Protecting Lake Ohrid

TOWARDS STRENGTHENED GOVERNANCE OF THE SHARED TRANSBOUNDARY NATURAL AND CULTURAL HERITAGE OF THE LAKE OHRID REGION

IN THIS ISSUE

1. Sixth transboundary platform meeting for safeguarding the Lake Ohrid Region (page 2)
2. #OurLakeOhrid, Photo Contest- an album with the best photos (page 3)
3. Marking of trails in Lake Ohrid Region (page 3)
4. Greening the tourism industry in Pogradec (page 4)
5. Mobility week in Pogradec (page 4)
6. Guidelines for the built heritage of LOR in and around Pogradec, on the Albanian side of Lake Ohrid (page 5)
7. Albania’s first Natural World Heritage Property, inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List (page 6)
8. World Heritage Committee Decision on Natural and Cultural Heritage of Ohrid Region (page 6)
9. Interview with Elizabeta Veljanoska Sarafiloska, Director of PSI Hydrobiological Institute, Ohrid (page 7)
10. Portrait - The woman who constructs wooden boats (page 8)
11. A short visit to Lin village, locked in the past (page 8)
12. Interview with a nature explorer of Lake Ohrid Region (page 9)
13. Flora and fauna of Pogradec area, Lake Ohrid Region (page 9)
14. Article on a BBC reportage & the Guardian: Ohrid, One of the Ten Best Lakeside Towns in Europe (page 9)
15. What’s next and partners (page 10)
The sixth Trans-boundary Platform meeting of the project "Towards strengthened governance of the shared trans-boundary natural and cultural heritage of the Lake Ohrid region" took place on 14 and 15 September 2017 in Pogradec, Albania. The meeting was part of the joint EU-UNESCO initiative, held in close cooperation with Albanian and Macedonian authorities, to strengthen trans-boundary cooperation for the management of the region’s natural and cultural heritage.

More than 20 representatives participated in the meeting, including officials from the two countries, environment, tourism and culture ministries and national commissions to UNESCO, as well as from the region’s municipalities. Representatives from UNESCO and advisory bodies to the World Heritage Convention, ICOMOS and IUCN were also in attendance.

The specific objectives of this Trans-boundary Platform meeting included the identification of additional needs with regard to trans-boundary consultation and coordination for the draft World Heritage nomination document, and the provision of an update on progress for finalizing the management planning documents for the existing World Heritage property and the proposed extension in Albania. The meeting also sought to define options for trans-boundary cooperation and governance for the property, in line with the management requirements for World Heritage trans-boundary properties.

The meeting provided the opportunity to continue the significant work achieved in the previous meetings for improvement of bilateral cooperation between representatives from both Albanian and Macedonian local and central administrations, the tourism sector, and those in charge of urban and rural development, culture, nature protection, resource management and the environment.

Several presentations were given at the meeting, including an overview of the progress made so far in implementation of project "Towards strengthened governance of the shared trans-boundary natural and cultural heritage of the Lake Ohrid region", provided by Alexandra Fiebig of the UNESCO World Heritage Centre. This was followed by an overview of the process for the preparation of a nomination document for the extension of the existing World Heritage property to the Albanian part of the Lake Ohrid region, presented by representatives from the Albanian Ministry of Environment, Ministry of Culture, ICOMOS, and IUCN. Representatives from the Macedonian Ministry of Environment and Physical Planning and Ministry of Culture provided an update on implementation of the World Heritage Committee Decision 41 COM 7B.34 adopted in Krakow, Poland, including the Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) consultation process for the draft management plan for the existing World Heritage property.

To supplement these discussions Andrea Goertler from the GIZ Tirana Office presented the main findings and recommendations from the reports concerning shore-zone functionality and fisheries and Mirjam de Koning, Executive Director of Prespa Ohrid Nature Trust Fund (PONT), presented the fund’s five-year strategy.

