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Heritage supporting sustainable development opportunities in the Lake Ohrid region

"How can we benefit from the inscription of the Lake Ohrid region on the World Heritage list?"

Indeed, the establishment of the World Heritage property provides a major opportunity for local entrepreneurs, and this should not exclude small businesses with a focus on sustainability. Several local projects have seemingly been trying to support nature and culture based microenterprise development and the municipality is clearly keen to help. However, microenterprises and small business developments are failing due to a lack of adequate business planning and administrative support, insufficient or poorly targeted start up financing, underdeveloped value chains and weak marketing.

The workshop "Heritage supporting sustainable development opportunities in the Lake Ohrid region" took place in Tushemisht and Pogradec between April 25 and April 27 in this context, as it was meant to offer a capacity building opportunity on the potentials for "Heritage - friendly" small-scale enterprises/initiatives for Lake Ohrid region practitioners, institutions, organisations, communities and networks in line with the World Heritage Capacity Building Strategy. It aimed at supporting the spreading of the notion of and requirements for, a World Heritage Property within a Sustainable Development approach, at strengthening the bridging process between the relevant institutions - at the national and local level - and the local communities, and at reinforcing the network among communities, NGOs and institutions in a transboundary context and with relevant partners elsewhere in respective countries and abroad, encouraging small-scale initiatives that contribute to the bigger picture.

Addressing the small-scale entrepreneurship concerns and values of the Lake Ohrid region, the workshop introduced firstly the broader picture, the overall context and associated heritage concerns, addressing specifically the following themes and issues: agriculture and forestry, recreation and tourism, traditional craftsmanship, eco-environmental services and heritage friendly enterprises. In addition, a selection of case studies illustrated the issues and provided useful examples of successful initiatives from both cultural and natural points of view, mainly from the region (and most notably Ohrid): sustainable fishing management practices, revived and modernized filigree artisanship, Mihavine cheese labelling and redistribution, tourism itineraries etc. Then, keeping in mind the Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats emerging for the above themes in the Lake Ohrid region, the workshop was articulated around a practical group exercise built around a simulation environment, with associated visits and meetings with local actors. Each group selected one proposal for a small enterprise that could fit into the bigger picture of a potentially integrated response to the identified challenges, putting together compatible and heritage sensitive business initiatives. Four groups were thus formed, that worked intensively through the associated business project to formulate a detailed feasibility plan based on the activities carried out during the workshop (including learning from other experiences and case studies, interviewing local entrepreneurs and staff of the relevant public administrations (notably the Municipality), and financial sectors (banks and donors). At the end of the workshop, each group presented their proposal, feasibility plan and roadmap for implementation to a mixed jury (representing the investors) that notably included representatives of the Pogradec Municipality, and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia Ministry of Culture along with UNESCO, IUCN and ICOMOS representatives. Overall, the oral and slide presentations introduced were very solid, attractive and particularly rich in the development and the organisation of promising ideas and associated contents, even including some of the potential difficulties, issues, synergies or shortcomings Proposals could easily be developed further to serve as the basis for actual project developments in the near future. Branded itineraries/tours around the lake linking associated traditional crafts and services; a Centre for the regional traditional crafts; local berries medicinal liquors; a local Gastronomy food standard, valuing quality of products and enhancing presentation. Through this interactive exercise and the following evaluation, participants have successfully become acquainted with concepts and principles related to sustainable and heritage friendly development opportunities, as they faced the various constraints and difficulties related to the specific preparation of a structured business project proposal.

The group of about 20 participants for the workshop was carefully identified ahead of the event, well-balanced in term of expertise and background (public administration, private sector, culture, nature, tourism, economics) and showed a high motivation throughout the whole event, with intense and continuous interactions between and amongst the distinct groups. From the public side, the workshop witnessed the solid and active presence of the Pogradec Municipality, alongside the Directors of Struga and Pogradec Museums and representatives from the Ministries of Agriculture, Environment (RAPA) and Culture (Albania and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia). From the private sector, individual entrepreneurs, farmers, fishers, artisans, and tourism actors were also actively mobilized. Finally, the workshop was also the occasion for several local businesses to associate with the event, and therefore put theory into practice: through a crafts and food fair set by the venue on the first evening, through lunches and dinners happily enjoyed in local traditional restaurants, with fruitful visits to local artisans and by transiting by bike along the Lake Ohrid between Pogradec and Tushemisht, fully appreciating the local hospitality of the local Bed & Breakfasts of the women in Tushemisht. One of the group beautifully described the underlying idea: "exploring the visible and invisible magic of the Lake Ohrid region."

