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**FACULTY OF TOURISM AND BUSINESS LOGISTICS**

ТРЕТА МЕЃУНАРОДНА НАУЧНА  
КОНФЕРЕНЦИЈА

THIRD INTERNATIONAL  
SCIENTIFIC CONFERENCE

**ПРЕДИЗВИЦИТЕ ВО ТУРИЗМОТ И БИЗНИС**  
**ЛОГИСТИКАТА ВО 21 ВЕК**

**CHALLENGES OF TOURISM AND BUSINESS LOGISTICS**  
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## SUSTAINABLE TOURISM AND UNESCO STATUS BENEFITS: PERCEPTIONS OF RESIDENTS OF OHRID

*Biljana Petrevska<sup>1</sup>; Cvetko Andreeski<sup>2</sup>; Tanja Mihalič<sup>3</sup>*

### Abstract

*The study analyses and discusses differences of residents' perceptions of Ohrid (North Macedonia) when investigating personal attributes like age, category of employment and tourism dependence, in two directions: (1) Socio-cultural, natural and economic sustainability dimensions of tourism; and (2) Benefits that world heritage status brings, as prestige, environmental protection, and economic benefits. The research is based on face-to-face surveys conducted among 630 locals during January 2020. Cross tabulations were calculated at a level 0.1%. It was found a very slight difference in age and category concerning the socio-cultural aspect of sustainability. Age strongly matters when creating residents' perception on the natural aspect of sustainability, while tourism dependence matters when perceiving economic aspect of tourism sustainability. Along, the study found no difference in residents' perception on the positive effects of UNESCO designation. The findings have practical significance indicating many suggestions valuable when creating new strategic approaches for boosting local tourism development.*

**Key Words:** Sustainable tourism, perception, UNESCO, Ohrid.

**JEL classification:** L83, Z32, Z38

### Introduction

World heritage (WH) sites are famous tourist attractions provoking ever-growing interest among tourists. Such destinations are vastly visited on a daily basis, thus risking to put in danger the socio-cultural and natural resources, including the protected cultural or natural heritage.

Many studies elaborate the residents' perception on tourism impacts (Kuščer & Mihalič, 2019; Nunkoo et al., 2013; Seraphin et al., 2018). This paper adds to the literature by exploring differences in residents' perception when investigating selected personal attributes, but from a two-sided manner: the mainstream tourism sustainability pillars, and the WH status benefits. Specifically, the case of Ohrid (North Macedonia) is elaborated for three reasons, because: it is a WH site for forty years (UNESCO, 1979 and 1980) that faces a profound urban transformation due to tourism development (Petrevska & Collins-Kreiner, 2019), upon which serious concerns are raised to be put on the List of WH in danger (UNESCO, 2019).

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The paper is structured as follows. After the introduction, a snapshot on the literature review on sustainable tourism in WH destinations and WH benefits, is provided as a background material. The next section describes the methodology and data. The paper concludes with the main findings, research limitations and future work to be addressed.

### **Background Material**

Tourism sustainability has been long debated and vastly explored opening discussion from various aspects and elaborating a variety of interpretations. In this line, sustainability measurement and indicators have been debated (Cernat & Gourdon, 2012; Huang, 2011; Mahdavi et al., 2013), understanding the principles of sustainability (Harrill, 2004; Popescu et al., 2017; Sharpley, 2014), controlling sustainability (Butler, 1999; Middleton & Hawkins, 1998), inter- and intra-generational equity as an essential prerequisite of sustainable tourism (Bramwell, 1998; Wahab & Pigram, 1998), etc.

Furthermore, many arguments are raised about understanding of different residents' attitudes to tourism from the aspect of various theories, like: Social exchange theory (Ap, 1992), Tourist area life cycle (Butler, 1980), and Irridex model (Doxey, 1975) Stakeholders theory (Dwyer et al., 2016; Marinovski et al., 2019; Petrevska et al., 2020; Šegota et al., 2017) etc. Soon, it was realized the need for adding tourism responsibility as complement to the sustainability (Goodwin, 2011; Mihalič, 2016).

Furthermore, many other studies explore resident's attitudes on tourism impacts when living in a WH tourism destination (Nunkoo & Ramkissoon, 2010; Rasoolimanesh & Jaafar, 2017; Rasoolimanesh et al., 2017a, 2017b; Su & Wall, 2015).