At the end of the meeting, a resolution on follow-up and steps to achieve an effective trans-boundary management structure and mechanisms was drafted and agreed upon by the participants, as an important step in ensuring that the management of the Lake Ohrid region is in line with the requirements for World Heritage trans-boundary properties.
Our Lake Ohrid Photo Contest

When you visit a lake, make sure you have your camera handy. Lakes inspire photographers, and this includes our Lake Ohrid too, one of the deepest lakes and the oldest lake in Europe, surrounded by majestic mountains and wonderful nature. To capture the beauty of this region, a second competition with the hashtag #OurLakeOhrid ran for two months, from 25 July-25 September within the framework of the project Towards strengthened governance of the shared transboundary natural and cultural heritage of the Lake Ohrid region, financed by the European Union and the government of Albania, and implemented by UNESCO. Followers of the project pages on Facebook, Instagram and Twitter were invited to post their photos from the region to spread the word, also inviting their friends to share their photos in order to help promote this extraordinary heritage.

Hundreds of photographs were submitted before the deadline, and the top 50 will be published in an album of Lake Ohrid by the EU-UNESCO project. The album will be available in print and electronic version, presenting the author’s name and the story behind each photo. Each of these 50 winning photographs will be awarded a copy of the Lake Ohrid album. Photographs will also be showcased in an electronic album that will be available on the UNESCO World Heritage Centre project website.

It is amazing to see all of the photos taken from different parts of Lake Ohrid, at different moments of the day, in different seasons, but with one thing in common: a love for #OurLakeOhrid.

The hashtag was quickly adapted by all followers, and used extensively during the photography competition and at all other times! All seem to love our Lake Ohrid, a true wonder of nature.

Marking of Trails in Lake Ohrid Region

The Lake Ohrid Region is of immense natural and cultural value. From the rugged mountains to the clear cool waters of the lake, the entire region offers an enchanting escape, and the potential for unforgettable adventures. This richness and diversity is best explored slowly and deeply.

The Lake Ohrid region project is currently working with partners and local stakeholders with the aim of making the gems of the region better known and more easily accessible; they await exploration by many more people. Several hiking and biking trails and interest points have been identified and are currently being marked and signposted in the field. Staff members of the Regional Agency for Protected Areas have been trained in the identification of potential locations and in the installation and maintenance of soft tourism infrastructure. In order to support sustainable tourism in the area, the project partners are preparing a dedicated website, brochure and information panels leach in three languages: Albanian, Macedonian and English that would promote carefully selected locations for the enjoyment of domestic, regional and international visitors.

Locations that are well worth visiting include the village of Alaruj with its exciting nearby hiking trails. At its highest point of 2,287 metres above sea level, the mountain range of Mali i Thate offers rewarding views of the two lakes: Ohrid and Prespa, and the large settlements of Pogradec and Ohrid. From there one can enjoy views of the Prespa National Parks of Albania and Greece, and the mountain peaks of Galicica National Park, and even as far as the Traditional Land Use in the region. Several smaller trails lead to the top of the peninsula, offering 360-degree views of the lake and mountains. Each path leads to a different adventure: a hidden church, a derelict bunker, mountainside vineyards, and more.

Farther away from the concentrated settlements near Lake Ohrid sits a distinct natural phenomenon called Guri i Kamjes. This unusual rock formation is perched atop a ridge deep in the hinterland, between the villages of Dardhas and Osnat. Guri i Kamjes, offering panoramic views that reach as far as Lake Ohrid and even farther in the other direction. The journey is as rewarding as the destination itself, taking you through a wide variety of farmland, villages and natural landscapes.

Many high perches and secluded trails are easily within walking distance of the region’s urban centres, while others require a short car trip or cycle ride. While Lake Ohrid’s hinterland offers endless opportunities for exploration, many trails and roads are still unmarked. Before embarking on a trip, step into the RAPA information centre in Tushemisht where you will find maps and suggestions for your trip. and, once started, be prepared to ask locals for advice, and be sure to take along enough food and water.
Waste Management in Lake Ohrid Region

The activity Waste Management Awareness Campaign as part of the Lake Ohrid region project identified tourism businesses in Lake Ohrid Region as one of the main target groups to reach out to. Tourism services, such as accommodation providers, bars and restaurants, have a key role to play in managing community waste, but also in communicating with the visitors to the area. With this in mind, two workshops were held as a means of introducing the issue of waste management and the promotion of successful practices from around the globe for tourism businesses in Pogradec.