The course was well-organised and inclusive, with every part useful to us. When we started this course our knowledge about the importance of the Lake Ohrid region was minimal, but with this training we learned a great deal. The workshop, the working groups and practice helped us to understand how sustainable tourism should work, which means that all small businesses, municipalities, guest houses and hotels should cooperate with each other in the same direction. We really hope to see more and similar trainings that can have a real impact on how to run friendly and sustainable businesses around Lake Ohrid and to raise awareness of the local community on protecting the Lake.

Alexander Filipillari, local tour operator

Christophe Graez, ICOMOS expert
The State Party of Albania is progressing with the nomination file to the World Heritage List of the natural and cultural heritage of the Lake Ohrid region to the Albanian side of Lake Ohrid, which comprises one third of the lake. Albania’s Ministries of Environment and Culture confirmed that the EU-funded project Towards strengthened governance of the shared trans-boundary natural and cultural heritage of the Lake Ohrid region is now entering the final phase with the preparation of the nomination file. "We have worked very hard, and think that now the voluminous file is almost ready," says the head of the Albanian expert team working on the file, Dr Spase Shumka, a hydrobiologist and professor at the Agriculture University, Tirana. It is hoped that the nomination file will be ready for submission to UNESCO by the Albanian authorities early next year.

The nomination extension file (also known as a major boundary modification request) has over 700 pages and includes sections on the identification and description of the site, and most importantly, the justification for its inclusion on the World Heritage List. There are many interesting facts about the Lake Ohrid region that were not well-known before, even by locals. For example, the Lake Ohrid region has 18 natural monuments proclaimed as IUCN Category III protected areas by government decision no. 676, dated 20 December 2002. Among these monuments there are ten geological monuments, three hydrological monuments and five biological monuments.

When asked what the most difficult part was in preparing the nomination file, Dr Shumka noted that it took much effort to undertake a comparative analysis of Lake Ohrid with other ancient lakes in Europe and elsewhere in the world that are also listed on the World Heritage List, analyzing the significant attributes of Lake Ohrid, why it is unique, and why it should be inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List. The difficulties, says Dr Shumka, lie in the fact that in Albania there are very few written studies or historical facts verifying ancient settlements in the area, because during the time of communism no extensive scientific study of the area was undertaken. The nomination dossier also examines the rapid changes and developments after 1990 and the increasing human population in the lake catchment areas (almost tripling), the eutrophication of the water, and the continuing use of water for agriculture as factors that are currently adversely affecting the ecosystems. It was only in November 1999 that the Albanian side of Lake Ohrid was proclaimed as a Protected Area, which covers both water and terrestrial ecosystems (Pogradec Terrestrial Aquatic Territory Protected Landscape Area, with a surface area of 27,323 ha). Dr Shumka states that, unsurprisingly, the natural attributes of the Albanian side of Lake Ohrid are the same as on the Macedonian side. The nomination file also highlights that the Lake Ohrid and Prespa region represents a unique ecological and biogeographical phenomenon in Europe. Along with a large number of endemic, rare and relict species of high significance, their different ecological characteristics, distribution and origin have contributed to the region’s uniqueness.

