a World Heritage site?

There are many things that need to be improved in the management of Ohrid in order to maintain the WH status, and moreover to enhance its development. In my opinion the current situation it's alarming.

5. Who is responsible and what are the key issues regarding the management of tourism in Ohrid and the implementation of sustainable tourism development?

The main responsibility is of the authorities on a national level. The government makes the legislation, and then different institutions on national and local levels must implement those regulations. Currently, I think the regulations and legislation are in place, but there is a lack of their implementation. However, in great part, there is responsibility in the moral and ethical behaviour of each individual of the local population, and increased awareness about the environmental consequences is essential

6. Is there cooperation between different stakeholders (government, private sector, community) in the tourism management process?

Institutional cooperation exists and has been established, regarding their efficiency and effectiveness, I could not comment.

7. What does the World Heritage status of Ohrid mean to you personally and professionally?

Pride and privilege. I'm very proud to live in a place that has such recognition as mixed natural and cultural heritage because it's really rare and significant. However, I would say that generally there is a low level of awareness and interest in this subject in the local population and some improvements and promotions should be implemented in order to protect this heritage.

8. What is the significance of the fact that Ohrid is part of UNESCO's world cultural and natural heritage?

It's an attribute which gives competitive value to the destination

9. Does the World Heritage status has influence on tourism demand and economic opportunities in Ohrid?

It has influence, since as a brand and promotional tool that gives Ohrid an advantage and makes it more attractive to tourists. It has potential that I think is not completely and adequately used. It should be highlighted on all promotional materials that Ohrid is a rarity since there are only around 30 mixed properties in the world and is worth visiting.

10. Do you think that the WH status impacts the environmental protection of Ohrid?

It absolutely has an impact since most of the regulations are based on UNESCO requirements, and they are based on the best practices... We need to adapt and accept those norms for further protection of the natural and cultural environment.

11. What do you see as the main benefits of Ohrid's World Heritage status for the local community?

Generally speaking, except for the privilege of living in a WH site, they face many more challenges than benefits. Especially in the core of the old city, they are restricted in terms of building and reconstruction there are regulations from UNESCO that need to be respected to preserve the authenticity of the city.

12. What challenges or limitations do you associate with Ohrid's World Heritage status? Do they impact the implementation of sustainable tourism development?

I don't think that the UNESCO regulations and requirements are limitations, although their implementation is challenging mostly because they are often violated especially by the construction industry... I think that the overall condition and appearance of the city itself would be much better if all laws were respected both by the institutions and by the citizens.

13. What kind of changes would you suggest for more effective management of Ohrid?

More strategic management of the destination and urbanization of the city with implementation of the regulations.

14. How do you envision the future of Ohrid as a tourism destination with its World Heritage status?

I hope and I would like Ohrid to move from the concept of mass tourism to more sustainable forms of tourism. With improved quality of services in all aspects that influence the overall tourist experience since the tourism offer dictates the type of visitor the destination will attract, to put much more focus on cultural tourism and consequently to reduce the number of tourists and move towards more qualitative visitors.

15. Is there anything you would like to add regarding this subject?

Let's appreciate, preserve and improve this heritage that we have without further devastation of nature. Ohrid has existed for thousands of years and should continue to exist for future generations as a place endowed by God with strong natural and cultural characteristics that

will be invaluable in the future, even the clean water that we take for granted. Let us be more aware of what we own and try to preserve it.

NGO-1: President of the Tourist Association of Ohrid

1. How do you define and understand the concept of sustainability and sustainable tourism?

Sustainable tourism is about protecting the environment since it isn't possible to develop tourism without a clean and healthy environment. To give advantage to development on alternative forms of tourism like rural, adventure, eco ... that won't have a negative impact on the nature.

2. Which aspect of sustainable tourism development would you describe as most important (socio-cultural, economic, environmental)?

All three aspects are important and complementary to each other, it depends on the overall situation. For example, in rural areas, the priority may be economic development, while in urban cities, the ecological aspect is more important to benefit everyone, the residents and the stakeholders.

3. How would you describe the current situation of the tourism industry in Ohrid? Would you describe tourism in Ohrid as sustainable?

There is no sustainable tourism in Ohrid in any sense. All decisions are made ad hoc without a predetermined and clear strategy.