In a joint effort organised by the project partners and Pogradec Municipality, a first workshop took place on 30 June gathering hotel, bar and restaurant owners from the area around the lake. The workshop was prepared by Ms Deirdre Shurland, international expert on sustainable tourism, and Ms Matilda Andoni, Co-director of the Albanian Tourism Association. During the day, the participants were introduced to the issues and engaged in discussions on waste management, visitors and business development opportunities. Municipality representatives presented the waste management plan, after which the floor was opened up to questions with productive interaction between the community representatives taking part, in this case the business sector.

The concept of the workshops was to introduce, follow up and offer space for constructive discussions among businesses and the local government. The first workshop was held prior to the tourism season, giving the participants time to anticipate the topic and prepare for issues they will face and what they should look out for. As a follow up, a second workshop was held on 29 September, after the end of the summer season. This workshop focused on past experiences and addressed the ways in which tourism providers can take steps towards greening their business. Such changes include revisiting their internal management policy, improving waste management and looking at ways to increase energy and water savings. The participants were introduced to sustainable certification and available options to register a business under one of the numerous certification schemes.

Mobility Week in Pogradec

The Waste Management Awareness Campaign in the Lake Ohrid Region also entails activities aimed at sensitizing local communities towards the concept of the Reduce, Recycle and Dispose waste hierarchy. For this purpose the project partnered with the local civil society organization from Pogradec, Une, Gruaja (Me, Woman), which has a history of success with community activities, especially with children and young people. As part of the project campaign the team from Une, Gruaja mobilized young people for a number of activities that combined different aspects of waste awareness, from 16-22 September. A creative workshop was coordinated by a local artist who led an arts and crafts workshop with young people on the topic of recycling. The children made a sculpture of a swan from recycled plastic bottles and drew recycling materials that were exhibited at the central fountain in Pogradec. Children were also taken on a walk to Lin peninsula to visit the XII century mosaic. On the way down from the mosaic, as a way of raising awareness, the young people picked up waste along the streets of Lin, also engaging with the local community.
Since last autumn, a team of Albanian architects and experts led by the Conservation architect Kliti Kalamata, notably assisted by architect Amanda Cici and other staff mobilized specifically by the Ministry of Culture, is developing the contents of what is going to become a referential publication for traditional architecture in the Lake Ohrid Region. Indeed, the manual is meant to become an invaluable reference tool for all those who are interested in and responsible for the preservation and conservation of Pogradec Area’s built heritage, such as local architects, engineers, and artisans. It is the constitution of knowledge tools about building techniques, meant to provide those involved with a technical accuracy, and should be made available to the professional community in order to promote:

- the use of appropriate repair and restoration specifications and methods
- professionally accepted methods of rehabilitation
- integration of new building systems into historical buildings
- optimization of the restoration process technically, socially, and economically.

It is an illustrated and practical learning/training tool, usable and useful, able to address real technical problems and really assist the local administrations as well as the state land notably the architects from the Ministry of Culture.

More specifically, it will highlight the value and merits of local traditional architecture, underline and explain its fragilities and wrong interventions, and propose solutions for rehabilitation, maintenance, and improvement/adaptation to modern use. As such, it is also a survey on the effects of disruptions which, for more than half a century now, have been affecting ways of renovating housing and construction, as well as on the various ways to preserve old buildings.

Finally, it is an awareness raising campaign for the decision-makers, the professionals and the general public at large, toward the great values carried out by this traditional architecture and the numerous dangers threatening it.

**A Work in progress.**

As the work is completed under the guidance and with the assistance of ICOMOS International experts Luisa De Marco and Christophe Graz, they have provided arch. Kalamata and his team with numerous examples of similar documentation, which served as a first base for their preliminary analysis during the last months of the year 2016, and narrowed down the specific topics and objectives to be covered for the Lake Ohrid Region.

On the base of a resulting table of contents, the team has proceeded since the beginning of 2017 with survey work in the field, taking pictures, drafting basic record drawings, measuring, and discussing with artisans.