Meanwhile, Arta Dallani, Director of the Institute of Cultural Monuments of the Republic of Albania, advises on the cultural heritage of Lake Ohrid, highlighting that this is equally as important as the natural part. The lakeside the cultural attributes and landscape of Lin Peninsula and Lin village, as well as the scenic area of Lin and Drilon, the north part of Lin, and the pile dwellings (former stilt houses/palafittes) are all to be included in the nomination file. This region has cultural attributes and outstanding values similar to those of the Macedonian parts, which already have gained the World Heritage status. The proposed region has a special morphology and position. Surrounding fields, views from Galicica and Mali i Thate, archaeological ruins of the Palaeo-Christian church and palafitte along the lakeside in Lin village and its mosaic with its visual integrity and well-preserved traditional architecture, encompass outstanding values of heritage. The buffer zone includes a region settled since prehistoric times, with traces from the Via Egnatia. The Lin Peninsula and its architecture, Palaeo-Christian church is one of the best examples of its kind in Albania, as well as traces of palafitte as a cultural landscape, and aspects of cultural heritage and traditional crafts. Having guidelines and the recommendations of experts from ICOMOS, IUCN & ICOMD to ensure the high protection and integrity of the unique values of cultural heritage in the possible area for World Heritage nomination, the working group from the Ministry of Culture, Institute of Monuments and Regional Directorate of Korça have substantially contributed in the preparation of the Draft Annex: the World Heritage Supplement to the Management Plan of the Protected Landscape of Pogradec Region 2017-2027. It is a document that accompanies the nomination file. The technical group of the Ministry of Culture and Institute of Monuments undertook an evaluation of the cultural heritage material and spiritual aspects of the Albanian part of Lake Ohrid - she says. After the last revision, the nomination file will be sent to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. It is this ministry that will hand the file to the UNESCO World Heritage Centre for the usual evaluation process by the IUCN and ICOMOS and eventually for discussion by the World Heritage Committee. Dr Shumka says that, hopefully in 2020, the Albanian part of Lake Ohrid will be inscribed as a World Heritage property.

Lake Ohrid region World Heritage nomination file in progress

As requested by the World Heritage Committee at its 40th session (Istanbul, ICOMOS 2016), a joint World Heritage Centre, ICOMOS and IUCN Reactive Monitoring mission was invited by the State Party of the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia to the World Heritage property Natural and Cultural Heritage of the Ohrid region, which took place from 9 to 14 April 2017. The objective of the Reactive Monitoring mission was to assess the state of conservation of the property, as well as potential threats.

To its Outstanding Universal Value (OUV) from large-scale infrastructure projects recently proposed within and around the property, in particular the A3 road, the Railway corridor VIII, Highway A2 and the Galicica Ski resort that might represent a potential danger to the property, in line with paragraphs 179 and 180 of the Operational Guidelines. The mission was particularly tasked with providing technical assistance to the State Party with regards to the scope and development of a Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) and Heritage Impact Assessments (HIAs) which would comprehensively assess the potential effects made to preserve cultural and natural heritage in response to the last decision by the World Heritage Committee in Krakow.

The mission held widespread consultation with national, regional and local authorities, site managers, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in Skopje and Ohrid. The mission undertook on-site visits to the Galicica National Park, the Museum of the Bay of Bone and other urban and rural sites of the town of Ohrid including Prashtik, St. Holy Mary Pangeption, Galleries of Icons, St. Sofia, and the proposed locations for the infrastructure projects. The mission received a detailed introduction to a series of documents, plans and programs from the relevant Macedonian authorities.

A special meeting with the NGOs and the members of the mission was organized by the authorities. The mission received documents from civil society on a wide range of issues on the state of conservation of the property and discussed the need to establish participative approaches for the management of this World Heritage property.

Our visit was at the invitation of the State Party at the request of the World Heritage Committee in order to assess the state of conservation of the attributes that are part of the cultural and natural heritage of this World Heritage site. Our duty is to report on the state of conservation so that the World Heritage Committee can take a well-informed decision next July in Krakow. We discussed with many local and national authorities the progress and efforts made to preserve cultural and natural heritage in response to the last decision by the World Heritage Committee Istanbul.,” explained Ms. Anna Sidorenko, UNESCO World Heritage Centre representative. The mission team prepared a report that sets out recommendations on the state of conservation of this mixed World Heritage property which was inscribed for its cultural values in 1979 and for its cultural values a year later. Following peer review by the UNESCO World Heritage Centre, ICOMOS and IUCN, the final report was sent in mid-June 2017 to the Macedonian Government. The report will be publicly available by the end of June as part of the World Heritage Centre publically available report on the state of conservation so that the World Heritage Committee can take a well-informed decision next July in Krakow.