4. In your opinion, how effective is the current management of Ohrid as a World Heritage site?

I would say that Ohrid needs a better strategy to improve the distribution of tourists and prolong the season to avoid overcrowding. Better organization of the cultural events...The problem is that although it is considered to be the most important destination in the state, the active tourist season in Ohrid is very short, approximately 45 days. It begins with the Ohrid Summer Festival on 15 July and finishes at the end of August. There are individual visitors after that, but their number is a lot smaller.

5. Who is responsible and what are the key issues regarding the management of tourism in Ohrid and the implementation of sustainable tourism development?

The key ones responsible are the national government/institutions which don't have a clear strategy and vision for sustainable tourism development, or in what direction they want to develop tourism in Ohrid, and then the local authorities, which are mainly focused on their

political agenda with no consideration of sustainable tourism development. Ohrid, as a natural and cultural heritage and an important tourist destination, should be unpoliticized and governed towards economic development. However, the cost of their politics is paid by the local communities.

6. Is there cooperation between different stakeholders (government, private sector, community) in the tourism management process?

No, there is no collaboration between the stakeholders, especially between the government and NGOs like ours, since we often critique the government's decisions. We are actively trying to protect the lake, while the government which has the legal power and responsibility doesn't do that.

7. What does the World Heritage status of Ohrid mean to you personally and professionally?

It is a privilege to have the WH status.

8. What is the significance of the fact that Ohrid is part of UNESCO's world cultural and natural heritage?

This means that Ohrid is a significant heritage for the whole world and civilization, not just Macedonian or Balkan heritage. It is a prehistoric lake with rich biodiversity and a city with a significant cultural history (25.000 m2 of fresco paintings). It surely deserves to be on the WH list, but it is up to us to protect and preserve it.

9. Does the World Heritage status has influence on tourism demand and economic opportunities in Ohrid?

The status significantly benefits tourism; it's like having the brand Coca-Cola. It contributes to the recognition and attractiveness of the destination by presenting its natural and cultural heritage and increasing its visitation rate. On the one hand, it is beneficial for the economic development of Ohrid and on the national level as well. On the other hand, it is like some limitation or handicap since, during the season, it results in overcrowding. For example, one of the churches in Ohrid Bogorodica Perivlepta is facing the problem of the destruction of its frescoes by salts and nitrates, and the overcrowding of people in the summer increases that danger. There must be a better strategy to manage the destination.

10. Do you think that the WH status impacts the environmental protection of Ohrid?

Yes, the status of WH surely has a positive impact on environmental protection. But we as a civil association are not satisfied with the treatment of UNESCO, and we think that it would be a lot better if Ohrid had been put on the list of danger almost 10 years ago, since the initial

warnings of UNESCO began. In that way, the necessary measures would be implemented on time. Now the problem is dragging on without specific measures taken to correct the situation and preserve the values of Ohrid.

11. What do you see as the main benefits of Ohrid's World Heritage status for the local community?

The local community enjoys the economic benefits of tourism, although there is a large emigration of the young population of Ohrid because they do not have permanent work throughout the year and opportunities for prosperity and advancement in other sectors except tourism and hospitality.

12. What challenges or limitations do you associate with Ohrid's World Heritage status? Do they impact the implementation of sustainable tourism development?

There are no direct challenges from the status. However, there are challenges as a result of the tourism in Ohrid. The main warning from UNESCO is regarding uncontrolled and often illegal urbanization, which on the other hand, is the main source of income for the local authority. This can be prevented by putting Ohrid on the danger list of UNESCO.

13. What kind of changes would you suggest for more effective management of Ohrid?

Development of sustainable winter tourism in the Galicica National Park and construction of an ecological ski centre from authentic natural materials that fit into the natural environment. In this way, additional jobs will be created, and the hotels will not be empty during the winter period but will be used; the private landlords will also benefit. Only in this way, Ohrid will have a whole year of tourism and not a season of only 45 days, as already mentioned.

14. How do you envision the future of Ohrid as a tourism destination with its World Heritage status?

If Ohrid is not put on the List of World Heritage in Danger, it will be devastated and become a dead city. Due to the current urban chaos, Ohrid will be a block of buildings, used for a month, and a city without a young population. Young people are increasingly disappointed by this situation and leave the city, the birth rate is decreasing and in the next 20 years, there will be no young population.

