

## State of conservation report

**Name of the property:**

Plitvice Lakes National Park (Republic of Croatia)

**Date of inscription on the World Heritage List:**

1979; (extension 2000)

**Inscription criteria:**

(vii)(viii)(ix)

**Identification number:**

98bis

**Summary of the report**

Plitvice Lakes National Park (NP Plitvice Lakes) is the oldest Croatian national park and the only area in the Republic of Croatia included in the UNESCO World Heritage List, which it was inscribed on in 1979. It is well known for its magnificent travertine dams that form clear lakes in constant biodynamic process of tufa building and growth. Plitvice Lakes are protected according to three criteria of outstanding universal value VII, VIII and IX.

For effective conservation of the lake system and the dynamic growth of tufa barriers as an outstanding universal value the Public Institution was established which manages the NP Plitvice Lakes. Management of the NP Plitvice Lakes area is, among other, ensured through the implementation of the Management Plan of the Plitvice Lakes National Park as well as the Spatial Plan of the area with special features for NP Plitvice Lakes (Spatial Plan).

In recent times, the growing challenge for the NP Plitvice Lakes has been the excessive visiting in the lake system. The manner of visiting will be regulated through the adoption and effective implementation of the new management plan for NP Plitvice Lakes within the framework of which also the Visitor Management Action plan will be developed.

In 2014, the new Spatial Plan, adopted by the Croatian parliament, came into effect whereby the spatial plan from 1986 ceased to be valid. Through the adoption of the new Spatial Plan there was a change in building areas and their purpose. In certain parts of NP Plitvice Lakes the surface area of building areas was reduced while in some settlements it was increased. Although in general the new Spatial Plan is more restrictive with respect to the previous one, it was established that in the past three years in which it has been in use the trend of construction of tourism facilities has intensified. With regard to the complaints by third parties (complaints concerned a wide range of issues) which, among other, concern the intensification of construction of tourism facilities, in March 2016 the Ministry of Environment and Energy (MEE) received the request from the UNESCO World Heritage Centre to prepare the State of conservation report.

In May 2016, MEE prepared and submitted the indicated document on the basis of which the UNESCO Decision, adopted during the 40th session of the World Heritage Committee, was passed.

The decision indicates:

- concern regarding the significant expansion of tourism facilities within the property and the fact that the Public Institution is not a party in the procedure of building permit issuance;
- that the scale of development of tourism facilities that has taken place in the property since 2014 represents a potential danger to the Outstanding Universal Value of NP Plitvice Lakes;
- that it was noted that an administrative supervision would be carried out in order to evaluate the issuing of construction permits, as well as that the State Party is urged to undertake such an evaluation of procedures and to ensure that no new permits are issued until this process has been completed;
- the request that the Public Institution managing NP Plitvice Lakes is included in the process of building permit issuance within the area of the national park;
- the request for development of a Strategic Environmental Assessment of the Spatial Plan for NP Plitvice Lakes, including a specific assessment of potential impacts on the OUV;
- the request to invite a joint WHC/IUCN Reactive Monitoring mission to the property to evaluate the threat posed to the property's OUV by the recent expansion of tourism facilities within the property;
- the request to submit an updated *State of conservation report* by 1 February 2017 which would contain information on implementation of the above indicated.

MEE, which is competent for the implementation of the World Heritage Convention for the field of natural heritage, informed of the UNESCO decision and included in its work the Directorate for water management (MEE), Croatian Waters, the Ministry of Construction and Physical Planning (MCPP), Croatian Institute for Spatial Development (CISD), the Ministry of Tourism (MT), Croatian Agency for Environment and Nature (CAEN), Public Institution Plitvice Lakes National Park (PIPLNP) and local self-government units.

With regard to the request concerning the inclusion of PIPLNP in the process of building permit issuance, MEE carried out consultations with MCPP related to the analysis of the Spatial Plan and the analysis of the implementation of the Spatial Plan as well as the preparation of possible amendments to legislative frameworks regarding the competence for issuing acts for construction in protected areas and parties participating in the process of their issuance. It is important to stress that in accordance with regulations currently in force MEE is involved in the process of issuing building permits through issuance of nature protection requirements and main design approval and in this procedure most often the opinion of the public institution is requested. Furthermore, MEE issues approvals for all projects in the territory of the national park for which it is not necessary to obtain a building or location permit, whereby better protection and monitoring of the park is provided. Currently, analysis of issued building permits is underway as well as the grounds for their adoption. In addition, analysis of illegally built buildings is being initiated and proceeding by supervisory and inspectional authorities is expected.

With regard to the UNESCO Decision requesting the development of a Strategic Environmental Assessment of the Spatial Plan for NP Plitvice Lakes, including a specific assessment of potential impacts on the OUV, the obligation to carry out strategic environmental assessment for spatial plans of national parks and nature parks, including their significant amendments, was only introduced into the Croatian legislation by the Environmental Protection Act from 2013 (Official Gazette No. 80/13, 78/15). Since the development of the Spatial Plan in question was initiated before the indicated Act entered

into force there existed no obligation to carry out strategic environmental assessment.

Although strategic environmental assessment was not carried out for the Spatial Plan, MEE performed a thorough inspection of the Spatial Plan for which it issued prior approval and, among other, considered potential impact of the implementation of the Spatial Plan or certain planning solutions on the objectives of conservation and the integrity of the area of the ecological network. Nature protection requirements were also incorporated into the Spatial Plan. Furthermore, the impact of individual projects is additionally examined through procedures prescribed by the Nature Protection Act (assessment of acceptability for the ecological network, issuance of approvals, establishing nature protection requirements).

If through the analysis of the Spatial Plan it is established that the said plan needs to be amended, along with the indicated amendments to the Spatial Plan also the strategic environmental assessment and assessment of acceptability for the ecological network will be carried out.

MEE invited the WHC/IUCN Reactive Monitoring mission to provide an objective opinion on the situation at NP Plitvice Lakes.

Before the WHC/IUCN Reactive Monitoring mission took place three preparatory meetings were carried out at which the following participated: Directorate for nature protection (MEE), Directorate for water management (MEE), Croatian Waters which is responsible for issuing special conditions and certificates in accordance with the Water Act, MCPP, CISD which is responsible for professional physical planning activities and is authorised by MCPP to coordinate the development of spatial plans of areas with special features for national parks and nature parks, CAEN which is responsible for the preparation of the expert background document for the protection of nature for spatial plans of national parks and nature parks, and PIPLNP.

During the Preparatory meetings and at the Reactive monitoring mission PIPLNP, MEE, CAEN, MCPP and CISD representatives worked on the development of the Action plan for improvement of the state of conservation of the UNESCO World Heritage Site Plitvice Lakes National Park.

The following topics and activities from the Action plan will be carried out:

- Topic 1: Action plan organisation and implementation
  - an interdepartmental coordination and operational team for implementation of the Action plan will be established,
- Topic 2: Optimisation of park visiting
- Topic 3: Resolution of the issue of water supply and wastewater drainage through the Agreement on the restoration and reconstruction of water facilities within the NP Plitvice Lakes
- Topic 4: Analysis of the scale of construction in NP Plitvice Lakes and analysis of implementation of existing Spatial Plan.

Topic 5: Inclusion of the local community in park activities

The goal of the Action plan is to alleviate pressures on natural values of NP Plitvice Lakes.