

A photograph of a gym with people working out, overlaid with large white text. The gym has wooden floors and various exercise equipment. A man in a black t-shirt and shorts is standing on the left. A man in a grey long-sleeve shirt is leaning against a large orange cylindrical piece of equipment. A woman in a white long-sleeve shirt is sitting on the floor, looking at a book or tablet. A woman in a white long-sleeve shirt and black shorts is leaning over a large orange dumbbell. A blue ball is on the floor in the bottom left. A blue foam roller is on the floor in the bottom center. A metal ring is on the floor in the bottom center. The text is in a bold, sans-serif font, with 'SPORT' being the largest word. The text is white and stands out against the orange and blue background of the gym.

**PLANNING
AND MANAGING
SPORT,
RECREATION,
AND HEALTH
IN HIGHER EDUCATION:**

Sustainable Practices
for a Sustainable Future

UNIVERSITY OF NIŠ
FACULTY OF SPORT AND PHYSICAL EDUCATION

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RECREATION AND HEALTH
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**PLANNING AND MANAGING SPORT, RECREATION
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TOURISM OF OHRID (NORTH MACEDONIA): (UN)SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

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ABSTRACT

The research aims to measure residents' perception of tourism impacts and the quality of life in Ohrid, North Macedonia. To do so, a four-factor model is proposed based on the principles of sustainability and responsible tourism development, specifically tailored for a world heritage tourism destination. Given the real danger of losing the UNESCO status, the research highlights the need for an interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary approach to develop a coherent and integrated framework to revive and safeguard tourism in Ohrid.

Keywords: sustainable; tourism; responsible; impacts.

INTRODUCTION

With a population exceeding 52,000 individuals, Ohrid is the most renowned tourism destination in North Macedonia, contributing to more than a third of all tourist arrivals and overnights in 2019 (State Statistical Office of the Republic of North Macedonia, 2020). The combination of natural geographic and human activity in the region is exceptional, creating a unique and rare harmony, as stated by UNESCO (2019a). The Lake Ohrid region is a mixed World Heritage (WH) property that was initially designated in 1979 for its natural outstanding value and in 1980 for its cultural and historical importance. It is one of only 11 mixed WH sites in Europe and 39 out of 1,121 mixed WH properties globally (UNESCO, 2019b).

Since the early 2000s, the concept of sustainability has gradually become a part of the global heritage community (Barthel-Bouchier, 2013), adding scientific discourse, and becoming an institutional element in assessing cultural assets (Schmutz and Elliott, 2016). The focus has shifted from aesthetics and

architectural value to a more objective evaluation of resources' sustainability (Labadi, 2013). Consequently, the outstanding universal value (OUV) of cultural assets has received enhanced scientific validation. Although UNESCO has endeavoured to reconcile the protection and management of WH sites with the development of sustainable tourism, challenges remain in balancing the socio-cultural and environmental impacts. Lately, it is noted to make the reassessment of existing sustainability development objectives, incorporating new dimensions of quality of life (QOL), promoting healthy behaviours, and preparing stakeholders for a more responsible and sustainable tourism industry.

The UNESCO concept of WH OUV is based on two principles (UNESCO, 1972):

- The first principle pertains to cultural and/or ecological properties that hold extraordinary significance and importance to the current and future generations.
- The second principle requires the permanent management and stewardship to safeguard and conserve WH properties.

The city of Ohrid (North Macedonia), is a topic of concern since many urgent risks have threatened its long-term sustainability, as already discussed by Petrevska *et al* (2020a, 2020b, 2023), and Petrevska and Mihalič, (2020). In fact, UNESCO is seriously considering adding this site to the List of WH in Danger (UNESCO, 2019a).

RESEARCH CONSTRUCT

The research employed the following multi-stage methodology:

- The first stage (qualitative approach) involved:
 - An expert's judgement on identifying a list of primary and secondary factors related to tourism sustainability of Ohrid, and
 - Content analysis of secondary resources (UNESCO standard list of factors and mission reports).
- The second stage (quantitative approach) involved collecting primary data (630 respondents) to assess residents' perception on tourism sustainability and QOL.
- The third stage (scientific research approach) involved utilising a theoretical model that captures the environmental and socio-cultural impacts, measured by the damage to the OUV, the economic impacts, represented by the economic benefits, the socio-psychological capacity of the destination, which is reflected in the QOL of the residents, and the socio-political capacity, which is represented by the destination's capacity relative to its WH status.

The study developed three primary hypotheses (H) for direct, indirect, and mediating effects:

- H₁ reflected direct effects with the WH status on residents' QOL (H_{1a}), on damage to the OUV (H_{1b}), and on economic benefits (H_{1c}).
- H₂ focused on the indirect effects of the WH status on residents' through the impacts of OUV damage (H_{2a}), and economic benefits (H_{2b}).
- H₃ examined the mediating effects of the OUV damage (H_{3a}) and economic benefits (H_{3b}) on the relationship between the WH status and the residents' QOL.

RESULTS

According to the study, residents of Ohrid consider economic benefits to be the most important aspect of tourism development. The importance of the WH status is ranked second, followed by the QOL, and the OUV damage. The results suggest that further development of tourism could lead to the degradation of the city's historical and natural resources, which are the basis for its WH status. This raises concerns about the social sustainability of tourism development, particularly in the historic environment.

Positive relationships between the WH status and the QOL is perceived positively by residents being influenced by other factors, such as access to basic services, social cohesion, and other economic and environmental factors. In the long run, over-reliance on tourism revenue can lead to a degradation of the very assets that attract visitors, such as the OUV that earned the site its WH status. Therefore, it is crucial to balance economic benefits with sustainable tourism practices that protect and preserve the destination's resources. Disregard for the fundamental goal of the WH designation is not necessarily a universal attitude among all residents. It is possible that this attitude is more prevalent among those who are primarily concerned with the economic benefits of tourism. No significant direct effect of OUV damage on residents' perception of QOL was found which may be due to the relatively early stage of tourism development. Yet, the findings do not necessarily indicate that there is no negative impact of OUV damage on residents' QOL, but rather that this relationship was not statistically significant. Additionally, it was found that economic benefits play a significant mediating role in the relationship between the WH status and the residents' perception of QOL, but OUV damage does not have a mediating effect.

CONCLUSION

Residents of Ohrid prioritise economic benefits over the protection and preservation of their city's cultural and natural heritage, which is a common issue in many tourism destinations. However, economic benefits and the protection of cultural and natural heritage are not mutually exclusive. Sustainable and responsible tourism practices can lead to economic growth while also preserving the environment, culture, and tradition of a destination.

Also, residents' focus on economic benefits may be driven by their desire for a better QOL, as income can be a significant factor in determining one's overall well-being. However, it is important to recognize that a clean environment, protected culture and tradition, and a healthy life are also essential components of a good QOL.

Overall, it is crucial to strike a balance between the economic development and the preservation of cultural and natural heritage in tourism destinations. This requires collaboration between stakeholders, including residents, tourism businesses, and local governments, to promote sustainable and responsible tourism practices that benefit both the local community and the environment.

Open issues to be discussed:

1. What about the social sustainability of Ohrid?
2. How can the UNESCO label for sustainability and the outstanding universal value of Ohrid be preserved?
3. Does the UNESCO label fade its original task for Ohrid?
4. Is Ohrid on the pathway to losing the UNESCO label?

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