This survey phase is now fully completed, notably thanks to the enthusiasm of the participants, who spread through out Lin, Tushemisht and Pogradec. Arch. Amanda Cici and Foton Qirinxhi, main figures in Mr. Kalamata’s team, were joined for this work by two architects from the Institute of Monuments of Culture, Oksi Buliku and Larin Dvorani, as well as by two other young volunteer architects following the course for restoration program, Eni Gjoni and Piro Karanxhe.

The onsite survey phase also acted as a training phase, and all of these young practitioners could learn a lot: since they benefited from the direct guidance of the most experienced and knowledgeable arch. Kalamata on the local typologies and associated techniques.

As Mr. Kalamata expressed it in late June, “I think the work has gone well and now we have all the material we need from the field. We have taken many samples, good and bad ones, and we have fixed the way in which to present them through designs and drawings.”

Recently, since the onsite collection of the data was completed and organized, the team has completed the analysis of the typologies and pathologies of the existing built heritage, and associated them with detailed sketches and photographs. They are now in the process of drafting the sections on recovery and repairs, with practical files, as well as improving the associated sketches. These will then be revised and validated with the international expertise of ICOMOS.

Photographs largely illustrated, the Guidelines will not only introduce the various typologies and techniques, but also the good practice repairs, where local craftsmen are in action, hereby photographed through the various steps/stages by the survey team documenting the process.

Photographs by K. Kalamata and team

In the coming weeks, the work will be concentrating around editing issues, such as the translation to English, and the graphic design and presentation of the publication including the physical and digital version. The manual, mostly addressed to the technicians in charge of the conservation of the site and the inhabitants themselves, may be designed in a dual format. This format would comprise both a booklet presenting the local cultural heritage through its typologies, creating artistic features on buildings and associated traditions, and a series of illustrated technical cards to show the most recurrent conservation problems and their possible remedies in the form of best practices. However the final format still remains to be decided, in consultation with the Albanian institutions.

The publication is expected to be printed by the end of 2017, and therefore available from the early 2018, hopefully shaping new perspectives for the very beautiful, rich, and efficient traditional forms of architecture of Lake Ohrid Region, and serving as an example for other areas in the country, where other traditional forms of architecture also deserve careful concern and guidance.
The first Albanian natural World Heritage property was inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List by the World Heritage Committee at its 41st session, which took place from 2 to 12 July this year in Krakow, Poland. Two of the country’s beech forests were inscribed as component parts of the transnational serial World Heritage property ‘Ancient and Primeval Beech Forests of the Carpathians and Other Regions of Europe’. The inscribed components of the World Heritage property are the beech forests at Lumi i Gashit (north Kosovë) located within Valbona Valley National Park, which is a strict nature reserve (IUCN category Ib), the highest category of protected area recognized by the World Commission on Protected Areas, a body of IUCN, and Rrajca Forest, within the Shebenik-Jabllanice National Park (east Elbasani) also a strict nature reserve.

The inscription marked wonderful news from the World Heritage Committee during its examination of nominations to the World Heritage List on 7 July 2017. The transnational extension of the World Heritage site of the ‘Primeval Beech Forests of the Carpathians and the Ancient Beech Forests of Germany’ (Germany, Slovakia, Ukraine) now stretches across twelve countries in Europe, which include Albania, Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Germany, Italy, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain and Ukraine. Following the end of the last Ice Age, European beech spread out from a few isolated refuges in the Alps, Carpathians, Mediterranean and Pyrenees over a short period of a few thousand years in a process that is continuing. This successful expansion is related to this tree species’ flexibility and tolerance of different climatic, geographical and physical conditions. Prior to human intervention, the beech forests of Europe occupied some 91,000,000 ha, while currently, primal or ancient beech forest comprise a total of 90,000 ha.

We interviewed Ermal Halimi, specialist in the Biodiversity and Protected Areas Directorate at the Ministry of Tourism and Environment of Albania, about the nomination process to inscribe the Albanian beech forests on the World Heritage List.

