

Towards People-Centered Approaches in the Management of the Natural and Cultural Heritage of the Ohrid Region World Heritage Site

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INTRODUCTION

The Ohrid Region is located on the shore of Lake Ohrid in the Republic of Macedonia. Lake Ohrid (Fig.1), dating from ancient geological eras mesmerizes with its outstanding natural beauty. It represents an authentic museum of living endemic and relict species of flora and fauna. Possessing all these features, its significance for global science is exceptional.

The historical monumental ensemble of the town of Ohrid, as a centre of the region, the town of Struga, the several fishermen's settlements on the shore, as well as the many archaeological sites and Christian spiritual centers (Fig. 2), make the Ohrid Region a unique and marvelous blend of natural geographical phenomena and human action (UNESCO, 2015).

The long historic continuity in this region has created natural and cultural heritage of outstanding universal values that surpass national boundaries and are equally important for the current and future generations of the entire humanity.

In 1979, the UNESCO World Heritage Committee decided to inscribe the Ohrid Region on the World Heritage List for its Outstanding Universal Value (OUV) as a natural heritage site under criterion (iii), which is presently criterion (vii), and in 1980 this was amended with the criteria for cultural heritage (i), (iii) and (iv), thus making it a mixed World Heritage Site.¹

¹ Authors note: various resources available on: <http://whc.unesco.org/en/list/99>

One of the challenges for a successful management of the World Heritage property is the establishment of balance between contemporary needs and preserving of the unique natural and cultural values (including the OUV) of the region. This inevitably requires cooperation and communication of all involved institutions, stakeholders and local communities, which have to negotiate different aspects and organize public debates in view of establishing a long-term protection and sustainability of the property. According to Kvisteroy (2012), “a local community can be a group of people living in a particular place, sharing a common life, or being by common interest to a World Heritage Property and values attached to its assets. Local communities have interests, expectations, aspirations, obligations and need benefits. Local communities develop and change constantly, and their interests may not necessarily coincide with World Heritage interests”.



Figure 1: Lake Ohrid ©Ana Aleksova



Figure 2: Church of St. John at Kaneo ©Mishko Tutkovski

Although, there is a strong legislation and an institutional framework to safeguard this World Heritage property, research has shown that one of the critical issues identified is the lack of focus on people and their livelihoods in addition to the issues of safeguarding heritage values (Aleksova, 2016). This requires, in the first place, to understand the values of the property, including interlinkages between nature, culture and people, and to work towards the sustainable development of the region. For this purpose, we propose a People-Centered Approaches (hereafter PCA) as a way forward to more effective conservation and management of the property which will be further elaborated in the next sections of the paper.

Heritage Management in the Ohrid Region

There are three essential elements that are interdependent in any primary heritage management system: institutional framework (the organizational set-up that sets out the operational structure and working methods that allow actions to be taken), legal

framework (the mandate that empowers people and organizations to act. It defines what constitutes heritage and the criteria for its conservation and management, usually by means of legislation), and resources (the human, financial and intellectual inputs that create operational capacity and facilitate processes) (UNESCO, 2013) (Fig. 3).