There is also a large body of literature that argues different empirical evidence on whether WH status provides an additional dimension to a tourism destination. While many scholars elaborate that if natural and cultural attractions are officially authenticated and inscribed in the UNESCO's WH list tourism demand increases (Alzua et al. 1998; Carr 1994), others argue that it is not possible to find a clear positive relationship (Cuccia & Cellini, 2007; Cellini & Cuccia, 2009; Cellini, 2011).

Among the most referenced benefits that WH inscription brings to tourism destination are increased honor and prestige allowing added-value promotion of the destination, environmental protection, and economic benefits (Galland, et al., 2016). So, gaining a symbolic value (Kowalski, 2011; Regnault, 2011), increased promotion and tourism expansion (Poria et al., 2011; Ryan & Gu, 2009), protecting the environment (Hall, 2006; Kim et al., 2007), and the increased financial influx (Hall, 2006; Kim et al., 2018), are the top benefits that UNESCO name and logo bring to a WH destination.

### **Methodology and Data**

The research took qualitative and quantitative methods. The qualitative approach included review of literature. The quantitative approach covered data obtained from a face-to-face survey conducted in January 2020 among 630 residents of Ohrid living in various locations. They were previously well informed about the survey's aims in order to avoid any attempt to manipulate the survey process and possibly bias the results. A schedule was established whereby data were collected during different days of the week and at different times of the day to maximize the chances of obtaining a representative sample. Thus, a non-forced approach was applied (Ap & Crompton, 1998; Martín Martín et al., 2018).

Table 1: *Sample and representativeness tests of selected demographic characteristics*

Demographic characteristics	Sample (%)	Population (%)	Tests
Gender			
Male	55.2	48.36	$\chi^2 = 1.87344$ , df = 1, p-value = 0.17109
Female	44.8	51.64	
Age			
15-24	20.6	13.22	$\chi^2 = 10.40174$ , df = 5, p-value = 0.06464
25-33	18.6	16.84	
35-44	24.1	18.05	
45-54	17.5	15.86	
55-64	11.4	16.74	
65+	7.8	19.30	

Note: Significant at  $p > 0.01$ , Source: *Authors*.

Table 1 presents full representativeness of the sample with Ohrid's population by gender and age ( $\chi^2 = 10.40174$ , df = 5,  $p > 0.01$ ). Only 7.3% of the respondents have finished elementary school, 44.1% have secondary education, and 48.6% have higher level of education. Slightly more than half (55.4%) are full-time employed, 8.9% are part-time employed, 10.3% are students, 13.8% are unemployed, and 11.6% are retired. The vast majority (83.3%) has monthly personal income of up to 500 euros. With regards to the place of living, 6.7% live in the old city, 20.8% up to 1km from the center, 41.7% more than 1 km from the center, and 30.8% in the suburb or a nearby village. More than half of the respondents (56.2%) are not dependent on tourism, 32.2% of them, either personally or some family members, receive direct tourism benefit, while 11.6% receive indirect/induced effects.

The survey instrument was a self-administered fixed-choice questionnaire and the respondents used a five point Likert scale (1=strongly disagree to 5=strongly agree) to assess the items. The main three sustainability pillar impacts are addressed (Kuščer & Mihalič, 2019) along with the main benefits that WH status brings to a tourism destination (Galland, et al., 2016). As such, the questionnaire was structured in five sections, covering socio-cultural tourism impacts (six items), natural tourism impacts (four items), economic tourism impacts (nine items), WH status benefits (three items), and general data of respondents.

The collected data were transferred to a common scorecard database in SPSS 24.0 in order to perform statistical evaluation. Cross tabulations were performed, and the Pearson chi-square test was calculated in order to identify differences among locals when perceiving tourism development from sustainability perspective, and WH status of the destination. For identifying possible relationship between the variables, cross tabulations were calculated. Although already results were obtained at 0.1%, 5% and 10% level of significance on three personal attributes: age, category and tourism dependence, herein only for the level of 0.1% are presented.

### Findings and Discussion

The study analyzed and discussed differences of residents' perceptions of Ohrid when investigating the following personal attributes of respondents:

- Age, in terms of belonging to the following age sub-groups: between 15-24 years (young), 25-34 years (young-adults), 35-54 years (middle-aged), 55-64 years (elderly), and over 65 years (aged-adults);

- Category, in terms of employment of the respondents belonging to the following sub-groups: full-time employment, part-time employment, student, unemployed, and retired; and

- Tourism dependence of the respondents, in terms of belonging to the following sub-groups: correspondent of the family members receive direct financial (or other) benefits because of tourism (job, private accommodation rental, other), correspondent of the family members receive indirect financial (or other) benefits because of tourism (farmer, supplier, local food producer, construction builder, taxi driver, shop salesmen, other), and not related to tourism.