Lake Ohrid region

![Map of Lake Ohrid region World Heritage nomination file in progress](image)
Llazi Icka, portrait of the man who spent a life in wood carving

Llazi Icka is in his 80s but is still working with the same passion he did as a young boy, carving wood and creating wonderful objects. Once you meet him in his studio, you are hit by his tranquil face and the smile of a man who has lived enough to teach you much about life. He is in love with everything around his shop, which is situated among the old streets of Pogradec. If you visit the studio of Llazi Icka, the well-known master of woodcraft in Pogradec, you will notice that it is hard to find a piece of wall without an object hanging from it. All the walls are covered, and even the back facade of his three-floor house is carved in wood.

Stay a while and focus your eyes on each of his works and you will fall in love with all of them, not knowing which to buy. This is because he has made each of these objects with passion and love. He works here every day, without noticing the time pass by, paying attention to every detail of his work. He observes: “If you want to make art, don’t rush, you can’t do art rushing.” If you ask him to choose his favourite work, he says that he loves them all. Llazi inherited this craft from his grandfather Mihali and his father. Spori, both of whom loved this profession. He recalls a story: “Every time my father started to work on a piece of wood, he talked to it for a while, as if he wanted to apologise for transforming it, or to ask what form it would like to take. It was something amazing to see him talking to the wood before carving it. And he did so for more than 40 years.”

When he was a little boy, Llazi followed his father’s work attentively and, without saying anything, started to draw different objects and then design them. He then became the man to inherit this tradition to its fullest. If you ask him how many days he needs to complete an artwork in wood, he says that sometimes it takes him weeks. Because of his knowledge of the different types of wood, he can judge the quality just by touch, and he knows where to find it. Sometimes, he asks farmers in the villages of Bishnica and Gora to bring pieces of wood that he needs while on other occasions he finds the pieces himself while walking around the lake, turning them into beautiful objects.

In his studio there are more than 500 wooden objects, some are ornaments, while others have a practical use: chairs, tables, stairs. His work is known not only in Pogradec, but throughout the country. Some of his artwork has been exhibited, and many articles have been written about him. Now, the challenge is to pass this tradition into good hands. His son is a professor but during his spare time he chooses to stay in his father’s studio, working and carving wood. As Llazi proudly affirms, his son and daughter both know how to carve wood. The son has the same passion but cannot dedicate the same amount of time to this profession as his father. He has promised to keep this tradition alive.

This is what World Heritage is all about, passing on our values to the younger generations and preserving those values for the years to come. In the eyes and the smile of this noble man you can see the satisfaction of an accomplished mission.

Marta Pejoska, the story of the silver filigree artist from Ohrid

Marta is a young architect who lives in Ohrid. She has dedicated herself to a beautiful tradition, turning silver filigree into contemporary modern jewellery. Following architectural studies she established her conceptual studio for contemporary jewellery design in 2011, opening the first private art atelier with a gallery. In continuing an old and filigree in her home town in 2014, in her name, Marta Pejoska. Her designs are unique. In by her tranquil face and the smile of a man who has lived enough to teach you much about life. He is in love with everything around his shop, which is situated among the old streets of Pogradec. If you visit the studio of Llazi Icka, the well-known master of woodcraft in Pogradec, you will notice that it is hard to find a piece of wall without an object hanging from it. All the walls are covered, and even the back facade of his three-floor house is carved in wood.

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Diatoms from Lake Ohrid

Diatoms are microscopic algae that are photosynthetic. Each diatom cell is enclosed in a silica shell (called the frustule) which have distinctive shapes and ornamentations. The ornamentations are often species-specific and can thus provide important information for their identification and classification. Diatoms inhabit almost all bodies of water including fresh, brackish and salt water, and also terrestrial habitats such as wet rocks, mosses, soils, and even caves. They are either planktonic (living in the open water) or benthic (growing associated with or attached to a particular surface). Different estimates of diatom diversity have been offered. Some authors suggested there may be more than 200,000 species of diatoms extant and fossil but more recently a much reduced estimate of 20,000 species was given. Several sites in the world are known as hot-spots for high diatom diversity, most of which represent oligotrophic lakes i.e. those that are poor in nutrients and abundant in oxygen in the deeper parts. Among them, ancient lakes (i.e. those that have continuously existed since before the Last Glacial Maximum) have special importance, due to the specific living flora and fauna. Their prolonged isolation from other ecosystems resulted in extraordinary biodiversity and a high number of endemic lineages. Lake Ohrid, through its two million year history, accumulated unprecedented endemism with ca. 500 endemic species, including diatoms as one of the most species-rich groups of organisms. Until now a total of ca. 800 diatom species are reported in the lake, ca. 200 of them endemic and ca. 15 relict species, which were previously described as fossils from the Neogene Pannonian lacustrine basins in Romania. Most of the endemic and relict species are found at the bottom of the lake.