**Mr. Halimi, when did this process start at the Ministry of Tourism and Environment?**

The whole process started with the inscription of primeval beech forests of the Carpathians in 2007. In 2011, the property was extended by five component parts in Germany. The World Heritage Committee recommended that other State Parties be included, where such natural forests have existed, unchecked for centuries. From 2012–2019, the European screening process took place, financed by Germany. Forestry experts came to Albania to inspect the nominated areas, in particular two protected areas: Valbona Valley NP and Shebenik-Jabllanice NP. The process for the preparation of the nomination files for these beech forests took two years, from 2017–2018, and was financed by Austria. The last meeting in Krakow decided that Lumi i Gashit beech forest (12,615.2 ha) and Rrajca beech forest (12,129.45 ha) are components of the extended natural World Heritage property.

**How is it that these two areas have been well protected over the years?**

There are two reasons: firstly, these forests are very difficult to reach. The road conditions are poor, and the forests are located in very deep mountainous areas, far from inhabited zones. Secondly, these beech forests are part of two strictly protected areas, inside National Parks, that have had a protected status since the 1990s.

The conservation issues presented to the World Heritage Committee in 2017 included the contribution of a number of major planned projects. In its decision, the Committee requested that the State Party develop a Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) to assess the impacts of all major projects on the OUV of the property and measures to address the potential threats. The Committee also requested that the State Party halt the construction projects in subsections a and e of the A3 road and the Galicica ski resort within the property as these may have negative impacts on its Outstanding Universal Value, and undertake a study of alternative routes for the railway of the Pan-European Corridor VIII. The State Party was requested to submit a progress report on the implementation of the decision by 1 February 2018 for review by the World Heritage Centre and the Advisory Bodies, and if in their assessment insufficient progress is being made, for examination by the World Heritage Committee at its 42nd session in 2018. The State Party was also asked to submit an updated report by 1 December 2018, for examination by the World Heritage Committee at its 43rd session in 2019. For more information please visit UNESCO website.

**Who is responsible for better protecting these forests now that they are on the World Heritage list?**

The National Agency of Protected Areas, which is under the Ministry of Tourism and Environment, is responsible for protecting all National Parks of Albania, including Valbona Valley NP and Shebenik-Jabllanice NP, where these beech forests are situated. The agency is very active in this area and has done good work in informing the locals of the importance of these areas and ensuring that the woodlands are not cut down but rather protected.

Albania has a very rich biodiversity. We have at least 800 natural protected areas and nature monuments across the country, and these comprise one-third of all of the biodiversity in Europe.
Adopting a national strategy for monitoring and designating the fish of Lake Ohrid, with special focus on the famous Ohrid trout (Salmo trutta ilieina) by taking measures for artificial spawning in these facilities. We interviewed Mrs. Elizabeta Veljanoska Sarafiloska, Director of PSI Hydrobiological Institute, Ohrid.

Mrs. Elizabeta, what are your findings and what is the role of the Institute regarding conserving the World Heritage Site?

Lake Ohrid Region is one of the 35 mixed UNESCO World Heritage properties in the world. Thanks to an initiative of the Hydrobiological Institute, which managed to present to a wider audience the importance and uniqueness of this lake - its age, high level of biodiversity, high level of endemicism, relic species, oligotrophic water. It was designated as a UNESCO World Heritage natural property in 1979, while a year later the cultural attributes of the city of Ohrid and its surroundings were also inscribed as part of UNESCO World Heritage property. Thus, from its foundation in 1935 until the present, the Hydrobiological Institute undertakes measures for conservation of the lake and its unique living world and its natural habitats by monitoring the physical chemical and biological components, increasing public awareness about existing problems that threaten the water quality and existing biocenosis and presenting solutions for mitigation and improvement in the current conditions that deviate from the general oligotrophic condition.

Your Institute monitors the water quality of Lake Ohrid. What problems have you encountered?

We have monitored the lake for more than eight decades. Over this time, we have always applied the methods and innovations in contemporary limnology, both through equipping our facilities with sophisticated apparatus and by the training of our scientific staff in expert scientific centres around the world. Thus, the problems we have encountered generally are of a financial matter. Most of the finances we obtain from the national and international funds are limited: i.e. they concern practical realisation of particular projects. After finalization of the projects we are unable to perform extensive subsequent monitoring due to a lack of finances; i.e. the number of the sampling sites are always being reduced to a minimum, as well as the number of monitored parameters. This inevitably creates gaps in the chronological data sets. Adopting a national strategy for monitoring and designating the Hydrobiological Institute as a leading institution in monitoring is an imperative our institution is striving to achieve, for the protection of the Macedonian water bodies. Thus, only a national monitoring strategy, organized in accordance with the European Water Framework Directive (WFD), in which the Hydrobiological Institute will have the leading role as a result of its great expertise and experience in WFD implementation in the country, will benefit a better and more comprehensive protection of the water bodies.