15. Is there anything you would like to add regarding this subject?

No, thank you.

NGO-2: Executive director of the association Europe House Struga

1. How do you define and understand the concept of sustainability and sustainable tourism?

In my opinion, Sustainable tourism means enjoying all the natural beauties and services that tourism offers, without doing any harm to the environment.

2. Which aspect of sustainable tourism development would you describe as most important (socio-cultural, economic, environmental)?

All three are important, still in my opinion the environmental aspect is the most important, especially for tourism if the natural environment isn't preserved it will affect the attractiveness of the destination. For example, if the water in Ohrid Lake isn't clear and safe it will no longer attract tourists

3. How would you describe the current situation of the tourism industry in Ohrid? Would you describe tourism in Ohrid as sustainable?

I don't think that tourism in Ohrid is sustainable, I think the number of tourists exceeds the city's capacity in terms of providing adequate communal and sanitary service for example in managing the waste and responding to the needs of the tourists and the locals. There are too many events in a short period of time and too many visitors at the same place.

4. In your opinion, how effective is the current management of Ohrid as a World Heritage site?

It's necessary to develop a better strategy to reduce seasonality and enhance the services, to engage additional workers during the season if needed... Ohrid is not just about the beaches, it has reach offer that can be an attractive tourist destination also in spring or fall... with better distribution of tourists and reduced seasonality the overall experience will be better and the negative impacts of tourism will be minimized.

5. Who is responsible and what are the key issues regarding the management of tourism in Ohrid and the implementation of sustainable tourism development?

Destination management is the responsibility of local and national authorities. They need to collaborate and work towards the same goal. Also, increased awareness is necessary at local and national levels to develop strategies for long-term sustainability, as well as on the demand side- the tourists. I think the main challenge in Ohrid as a World Heritage site is that it is managed by three municipalities and two states. Not all of them have the same level of awareness. They must be aligned in the protection of the lake and its biodiversity.

6. Is there cooperation between different stakeholders (government, private sector, community) in the tourism management process?

The central government should support the local, which according to the current major of Ohrid wasn't the case, due to political differences. Ohrid has huge potential, its natural and cultural heritage are significant for the state and needs to be properly managed.

I expect more collaboration in the future. The private sector in Ohrid is often included and supports different events, eco-actions, and campaigns for raising awareness ... There are insufficient specialized NGOs in Ohrid which will react as preventive for some unsustainable practices. The ones that are present, work only on smaller projects and are not financially independent enough from the government. There is a lack of initiative in the local community to participate in the decision-making process. During the season they are all very busy...

7. What does the World Heritage status of Ohrid mean to you personally and professionally?

Personally, the opportunity to enjoy such WH is a privilege. Professionally, the status as a brand brings great potential for opportunities in the tourism sector. As an NGO there are a lot of issues that can be addressed and work on different projects for improvement.

8. What is the significance of the fact that Ohrid is part of UNESCO's world cultural and natural heritage?

The WH designation by UNESCO adds value to destination attractiveness and attracts tourists, but it also brings responsibility to preserve that heritage. The Ohrid Lake is an attraction by itself since it's the oldest lake in Europe with a rich diversity of flora and fauna... together with the cultural heritage are the main reasons for foreign tourists visiting Ohrid. The domestic tourists are not so aware and appreciative of the WH status, and see Ohrid only as a leisure or sun and sand tourist destination.

9. Does the World Heritage status has influence on tourism demand and economic opportunities in Ohrid?

Yes, I think it has a positive impact. The WH status besides recommendations and guidelines for protection also provides some funds that need to be carefully planned and used. Also, many investments, funds, and donations from various European organizations are dedicated to preserving Ohrid's natural and cultural heritage, which is valuable to everyone.

10. Do you think that the WH status impacts the environmental protection of Ohrid?

Yes, I think that the designation by UNESCO, with its regulations and recommendations, has a positive impact on the environmental protection of Ohrid.

11. What do you see as the main benefits of Ohrid's World Heritage status for the local community?

Besides the negative experiences from crowding, congestion and disturbance during the peak season, I think the economic benefits from tourism are very important for the locals. Most of them are dependent on or in some way involved in the tourism and hospitality sector.

12. What challenges or limitations do you associate with Ohrid's World Heritage status? Do they impact the implementation of sustainable tourism development?