Although the planktonic diversity is comparatively small, the community is a combination of widespread, endemic and relict species. Benthic community, beside its extraordinary diversity, is characterized also by a high degree of endemism and a presence of relict species and species from genera primarily considered as more diverse in marine habitats. The distribution of the benthic species is not homogeneous, but instead limited to particular habitats. The three zones of diatom communities observed in Lake Ohrid - littoral (up to 10 m in depth), sublittoral (10-25 m) and profundal (25-50 m) - appear to be driven by water depth, and water chemistry (primarily total phosphorous concentration, ammonia and conductivity). These three communities are inhabited by different endemic species. It is assumed that geographic and ecological modes of specialization may play equally important roles in creating and maintaining the extraordinary diatom diversity and endemism in Lake Ohrid.

Intriguingly, both molecular and fossil data show that most of the endemic lineages evolved in the initial phase of the lake development and have been maintained in the recent flora under different environmental conditions over the last 1.3 million years. It has been proposed only recently that three main processes potentially shape the extant patterns of diatom diversity in Lake Ohrid: i) multiple colonization events ‘species scatters’; ii) a single colonization and diversification ‘species flocks’; iii) multiple colonizations with subsequent intra-lacustrine speciation. The last hypothesis is probably most realistic and can explain both the high diversity and endemism of diatoms in Lake Ohrid. Ongoing research on molecular phylogenies of several diatom genera will provide deeper insights about the age and origin of the endemic diatom lineages and improve our understanding about the long-term drivers of diatom endemism in Lake Ohrid.

Analyses of the fossil diatom flora preserved in the sediments of Lake Ohrid, reveal presence of four major shifts in diatom composition during its existence. The shifts of the dominant species in the fossil diatom assemblages are driven primarily by temperature-induced productivity shifts, while the other physico-chemical factors like nutrients play a secondary role. These environmental changes resulted in the extinction of some endemic and relict species, both from plankton and benthos, while some species (such as Cyclotella fottii, Amphora transylvanica, Campylodiscus spp. Surirella spp.) have a greater resistance to environmental changes and have survived to the present days. However, their existence nowadays is strongly endangered due to dramatically increased eutrophication of the lake i.e. more nutrients have entered the lake causing a dense growth of plant life, as the result of inappropriate management of the lake and its surroundings. Species from two communities living in the littoral zone and in the depth of the lake are at a high risk of extinction. The main factors affecting the littoral community are infrastructural projects, the modification of the habitats (destruction or fragmentation of the reed belt) and variation of the water level (dropping up of the littoral zone). Factors affecting the profundal zone are different and result from eutrophication, including decreases in sedimentation rates of organic and inorganic sediment, turbidity (cloudiness) of the water, nutrient concentration, and pollutants, as well as decreases in the phototrophic zone and concentration of oxygen.

Continuation of strong human impacts on the lake will result in the extinction of many endemic and relict species. In such a case the lake will lose its significant attribute ‘most diverse and important’. Diatoms have survived two million years facing different challenges, having witnessed many changes in the environment. But their future is uncertain due to the inappropriate treatment of the lake by humans as a water reservoir or commercial product. Lake Ohrid is heritage that must be protected, defended and treated as such.