What do you think of the water quality on the other side of the lake, the Albanian side?

In recent years, jointly with our Albanian partners, we have completed two scientific monitoring projects, and experts of both countries have had an opportunity to compare the quality of the water on both sides of the lake. In general, the quality of the water in the Albanian part is similar to that of the Macedonian side, and as expected, the quality of the water in the open area (pelagic) is of the top category. But, unlike the pelagic zone, the sample sites near heavily populated areas, such as Pogradec or the village of Lin, are characterized by a deteriorated quality of water and ecology, ranging from moderate to poor. Increased concentration of phosphorous is recorded in the area of the River Drilon in Tushemisht, pointing to excessive nutrient loading coming from household waste and communal waters.

What are the measures to be taken on both sides to preserve Lake Ohrid and its species?

As mentioned above, both sides should adopt national strategies and laws for protection of the natural heritage of the Lake Ohrid region and the lake itself. First of all, the lake should be under permanent monitoring as an initial stage that would enable an initial assessment of the current status. To prevent discrepancies in the assessment resulting from the use of different methods, the parameters followed, frequency of sampling, data processing, and so on, simply both sides should implement the criteria of the European WFD, as follows:

- Harmonization of the national existing legislation on the protection of nature in both countries with the European legislation and its practical use.
- Increasing public awareness of the importance, uniqueness and indivisibility of the lake in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Albania, observing and treating the lake as a whole UNESCO World Heritage Site.
- Strengthening collaboration among scientists. NGOs and stakeholders would lead to a strengthening of confidence between the nations and consequently to a better understanding of the importance of the lake and its protection.
- Creating bilateral committees that would coordinate all activities related to practical realization of all of the above.
Genta, the young woman who constructs wooden boats

She is very young but already well known. The media have published articles about her work and the UN Women magazine has even dedicated a cover to this special lady from Albania. Her name is Genta Ahmeti, and she is the only woman in Albania producing wooden boats, a tradition that is disappearing but Genta is working hard to revive it.

Genta runs a wood factory called ‘Artisanal’. She is also the director and founder of the project ‘Life on a Boat’, which aims to build artisanal boats and to give life to a naval museum in Albania.

We were so impressed with her work, and asked her, as everybody else, the same question: why had she decided to construct boats, an unusual profession for a woman. She says with her characteristic smile that this was all about her passion. This profession was rooted in her since she was a little girl. Her father was a wood engineer and so she was raised in a family where wood was a major part of life. Even her first gifts were made from wood, or tools to carve the wood. She says that these things attracted her more than dolls. Her childhood led to her future. She studied wood engineering in Tirana University, and then went to Italy for further studies. When she returned she had formed everything clear in her mind: she would produce boats, but only from wood. She does not like it if all the waters of Albania are filled with plastic boats, which are not ecological and are ugly.

Genta has produced several models so far, but her projects are unstoppable. She says that there are still some solitary masters producing wooden boats, in Pogradec and Shkodra. These boats are produced for fishers in these big lakes, because they know the benefits of wooden boats over plastic ones. When we asked her if she has any plan to bring her boats to Lake Ohrid, she said that next year she would like to bring sailing boats to Pogradec, which could be used for tourism purposes. She sees a bright future in this business, as she thinks that everyone will understand that wooden boats are much better than plastic ones, and perhaps over time they can be replaced.

Genta is happy to revive this tradition and to follow in the footsteps of her father. Her next project is to open a naval museum in Albania, showing the history of wooden boats in the country, as well as displaying new models. We need more women like Genta, working so hard to revive old traditions.