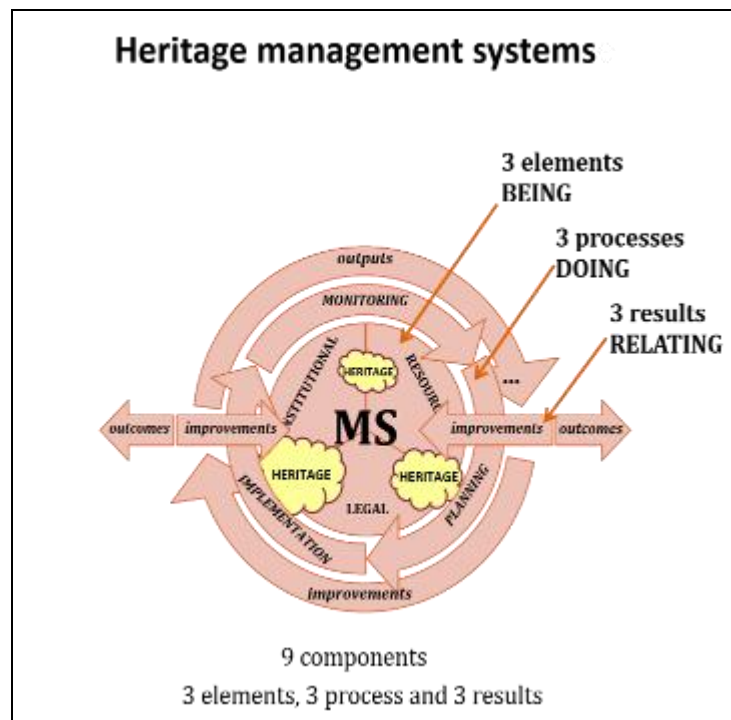


Figure 3: Management Systems ©Based on UNESCO 2013, p. 114

The World Heritage property of the Ohrid region is managed by two Ministries, the Ministry of Culture and the Ministry of Environment and Physical Planning of the Republic of Macedonia, and three local municipalities, Ohrid, Struga and Debarca. The Ministry of Environment and Physical Planning, as a responsible state authority in charge of protection of Lake Ohrid, in cooperation with the Ohrid Hydrobiological Institute, is continuously monitoring the ecosystem of the lake. The Ministry of Culture, through the Cultural Heritage Protection Office, is responsible for the maintenance, conservation and revitalization of the built heritage.

Because of the importance and concentration of the cultural heritage in this region, a special national institution for its protection was established: the Institute for Protection of Monuments of Culture and Museum – Ohrid (1973), which in coordination with the National Conservation Centre, has the authority regarding the protection of cultural heritage. Having in mind that the municipalities of Ohrid, Struga

and Debarca, according to the legal regulations, do not have any competences in the sphere of cultural and natural heritage protection, there are no local institutions established with this kind of authority.

The *Law on Proclamation of the Monumental Ensemble Old Town Nucleus of Ohrid as Cultural Heritage of Special Significance* (Official Gazette of the Republic of Macedonia, no.154/2015) foresees that the Old Town Nucleus of Ohrid will be managed by the National Institution for the Protection of Monuments of Culture and Museum – Ohrid, while in the name of the local community – by the Ohrid Municipality.

The rights and obligations of the Republic of Macedonia and of the municipalities Ohrid, Struga and Debarca, as well as the rights and obligations of all legal and physical persons concerning the management of the world natural and cultural heritage of the Ohrid region, are determined with the *Law on Management of the World Natural and Cultural Heritage of the Ohrid Region* (Official Gazette of the Republic of Macedonia, no.75/2010).

One of the latest management documents that was prepared by the Cultural Heritage Protection Office as the coordinative body, is the *Draft Management Plan for the Natural and Cultural Heritage of the Ohrid Region 2016-2025*. This Plan provides the vision for the future of the World Heritage property, defines the current problems and challenges and presents a review of the main goals, strategies and activities related with the protection, conservation and planned development of the region. Together with the implementation instruments, it aims at preserving the universal value and outstanding importance of the region, as a benefit to future generations, simultaneously striving to preserve its integrity and authenticity.

Since one third of Lake Ohrid is shared with Republic of Albania, various international transboundary management projects have been implemented to enhance the bi-lateral cooperation for the protection of the region during recent years. One of the pioneering projects was the Lake Ohrid Conservation Project (1996), with an objective to promote a cost-effective solution for transboundary natural and resource management and pollution problems and to provide a basis for the sustainable economic development of the watershed. Another international agreement is the

establishment of the “Ohrid-Prespa” Transboundary Biosphere Reserve under UNESCO’s Man and the Biosphere Programme in 2014.

The latest international and still on-going project is the joint EU-UNESCO project called “Towards strengthened governance of the shared natural and cultural heritage of the Lake Ohrid region”. The project is building a participatory process for integrated management planning and the preparation of a dossier by the Albanian authorities to extend the World Heritage property to the Albanian part of the Lake Ohrid. It aims to profile the transboundary area by assessing its values and opportunities for sustainable development, and to improve capacities for the effective management of the natural and cultural heritage in the Lake Ohrid region. The Project is implemented by UNESCO World Heritage Centre in cooperation with UNESCO Venice Office/Antenna Office in Sarajevo together with the project partners The Government of Albania, the Government of the Republic of Macedonia, IUCN, ICOMOS and ICCROM.²

THREATS AFFECTING THE WORLD HERITAGE PROPERTY

Having in mind the fact that the Ohrid region is both a World Natural and Cultural Heritage Property, it is of outmost importance to preserve its authenticity and integrity and to protect its natural and cultural values in a proper and sustainable way.