Authors: Zlatko Levkov, Aleksandra Cvetkoska & Elena Jovanovska
Lin, situated on the shores of Lake Ohrid, is that picturesque village and peninsula you see once you begin to descend Qafa e Thanes on the border between Albania and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. It is a lovely village with red-roofed houses and covered in flowers. The lake here shows its deepest blue, creating a perfect harmony against the hilly bay. If you are a visitor to Lin and want to stay a night or two, Rosa’s guest house is perfect. Everybody knows Rosa and her husband, who run one of the two guest houses in the village. She has learned how to promote her business, and the guest house is already on TripAdvisor and in many travel guides that include Lin in their itineraries. Rosa understands that listing a business with online travel agencies and establishing connections with tour guides and tour operators are crucial to having tourists throughout the year, not only in summer. But the best promotion is her hospitality: the way she cares for her quests, cooks and serves breakfast, her clean house and permanent smile. It means a lot to a tourist. People talk about the house, suggest it to friends, and so she always has visitors. The three-storey house has six rooms with twelve beds, though it can accommodate more than 15 people. Rosa has thought much on how to keep guests busy and happy. The best place is the garden with its lake view. The lake is all your feet, and right there is a private boat free for guests. You can take a ride onto Ohrid Lake, feel and breathe it fully. She also has a private beach, where you can sunbathe and swim throughout the day. Her guest house is a Bed & Breakfast, though you can order lunch or dinner, which she will prepare with care using the fresh produce of the village. The king of the table is always Koran, the endemic trout, one of 17 species of fish found in the depths of Lake Ohrid. Byrek or lakror filled with fresh vegetables are always part of the meal. Some wine or raki is always present. After a restful sleep, you have the best breakfast ever: eggs, butter, pancakes with jam, homemade with a rich flavour. The tourists she looks after are delighted with their stay at her guest house, promising to return. The B&B forms part of Tour Egnatia, for tourists from as far away as Australia, which includes a night’s accommodation in her house. Rosa is full of optimism about the business she has chosen. She is only 35 years old and is confident in managing her business with her husband, and has ideas to expand; already, in the summer, she takes on two people—her nieces. This family business concentrated on Rosa, her house and her hospitality is an example for other residents by the shores of Lake Ohrid.

The City of Pogradec was settled in the Neolithic period, situated in an amazing landscape of blue set against a green background, surrounded by a ring of mountains. Lake Ohrid, the deepest lake in the Balkans, was created more than two million years ago, and its shores are home to unique cultural monuments. As part of this special natural and cultural heritage, the people living in the area have developed and preserved culinary traditions, crafts, artisanship and provided hospitality for visitors over the millennia.

If you ask a tourist to name the attractions in Pogradec, in addition to Lake Ohrid they will mention the Basilica at Lin, the castle at Pogradec, Kamje Stone, Golik Bridge, and the Tombs of Lower Selca. If you ask a tourist or a resident, whether they have explored these places, few will answer yes; as a result of the lack of investment made in these iconic monuments. It is difficult for travelers to access and explore the magic of these places and experience the history they possess. These monuments are not fully unveiled to the public, rather, they lie forgotten and abandoned. However, the tourism sector of Pogradec Municipality has some ideas on how to develop these places and turn them into must-see destinations.

The lovely guest house of Rosa in Lin village

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Basilica of Lin

All of the local population and also some people from outside the municipality, know of its historical importance. It should be fully or partially opened to the public. Currently, only a small part of the basilica mosaics can be seen.

The architecture of the baptistery is rare, comparable only with the one at Butrint, which is why it should be unveiled to the public to display proudly to the community and visitors the rich heritage of this region. Information points, signage, photographs and descriptions about the artifacts, including the basilica rooms, are needed and they should be discreetly installed in order to preserve the ambience of the place and also because the experience of discovering that one gains is unique and incomparable with over-promoted sites. A tourist office could be set up to offer tickets to visitors, while specialists must be employed to care for the maintenance and preservation of this historical place.
The History Museum of Pogradec has a rich collection of artefacts. These objects represent the history of the region, from prehistoric up until the present. For us they have an extraordinary value, because they are part of our historical memory. The value of the objects is very important, because the Pogradec region has had a history that is different from anywhere else in Albania, unique even. For this reason most of the objects are from a special local historical context, and are unique in comparison to those of other parts of Albanian territory.

To which period does the oldest object belong?

The collection is comprised of a range of objects that belong to different periods of history. Some archaeological artefacts date back to the Neolithic, some 8,000 years ago, while others belong to the late Middle Ages. The ethnographic objects date from the late Middle Ages until the beginning of the 18th century, while the documents and photographs belong to the period from the 18th century up until the end of second World War.

Which aspects and objects belong to the Lake Ohrid region?