A short visit to Lin, the village locked into the past

It was a very hot day at the end of July. The newsletter team happened to be on the road from Pogradec to Tirana and decided to go for a short visit to the Lin peninsula. From above the view is amazing, enticing you to go there to see the houses that from up on the hill look like they blend into the blue waters of Lake Ohrid. The village looks somewhat empty at first sight, but when you enter it, you see that there are quite a few visitors in Lin. The waiter told us that during the summer season, you cannot find a place to stay, all the guest houses are full with tourists.

The houses have traditional architecture and the cobbled streets are narrow. Apart from the stunning views, Lin village has significant cultural values. The ruins of the church situated on the highest point of the village are the most important place to visit here. We climbed up the hill to see this ancient place, where archaeological excavations and numismatic records found in the church and its mosaic floor date back to the V and VI centuries. The gate was closed and we did not want to stay longer in the 40-degree heat. But immediately, Agim, the guard of the church showed up, opened the gate and invited us in. No ticket was needed.

The Palaeo-Christian church is one of the most important monuments of Albania’s heritage. The structure is decorated with colourful mosaics of flower motifs and geometric and Eucharistic scenes from the early Christian era. Poly-chrome mosaics and rich archaeological materials make the church one of the most beautiful monuments and a most interesting place to visit.

The view from this hill is simply amazing; you see the blue lake, green hills and high surrounding mountains. The village itself seems locked in the past. Nothing indicates that this is a touristic place: no information points, no signs, and issues with waste. The locals, mostly farmers, seem indifferent to the cultural values of this village, and to tourists.

However, this ancient monument retains its beauty and is always worth visiting. The significant cultural values are present, they just require a sustainable approach to tourism so that they may be understood and experienced from visitors far and wide, and protected to be passed on to future generations.
Exploring the nature around Lake Ohrid Region

Apart from the Lake, Lake Ohrid Region has a very beautiful mountainous area around it which offers a spectacular nature. It is ideal for sports such as climbing and hiking and other adventure tourism activities.

A group of up and coming boys and girls are exploring every day the unknown part of Pogradec and Korca Region through tours organized by Visit Pogradec, a local tour agency. We interviewed one of this explorer Mr Erindi Bejko.

Mr. Bejko, you explore the mountainous areas around Lake Ohrid with the guides of Visit Pogradec, Why this region?

First of all, I would like to thank you for the chance to talk to you on this topic. Unfortunately, we currently live in a world where the idea of beauty portrayed in the media focuses on what this or that model is wearing rather than the beauty of nature. Together with my friends we are committed to making this area better known. In everyday life we usually complain about what surrounds us, but never take action to know more. I am specifically referring to getting to know ourselves better and the city and the region where we were born and grew up.

Saying that Pogradec has the Lake is nothing new as one can see it while driving down Qafe-Thane. But if you want to go beyond that, you can see how the lake communicates with the other two lakes of Prespa, and this is a unique experience that you can get only if you climb up Mali i Thate. Travelling from Librazhd to Elbasan and seeing the River Shkumbin flowing below you is something that we all do and experience, but looking at it from the gorge in Valamar Mountain and the Llenga canyons is unbelievable. What I am trying to say is that Pogradec has hidden wonders and natural resources that are much bigger than you can imagine or see when driving your car around the streets of Pogradec.

What attractions would you recommend seeing? What are their historical and natural values?

I would recommend exploring the lakeshore by bicycle and you can explore the beaches that are hidden pearls in which the beauty of flora and fauna is the most impressive. The places are only reachable for adventure tourists?

I would recommend exploring the lakeshore of Lake Ohrid as it is an attractive place not only for the beauty of the area but also for the various lakes in the region. The Prespa lakes area is a unique place where you can enjoy a lot of flora and fauna. Exploring is like an appetite: the more you explore the more you want to explore. Thank you!

The area of Pogradec, in the Lake Ohrid Region, has a very rich flora and fauna. The forestry engineer Mr. Avni Mara, who works for Pogradec Municipality says that compared to other cities in Albania, Pogradec flora and fauna has been better protected. The area of Pogradec, around Lake Ohrid, includes 28,550 ha of forests, and 5,600 ha of pasture.