The discussion of the findings is in two directions:

(1) Sustainability dimension of tourism (referring to socio-cultural, natural and economic sustainability tourism impacts), and

(2) WH status benefits.

Table 2 presents a summary of identified differences per sustainability dimension and per personal attributes of the respondents.

Table 2: *Summarized results on differences in sustainability dimension*

Sustainability dimension	Attribute	Question
Socio-cultural	Age	- Due to tourism, locals have changed their way of living.
	Category	- Due to tourism, crime is on the rise.
Natural	Age	- Tourism increases air pollution in Ohrid. - I am annoyed by the night noise caused by tourism in Ohrid. - Tourism endangers the endemic flora and fauna in the Lake Ohrid.
	Category	- Tourists pollute Ohrid with their solid waste.
Economic	Age	- Tourism in Ohrid only benefits for those employed in tourism. - Due to tourism, prices in bars and restaurants in the city center are high. - Due to tourism, real estate prices are high. - Tourism brings economic benefits only during the tourist season.
	Category	- Because of tourism, life in Ohrid is more expensive. - Myself, or member from my family directly benefits from tourism or tourists who visit us. - Tourism brings economic benefits only during the tourist season.
	Tourism dependence	- Tourism in Ohrid only benefits for those employed in tourism. - Because of tourism, life in Ohrid is more expensive. - Tourism brings benefits to other economic sectors. - Myself, or member from my family directly benefits from tourism or tourists who visit us. - Tourism brings economic benefits only during the tourist season.

Note: Significant at  $p > 0.01$

Source: *Authors*.

Based on Table 2, it is noticeable that *age* of the respondents is the attribute that performs the most differences towards tourism sustainability dimensions. With regard to the socio-cultural sustainable dimension of tourism, the age makes a difference to only one item. Namely, young and young-adults as well as aged-adults, are neutral that due to tourism, they have changed their way of living. Opposite to them, middle-aged and elderly, agree. It means that over the years, as residents mature and get older, they get affected by tourism impacts and change the everyday living.

Furthering, the age was found that strongly matters when it comes to the natural aspects of tourism sustainability. Namely, age matters in three, out of four investigated environmental items. It was found that young, young-adults and middle-aged disagree, while elderly and aged-adults strongly disagree that tourism increases air pollution in Ohrid. It seems that as local residents grow old, they oppose that air pollution in the city is provoked by tourism, but most probably they are aware that additional factors contribute to air-pollution of the destination (like, Ohrid is not having a city gas hitting system). When investigating the local perception on the item "Tourism endangers the endemic flora and fauna in the Lake Ohrid", the aged-adults were the only one that strongly agreed with that statement. It clearly means that as locals' age they become more aware and start to truly care about the negative environmental impacts that tourism provokes with its rapid development in Ohrid. Similarly, is the case when investigating the irritation form the night noise caused by tourism. The older the residents are, the more they are affected with natural degradation that tourism provokes.

As for the economic tourism sustainable dimension, the age matters strongly. Namely, all respondents regardless the age-category:

- Disagree that "Tourism in Ohrid only benefits for those employed in tourism"
- Strongly-disagree that "Due to tourism, prices in bars and restaurants in the city center are high" and
- Strongly agree that "Due to tourism, real estate prices are high", and that "Tourism brings economic benefits only during the tourist season".

What is interesting and important to note, is the different intensity in the perception of locals towards this set of statements. It was found that the older the resident, the stronger is the attitude to detect and standby the perception.

Furthermore, based on Table 2, one may identify differences in perception among locals when investigating the *category* of respondents in terms of type of employment. For the socio-cultural sustainable dimension, the category notes difference to only one item. It is interesting the variety of perception on the item "Due to tourism, crime is on the rise", where the full-time employed respondents disagree, the part-time employed and students are neutral, while the unemployed and retired strongly agree with such statement. It turns out that when locals are not working, they feel vulnerable and evaluate Ohrid as not safe, perceiving that tourism brings crime and the socio-cultural negative impacts rise.