In my opinion, the main limitation forms the status is the strict rules and paperwork for renovating, and conservation of properties in the protected area. However, controlled urbanization should be established in any place, especially at WH sites.

13. What kind of changes would you suggest for more effective management of Ohrid?

Development of a strategy which will be aligned within all municipalities and implemented in practice, not just on paper. Strong leadership by the local authorities to enhance the quality of tourism products/offers in Ohrid. Also, is important to raise awareness of domestic tourists about the importance and value of Ohrid as a destination as a WH site and to understand why the prices are high... this on the other hand, is a negative consequence for the local population... Although domestic tourists are not the target of Ohrid, they are still an important part of it.

14. How do you envision the future of Ohrid as a tourism destination with its World Heritage status?

Ohrid has great potential, and I believe that with proper management, it will become a famous world destination in the future. I would suggest implementing more creative and innovative methods in construction, which would be more aesthetic but still environmentally friendly.

15. Is there anything you would like to add regarding this subject?

No.

NGO-3: Representative of Citizens' Initiative Ohrid SOS

1. How do you define and understand the concept of sustainability and sustainable tourism?

In natural terms, it would mean tourism that does not seriously diminish (or perhaps even supports) ecosystem function and species abundance so that flora, fauna, fungi and others can maintain their ways of life within healthy, balanced populations, continuing the many

services they provide both to themselves and humankind. In practice, the “leave no trace” concept offers a pathway for how to achieve this

The more people you attract, the harder it is going to be to keep it sustainable, but people volume isn't the only factor. It's also about what they do, where they go and what systems are in place to mitigate any negatives.

2. Which aspect of sustainable tourism development would you describe as most important (socio-cultural, economic, environmental)?

Ecology is the most important because it is from the ecological aspects that the economic and the socio-cultural emerge. In an Ohrid context, you cannot disconnect tourism demand from the condition and clarity of Lake Ohrid. The UNESCO status of the Ohrid Region as a natural heritage derives from its exquisite biological properties but translates into economic value through tourism.

3. How would you describe the current situation of the tourism industry in Ohrid? Would you describe tourism in Ohrid as sustainable?

The tourism industry is visibly out of control, while tourism visitations are steadily increasing. Self-evidently, it will not be possible to have a sustainable approach until a well-maintained wastewater system is extended to all settlements in the area, but, recent promises for a treatment plant in the village of Trpejca notwithstanding, this is nowhere close to being achieved. Even in the areas where there is sewerage coverage, concerns remain about leaks and overcapacity during the peak summer months.

Then there are issues like the Springs of Saint Naum, which are supposed to be home to several animal species that are unique in the whole world. Not only have restaurant facilities been allowed to expand and subsume an island in the centre of the springs, destroying it as a natural habitat and refuge for other species, but parties are being rafted with poles around the springs, sometimes with live music, which is an additional disturbance of the nature. In theory, St Naum Springs is in a Zone of Strict Protection of National Park Galichica, the highest level possible under the law. Carrying capacity has not been established and there is no control of visitor volume. And this is just one example where visitation is obviously and measurably unsustainable.

Tourism has also driven a construction expansion, with many apartments, villas, café-bars, and hotels being built far exceeding the needs of the local population, which is suffering out-migration. This is happening both inside National Park Galichica and immediately adjacent to hotspots of biodiversity.

Then you have all the other unsustainable activities and behaviours that are part of or emergent from the tourism industry. Transport is a particular issue. Poorly controlled boating on the lake is both a danger to swimmers and a serious disturbance to fish, whose movement

patterns are being altered and breeding grounds destroyed. New off-road activities in the national park are erosion, disturbance, collision, fire and pollution risk. Some are even driven in the shallow waters of the lake. Air travel, which Macedonia is seeking to increase both with the provision of subsidies and possible plans to expand the local airport, is a driver of pollution (air and water), noise and climate change as well.

On top of that, the failure to properly educate locals and tourists that they are visiting the most bio-diverse lake on the planet when measured by endemic species to surface area and some of the most species-rich mountain habitats in all of Europe results in irresponsible behaviour. For example, there have been incidents of visitors releasing sky lanterns from the lakeshore in National Park Galichica, which is extremely dangerous because it can cause wildfires and, even if it doesn't, inevitably leads to needless trash. Meanwhile, in the summer, large volumes of people party every night in the Studenchishte Marsh wetland, which is obviously unwelcomed by the birds, mammals, amphibians and fish who would otherwise live there.