Among the threats affecting the general values of the Ohrid region are the inadequate communication among all entities involved in the management process, the scarce awareness of stakeholders in the process of protection and implementation of the World Heritage values, insufficient investment in the educational system to train future staff, and unprofessional repair of the sacred and residential buildings by their owners. Research shows, that there is a clear lack of awareness among all stakeholders in the process of protection, preservation, presentation and use of the artistic values of the Ohrid region. The lack of engagement of the local authorities in the conservation and management of the property is also representing a threat (Aleksova, 2016).

In recent times, there are increased local development pressures, which are taking their toll on the environment and heritage values of the Ohrid region (UNESCO,

² Authors note: various resources available on: <http://whc.unesco.org/en/lake-ohrid-region/>

2016). Problems are arising from the lack of respect for the established legal mechanisms and insufficient involvement of stakeholders, as well as the lack of transparency and collaboration between the involved entities which results with a negative impact on the management and planning in the region, its state of conservation and the well-being of its communities and visitors. One of the biggest challenges is that responsibilities over the site are distributed among different local and national institutions that work separately, turning heritage management into a bureaucratic and time-consuming process. In terms of management of the property, it continues to be carried out separately by the cultural and natural institutions. The natural values of the site are under pressure from unsustainable use of resources, especially fishing, but also from unsustainable tourism development in the entire region, accompanied by low awareness among the decision-makers and lack of integrated urban planning. Uncontrolled constructions along the lake shore have negative impacts on the lake and the landscape. This excessive urbanization of the area directly influences the living conditions of both flora and fauna and impacts the values of the eco-system. Introduced alien species and increasing pollution by organic and inorganic sewage is threatening the vulnerable aquatic fauna and flora. The existing management institutions are understaffed and have insufficient budgets. Among other threats affecting the natural heritage are fires, deforestation, or inappropriate agro-technical measures that cause erosion.

Cultural heritage is a significant component in the overall values of the Ohrid region. The recognizable architecture of the urban matrix of the old urban nucleus of the town of Ohrid and the layers of historical periods confirm the role of immovable cultural heritage and the need of its proper protection. However, despite the large number of conserved and restored buildings, there are still many factors that are threatening the sustainable use of cultural heritage such as the insufficient knowledge and study of the historical development of the area, inexistence of financial assistance for the owners of historical buildings to repair and restore their buildings, insufficient professional staff with knowledge of traditional craftsmanship techniques. In addition, among the threats affecting the cultural heritage are the insufficient level of awareness on the architectural and artistic values of the built cultural heritage, unadjusted development concepts, which disrespect the limitations,

set by the protection criteria, and the unadjusted standard instruments for planning of the promotion of the condition of built heritage with the proscribed protection criteria.

Pressures on the environment increase when socio-economic conditions are difficult and unemployment rates are high. Thus, effective water and other natural and cultural resource management are essential for both sustainable growth and poverty reduction. There are many causes for socio-economic problems in the region, but as the political transition continues, solving of these problems is central to healthy communities and healthy environment (Avramoski et al., 2004).

We believe a PCA to heritage management (Court & Wijesuriya, 2015) should be adopted so that the interlinkages between nature, culture and people are acknowledged. Furthermore, communities are essential when assessing values and the attributes required to secure an equitable and long term protection of the site's natural and cultural heritage, as well as to harness the mutual benefits available to them and the site.

In conclusion, there is a detachment between what (heritage) authorities are doing and what people perceive and want. The identification of these threats represents the base both for the planning of optimal protection of the Ohrid region, and for the use of its potentials in a sustainable way.

WHY DO WE NEED A PCA TO HERITAGE MANAGEMENT IN THE OHRID REGION?

Heritage management has been addressed in two different ways, a traditional material-based approach and a more recent values-based approach (Poulios, 2014). A material-based approach (Fig. 4) focuses above all on the preservation of the original materials. The definition of what heritage is and what is to be preserved is of the absolute responsibilities of heritage authorities – governments and professionals. It is based on 'scientific methods' that give privilege to material elements, which is, in this approach, what defines the significance of heritage.