In fact, the oldest settlements in the Pogradec area are found along the lake shores. Since ancient times, when this area began to be populated by people, it has never been abandoned, which is why you can find plenty of traces from the people who lived here. For example, the objects found in the Lin area belong to the Bronze Age, Iron Age and late antiquity. Meanwhile in the Mesolithic area we have findings from the Roman period. In Pogradec we have objects from the early Neolithic, up until the Middle Ages. Starova belongs to Illyrian period. Gethenjasi has a history represented by a complex of personal objects belonging to an Illyrian aristocrat who lived during the Roman period. Meanwhile, Tushemishi has artefacts from the Illyrian civilization and late antiquity. We want to preserve this unique heritage, and pass it on to future generations, since our region is very rich in history and culture.

What investment is needed for this museum?

We use 70% of the building space to display artefacts, but we do not have space to show all of the objects that we have. We need a new building, perhaps, in order to have more space to display all of the artefacts and documents, to better present the history and heritage of Pogradec and its environs. We would want the museum to inform visitors about all periods, and present more artefacts and information to the public.

In October 2016, you participated in the ICCROM course Promoting people-centred approaches to the natural and cultural heritage (PCA16) carried out as part of the EU-funded Lake Ohrid region project. Has the course made you want to approach your work differently? How do you now consider the role of the museum in the community or the local community as part of the values of the museum collection?

PCA16 has helped me to consider the local communities not only as a ‘social concept’ that has existed in the past and has created our history and traditions but also as a vital part of our present and future. It has helped me to understand that in fact, the local community is the main actor not only in the conservation of our cultural heritage but also in the creation or alteration of our traditions in the present and their inheritance in the future. After PCA16, as part of the Museum of Pogradec and part of the local community myself, I now am more aware that as a present local community we can either add either take away to the values that the past local communities have created.

The Museum of Pogradec is located in the centre of the city and consists of three main pavilions dedicated to Archaeology, Ethnography and History. The artefacts and historical documents are laid out chronologically and typologically so the visitor has the possibility to follow the evolution of the objects on display. The working tools, ceramics, armour, jewellery, coins and clothing. Students are regular visitors, since their studies include learning about the city’s history and cultural heritage. The museum also serves as a place for a range of activities and conferences, of an historical or heritage nature.

The Museum of Pogradec is a two-storey building. It is still too small to display all of the objects stored inside. Nearly three-quarters of the space is used to display the artefacts, with the remainder used to store, restore and protect the items prior to display, and to accommodate the administration offices.

We met Froseda Angjellari Tola, the young, hardworking and enthusiastic Director of the Museum, to learn more about the opportunities and challenges that the Museum of Pogradec faces.

Ms Froseda what is the importance of the objects that this museum has?

The History Museum of Pogradec has a rich collection of artefacts. These objects represent the history of the region, from prehistoric up until the present. For us they have an extraordinary value, because they are part of our historical memory. The value of the objects is very important, because the Pogradec region has had a history that is different from anywhere else in Albania, unique even. For this reason most of the objects are from a special local historical context, and are unique in comparison to those of other parts of Albanian territory.

Related News

Albanian Parliament approves a law on Protected Areas

At the last plenary session, held on 4 May 2017, the Albanian Parliament approved a Law on Protected Areas. This law reflects international standards of nature conservation and represents a big step forward for nature conservation in the country. The law was the result of a year-long consultation with the public. The law complies with national and international legislation on the conservation of natural habitats and wild flora and fauna. The Law ‘On Protected Areas’ aims at effective and independent management of all existing and future protected areas, regulating the content of management plans and the ongoing management of protected areas. This law underwent a number of consultations with the public over the past year, with twelve round-tables during which the draft was discussed with representatives of universities, civil society, local communities and donors.

Macedonian Law on Nature Protection prepared

Within the successfully completed EU-IPA funded project Capacity building for implementation of Natura 2000, alongside the introduction of the concept of the EU ecological network Natura 2000, the new Macedonian Law ‘On Nature Protection’ and its sub-regulations have been prepared. In order to harmonise the national legislation and fulfil obligations under EU directives on habitats and birds, the Ministry of Environment and Physical Planning initiated the project in 2016, using it as an opportunity to transfer experience from EU member states and to establish and develop the Natura 2000 network. Stakeholders involved in the project included the public and private sectors, as well as civil society organisations: the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Water Economy, the public institutions Pelister, Mavrovo and Galicica National Parks, the public enterprise Macedonian Forests, local governments, the sector for tourism, hunting and fishing, non-governmental organisations working for environmental protection, owners and land users and other involved actors.