Realistically speaking, there will always be some negative impact from visitors and it is neither possible nor desirable to wall Ohrid off from the rest of the world. However, the current approach to tourism is maximizing threats, not mitigating them.”

4. In your opinion, how effective is the current management of Ohrid as a World Heritage site?

To the extent it exists, the management is highly defective. Laws are routinely flouted: Official figures from the State Statistical Office reveal that around 600 illegal constructions have been erected in the Macedonian side of the Ohrid Region since 2017 alone when UNESCO first conducted a Reactive Monitoring Mission to assess the condition of the World Heritage Site and identified such illegality as an issue. Local and national inspectorates do little to remediate law-breaking when it is reported to them, which has created a culture of impunity. Our association regularly reports instances of illegal construction or shoreline modification (like land reclamation) to authorities, but interventions are rarely reversed even when wrong-doing is categorical and recognized. Poaching of endemic fish is another matter that has not been resolved.

In addition, the Commission for the Management of the Natural and Cultural Heritage of the Ohrid Region, which was established to review construction and other plans within the World Heritage Site and block them if they are inappropriate, has not proven fully effective.

5. Who is responsible and what are the key issues regarding the management of tourism in Ohrid and the implementation of sustainable tourism development?

A major issue is that responsibilities are divided across institutions, which means the implementation of sustainable tourism falls between the cracks, although it would be more

honest to say that several of these institutions have little to no interest in sustainability anyway and are more concerned with short-term profits. This is particularly true of local municipalities, which probably have the greatest responsibilities.

On top of all these institutions, there are numerous strategies and plans, all of which are nominally intended to improve the management of the Ohrid Region from a sustainable tourism perspective. Some of these, including the strategy for tourism development, are yet to reach beyond the draft stage or, like the Lake Ohrid Watershed Management Plan, have not been adopted. Others are either behind the schedule they have outlined in their action plans or contain major deficiencies. Naturally, with so many plans and strategies, lines of responsibility are often quite vague, and there is no obvious hierarchy between the various documents.

6. Is there cooperation between different stakeholders (government, private sector, community) in the tourism management process?

There are attempts to build this kind of relationship. In terms of the private sector, most relationships are not aimed at management, but rather at allowing exploitative commercial practices. Examples include the contracts between National Park Galichica and off-road entities to allow access to the protected area for ATVs and 4x4s or concessions for coastal café-bars that are revenue generators for local municipalities.

As a positive example, the Local diving organization Amfora have played an important role together with the Hydrobiological Institute of Ohrid, international groups and even Hyundai Motors Europe to remove ghost nets from the lake bed and brainstorm strategies to prevent them together with figures from the local government. Fishers have also been involved in work to remediate discarded fishing gear. The problem is that these kinds of very positive activities tend to happen sporadically on a project basis, not a permanent, systematic one.

7. What does the World Heritage status of Ohrid mean to you personally and professionally?

The status encapsulates everything special and unique about the Ohrid Region, from the diatoms and animals in its evolutionary lake environment to the distinctive Ottoman architecture in Ohrid City's Old Town streets.

8. What is the significance of the fact that Ohrid is part of UNESCO's world cultural and natural heritage?

Symbolically, it signifies that the Ohrid Region qualifies for the gold standard of global heritage protection. In other words, the international community has identified the area as holding natural and cultural values of such great importance that they matter to every single person on the planet. In practical terms, the significance is much lower, because UNESCO has proved to be an inadequate and weak force for protection, whose central decision-making

committee does not appear to be placing conservation at the forefront of their considerations. To give one example of this, almost the entirety of Lake Ohrid's remaining wetlands have been destroyed over the past several decades, but it is only in the last few years that UNESCO became aware of the problem. Even since then, it has done barely anything to halt or reverse the destruction.

9. Does the World Heritage status has influence on tourism demand and economic opportunities in Ohrid?

For sure, some people do visit locations based on their World Heritage status and values. Lake Ohrid's exceptional clarity and old town architecture are very likely to motivate tourism receipts. High-value activities like underwater tourism are directly dependent on the nature and culture that is revealed to people during their adventures. However, exactly how much revenue is derived from World Heritage specifically is difficult to calculate.