Concerning the natural tourism impacts on sustainable development of Ohrid, only one difference is noted among various category-group respondents. Namely, students are the only who disagree with the statement that "Tourists pollute Ohrid with their solid waste". All other category-groups disagree perceiving that tourism provokes negative natural impacts. It looks



like the young respondents (presuming that students are those between 15-24 years) have low environmental awareness, which matures over the year.

Additionally, this attribute shows the most differences on the economic sustainability dimension of tourism, identifying three (out of nine) items. All category-groups strongly agree that "Because of tourism, life in Ohrid is more expensive", but the unemployed and the retired are much more convinced and the most perceive it among all. Part-time employed are the only ones who strongly agree that "Myself, or member from my family directly benefits from tourism or tourists who visit us". This confirms the strong and robust seasonality of tourism in Ohrid (Petrevska, 2015). Although overall all residents agree that tourism brings economic benefits only during the tourist season, it is interesting to note a moderate percentage (18%) of full-time employed locals who disagree with that statement. Most probably this stands for those who are permanently employed in tourism industry in Ohrid and have constant economic support.

The third, and last, personal attribute is *tourism dependence* of the respondents in terms of receiving direct or indirect financial (or other) benefits because of tourism, or being not related to tourism at all. All differences are related only to the economic impacts of tourism, which is to be expected due to the nature of the issue. It is logically that locals who directly benefit from tourism disagree (53%) with the statement that "Tourism in Ohrid only benefits for those employed in tourism", as it is logically that locals who are not related to tourism agreed with such statement (54%). Furthermore, all residents unconditionally agree that "Because of tourism, life in Ohrid is more expensive". However, those benefiting directly or indirectly from tourism are more reserved in such perception, while almost all respondents (93%) who are not related to tourism, perceived this statement unconditionally true.

The category-group which the most supports the statement "Tourism brings benefits to other economic sectors" is the one that receives indirect tourism economic benefits, as farmers, suppliers, construction builders, taxi drivers, etc. As well, logical result is the perception of locals who are not related to tourism to disagree (79%) that have benefits from tourism or tourists who visit Ohrid, unlike vast majority of direct local beneficiaries (91%) who agree. Finally, all categories of tourism dependence overall disagree that "Tourism brings economic benefits only during the tourist season". Yet, the most convinced in such statement are those who are not related to tourism.

With regards to the perception of locals on positive effects of Ohrid's UNESCO designation, the study found no difference when investigating age, category and tourism dependency as personal attributes. It is completely irrelevant whether locals are young, middle-aged or aged-adults, whether they are full-time or part-time employed or unemployed, and whether they gain direct/indirect benefits or are not related to tourism. They all (by age, category of employment and tourism dependence) are proud to live in WH destination, believe that Ohrid needs to strengthen environmental protection and strongly perceive that due to UNESCO's status, Ohrid benefits economically.

### Conclusion

The research highlights the differences among perception of locals when matching selected personal attributes (age, category of employment and tourism dependence), to the three-pillars of tourism sustainability, and the main positive impacts of WH designation.

Regarding the age, differences were found within the age-categories. Namely, the older the locals are, the more they perceive positive or negative tourism impacts on sustainable development of Ohrid. Age strongly matters when creating residents' perception on the natural aspect of sustainability, as well. Only elderly (55-64 years) and aged-adults (65+ years) are strongly motivated to honestly perceive and punctually assess the environmental reality, unlike young and young-adults. As per the employment category, only the unemployed feel unsafe and perceive a rise in the crime as a negative socio-cultural impact. They are also the most convinced category that life in Ohrid is more expensive due to tourism. The seasonality as a negative tourism consequence is the most perceived by the part-time employed. About tourism dependence, it was found that it matters only upon the economic tourism aspects.

Finally, the results showed only similarities and no differences among local perception when matching the personal attributes to the WH benefits. All residents identically perceive the positive impacts that UNESCO logo brings to Ohrid.

The research was limited with several factors which may be addressed in some future work. The research was conducted before the main tourist season, so it may be repeated during the season as well. Then, it identified differences only on three personal attributes, which may be extended to others, like: education, monthly income, place of living, etc. Finally, it assesses only the perception of locals, so other stakeholders' attitudes may be included. Yet, these limitations do not diminish the contribution of the research, since it poses many valuable suggestions of practical significance for tourism stakeholders.

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