UN Security Council adopts historic resolution for the protection of heritage

Resolution 2347 is the first resolution adopted by the Security Council to focus on cultural heritage. The unanimous support for the resolution reflects a new recognition of the importance of heritage protection for peace and security. UNESCO is guardian of a wide array of legal instruments that are of vital importance in the protection of cultural heritage. "The deliberate destruction of heritage is a war crime. It has become a tactic of war to tear societies over long term, in a strategy of cultural cleansing. This is why defending cultural heritage is more than a cultural issue, it is a security imperative, inseparable from that of defending human lives," UNESCO Director-General Bokova told the Security Council in support of the resolution.
The legends of Prespa and Ohrid

The modern Batman—Dr Philippe Theou

Little was known about the importance of bats in Albania until scientist Dr Philippe Theou began his research into the bats of our country. Supported by the EU-funded project NatuRAL, wildlife rangers and monitoring specialists from the Regional Administration of Protected Areas have been learning about monitoring bats from Dr Philippe Theou. The goal is to better the understanding of bat populations in the protected areas of Albania, and to ensure a better management of the habitats of these protected species. Bats are species of key importance for ecosystems and for human economies. One study found that a small bat colony of around 100 individuals can eat one ton of insects per year. Such regulation of insect populations has no negative impacts on human health, or soil and water quality unlike chemical insecticides.

Most European bat species are found in Albania and some maternal colonies comprise more than 7,000 individuals, while hibernating groups can include more than 2,000 individuals. This makes Albania highly important for bat conservation regionally, especially given the important migration undertaken by some species, with the same individuals recorded in Albania, Bulgaria, Central Europe and even Russia. Albania offers bats a diversity of habitats—caves, old houses, trees, military tunnels and bunkers—widely distributed throughout the country. Former military buildings are very interesting, providing roosts for bats.

The ongoing work will help the protection of the habitats and at the same time involve the local community in the activities. So far, 32 bat species have been recorded in Albania, a very large number, given that 50 species have been recorded for all of Europe, including Iceland and Western Russia. Croatia and Bulgaria have the highest diversity recorded so far, with 35 bat species. The upcoming research might help find species new to Albania. Dr Theou said that they have visited the ten protected areas that are the focus of NatuRAL. Monitoring missions are held throughout the year, mostly in two specific periods: winter, since this is the hibernation period, and late spring and summer, to investigate the maternity colonies. During the rest of the year information is collected on the distribution of the species and their migrations.

Divers and experts in the lake, Dr Theou.

So the lake is bad and good to the end.
There is a similar legend for Struga. When God created Ohrid Lake, he said: “created the most beautiful place in the world, but people are too sinful to live in peace on the banks of this lake. So, I will send a monster. Nobody knew what the monster looked like, but all were all scared and no one had the courage to live next to the lake. One day a young man named Struga came to the lake and dived into the waters, seeking to confront the monster. It was a fight to the death. In the end, the monster won the battle and ate the young man. After this fight, people decided to challenge the monster. They had found the courage to set up a village on the lake shore, naming him in honour of the hero, Struga. There is also a real story from the Albanian side. It speaks of a town buried under Lake Ohrid belonging to the Enkelejd tribe of Illiria. Its remains are to be found but the legend says that an earthquake caused the whole town to sink beneath the waves.

Ilustrating photos, paints by Anastas Konstandini, Tasos.
Protecting Lake Ohrid

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Ministry of Environment and Physical Planning
of the FYR of Macedonia

ICCMROM
(International Centre for the Study of the
Preservation and Restoration of Cultural Property)

ICOMOS
(International Council on Monuments and Sites)

IUCN
(International Union for Conservation of Nature)

Whats next?
- Lake Ohrid Day (21 June 2017)
- ‘How to green your business’ workshop for tourism service providers in Pogradec, part of Waste management awareness Campaign (30th June 2017)
- 6th Transboundary Meeting, mid-September 2017, Pogradec, Albania

Protecting Lake Ohrid
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