The last inventory of medicinal herbs in the area was carried out in 1978. Some of the most important medicinal herbs growing in this area include Sideritis raeseri, Castanea sativa, Conulus avellana, Rosa canina, Tilia spp. Juglans regia, Corylus avellana, Rubus idaeus, Callicurum autumnale, Crataegus monogyna, Salvia officinalis, Hypericum perforatum. Mr. Mara says that most of these herbs can still be found in the area, but a new inventory to see how many of them are still here is in process.

The last inventory of fauna was undertaken in 1989. Since then, the population of these animals have reduced due to illegal hunting. But lately, thanks to a hunting moratorium imposed by government in 2014, the situation has improved. Wildlife is now better protected and the evidence is that animals have returned in the protected and mountainous areas. The key animals and birds in the Pogradec area include Canis lupus, Canis aureus, Ursus arctos, Vulpes vulpes, Meles meles, Rupicapra rupicapra, Capreolus capreolus, Sus scrofa, Lepus europaeus, Felix lynx, Felix silvestris, Lutra lutra, Aquila chrysaetos, Tetrao urogallus, Alectoris graeca, Columba palumbus.

Now, thanks to the improved laws for protected areas, there is a better awareness of the need to protect the flora and fauna in and around the city, says Mr. Mara.

The history and the beauty of Lake Ohrid continues to be part of documentaries and articles written in the most world’s prestigious media. This summer, Lake Ohrid was featured in BBC and The Guardian. The Ancient History Concealed in Europe’s Oldest Lake was the title of a documentary published in the BBC Travel Magazine full article.

Mr. Mara

The area of Pogradec, in the Lake Ohrid Region, has a very rich flora and fauna. The forestry engineer Mr. Avni Mara, who works for Pogradec Municipality says that compared to other cities in Albania, Pogradec flora and fauna has been better protected. The area of Pogradec, around Lake Ohrid, includes 28,550 ha of forests, and 5,600 ha of pasture. The last inventory of medicinal herbs in the area was carried out in 1978. Some of the most important medicinal herbs growing in this area include Sideritis raeseri, Castanea sativa, Conulus avellana, Rosa canina, Tilia spp. Juglans regia, Corylus avellana, Rubus idaeus, Callicurum autumnale, Crataegus monogyna, Salvia officinalis, Hypericum perforatum. Mr. Mara says that most of these herbs can still be found in the area, but a new inventory to see how many of them are still here is in process.

The last inventory of fauna was undertaken in 1989. Since then, the population of these animals have reduced due to illegal hunting. But lately, thanks to a hunting moratorium imposed by government in 2014, the situation has improved. Wildlife is now better protected and the evidence is that animals have returned in the protected and mountainous areas. The key animals and birds in the Pogradec area include Canis lupus, Canis aureus, Ursus arctos, Vulpes vulpes, Meles meles, Rupicapra rupicapra, Capreolus capreolus, Sus scrofa, Lepus europaeus, Felix lynx, Felix silvestris, Lutra lutra, Aquila chrysaetos, Tetrao urogallus, Alectoris graeca, Columba palumbus.

Now, thanks to the improved laws for protected areas, there is a better awareness of the need to protect the flora and fauna in and around the city, says Mr. Mara.

Mr. Avni Mara

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The nature around Pogradec and explorer Erindi Bejko. Photos @VisitPogradec.

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Protecting Lake Ohrid

What's next?

- #OurLakeOhrid - announcement of the winners of Social Media Contest
- Series of Technical Working Group meetings to finalise the World Heritage extension file for the transboundary Lake Ohrid region
- 7th Transboundary Meeting, January 2017, Pogradec, Albania
- Launch of the Lake Ohrid region photo book
- Subregional training course on HIA/EIA from 5-9 February 2017

UNESCO
World Heritage Centre - Project coordinator

The European Union
main financial contributor

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MINISTRY OF CULTURE of the Republic of Albania

MINISTRY OF CULTURE of the FYR of Macedonia

Ministry of Environment and Physical Planning of the FYR of Macedonia

ICCCROM (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)

Protecting Lake Ohrid

This is a quarterly newsletter published by the project "Towards strengthened governance of the shared transboundary natural and cultural heritage of the Lake Ohrid region". Languages: English, Albanian, Macedonian. The European Union is not responsible for the content of this newsletter.

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