One thing that can be said with some certainty is that the Ohrid Region does not promote its natural and cultural wealth, preferring to attract mass and cheap beach-and-party tourism. Most visitors are unaware of the sheer number of world-unique species that exist at Lake Ohrid, their significance to science or the volume of birdlife that visits the lake.

10. Do you think that the WH status impacts the environmental protection of Ohrid?

It does galvanize voices for protection, provides some international oversight and attracts more attention from the media when threats emerge. UNESCO has also been an important voice in preventing damaging proposed developments like an express road and ski resort in National Park Galichica. Recommendations from Reactive Monitoring Missions, it has further offered advice to guide management and governance in a positive direction. UNESCO has failed to follow up on its recommendations from Reactive Monitoring Missions, several of which have been flagrantly ignored; produced a State of Conservation report in 2024, which, to our mind, misrepresents the situation on the ground in important ways; and accepted deficient protected area designs. Its communication with civil society appears to be regressing, and it has not followed up its threats, over several years to put Ohrid on the List of WH in Danger.

11. What do you see as the main benefits of Ohrid's World Heritage status for the local community?

If the status was functioning properly, it could be a safeguard for the ecosystem services that Lake Ohrid and its surrounding habitats provide. What we see, however, is that the status is not being used to highlight and maintain these massive and unique benefits, which underplays and limits their social and economic significance. It is instead being reduced to a simplistic tool of tourism promotion whose true meaning is rarely explained. Thus,

although there is local pride in the UNESCO status and people do not want to lose it, most do not understand what it signifies, not to mention the benefits they do and could receive from it. Some even regard the World Heritage badge as an inconvenience that holds back megaprojects.

12. What challenges or limitations do you associate with Ohrid's World Heritage status? Do they impact the implementation of sustainable tourism development?

Perhaps the challenge is linking the World Heritage status to people's everyday lives and helping them realize the benefits they receive from it both monetary and nonmonetary. People sometimes see the UNESCO status as a kind of burden. Why can't I add another floor to my house or build a swimming pool like everybody else?

What these questions don't realize is that the reason such activities and developments are inappropriate for the Ohrid Region is that it already has numerous treasures that are far more valuable and irreplaceable than all of them. Nobody, including Ohrid SOS, has explained this well to the general population, and it is not so easy to do so for a mass audience.

13. What kind of changes would you suggest for more effective management of Ohrid?

The first step would be to amend the legal framework to provide for effective protected area zoning; close loopholes that allow construction and other exploitative developments in critical areas; insulate protected area managers from political pressure; and to completely reform the process for staffing, conducting and reviewing environmental impact assessments. In parallel, inspectorates would also need to be partially restaffed, wholly retrained and empowered to ensure that laws are enforced. This would diminish the culture of impunity that has developed in the Ohrid Region.

Then to establish formal, legal protection for the entire World Heritage Site and zone it accordingly. As part of this process, nested protected areas like Studenchishte Marsh, National Park Galichica and Lake Ohrid itself would be rezoned in line with the reformed laws and brought up to IUCN standards. Finally, a central management team headed by appropriately qualified experts would be put in place and provided funds from the central government in order to implement and oversee the protection model. Additional revenue streams that do not directly depend on the over-exploitation of heritage would also be explored.

14. How do you envision the future of Ohrid as a tourism destination with its World Heritage status?

The conditions for adequate, long-term protection of the Ohrid Region do not exist either locally or internationally, and, because most people are more interested in the money, they can earn in the short term than sustainable visitation, local businesses and authorities will

continue to compete with other European destinations to attract higher and higher tourist volumes. Therefore, while it is probable that Ohrid will continue to be a World Heritage Site, the values that underpin the designation will gradually dwindle and the status will become increasingly fraudulent, which has already occurred with Ohrid Old Town, where fewer and fewer of the houses maintain their authenticity, with experts suggesting that its integrity has already been lost. This will reduce the desirability of Ohrid as a tourism destination and limit its potential as a tourism centre.

15. Is there anything you would like to add regarding this subject?

When local people and authorities do not understand the value of their heritage, they will not sustainably manage it. People do not even know what they are supposed to protect and therefore do not understand why the mass tourism models pursued in other parts of the world do not apply to their World Heritage context. Considering that the Ohrid Region has been on the List of World Heritage since 1979, this failure is quite shocking.