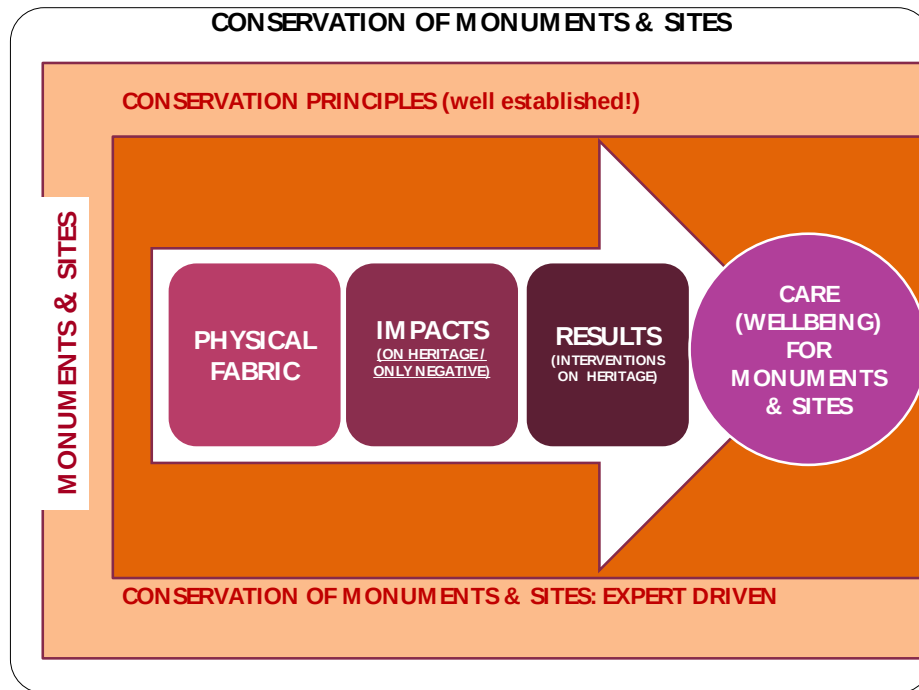


Figure 4: Conservation of Monuments and Sites ©Wijesuriya, 2016, p 5

This strict conservation principles and practices limit the use of heritage by the communities, to assure its protection by preserving the original, non-renewable fabric and structure with minimal and only absolute necessary interventions. This creates a discontinuity between the community and its heritage because the latter is seen as something belonging to the past that should be protected from our present harmful practices and so, be transmitted to future generations in a 'pristine' condition (Smith, 2006) A material-based approach has its limitations as it depends on state funding and maintenance and relies solely on the expertise of conservation professionals and these specific individuals are those who will interpret, challenge, create, and write about a heritage, having a complete disregard for the fact that communities may attach different meanings and values to the same heritage (Poulios, 2014).

In contrast, a values-based approach opened the conservation process to include communities by encouraging experts to engage with them and their different values. It is, therefore, a more preferable approach to heritage management. A values-based approach focuses on the values that various stakeholder groups ascribe to heritage, encouraging and promoting the community's involvement in conservation and placing it at the core of the process, with diverse important benefits. Heritage here is seen as a cultural process, thus its preservation is not the main objective, but the connection between this and the values ascribed by stakeholder groups (Poulios, 2014).

However, despite the participation of stakeholders, conservation professionals continue to favor solely the preservation of the tangible heritage elements. Instead of also being a stakeholder group, the specialists are in fact in charge of the whole conservation process and function as supervisors of the stakeholder groups. This means that even though stakeholders are involved in conservation, they are still under the authority of heritage professionals. According to Poullos (2014 p. 22) a values-based approach “attempts to expand the concepts of a material-based approach, without yet substantially challenging them”.

It is our opinion that PCA are more inclusive and holistic approaches as they are based on a bottom-up or people-up understanding of heritage and not just on the values stakeholders attach to it. Furthermore, including the community is essential, not only by consultation but by active participation and decision making. The World Heritage Committee has adopted strategic guidance over the years. In 2002, it adopted four Strategic Objectives - *Credibility, Conservation, Capacity-building and Communication*, to which was added a fifth in 2007; *Community*. The Strategic Objective “*To enhance the role of Communities in the implementation of the World Heritage Convention*” (UNESCO, 2016), known as the ‘5th C’, underscores the need to respect and support communities to be involved in World Heritage processes. Communities contain capacities and assets that outlast political or professional structures and complement expert knowledge and skills. A PCA harnesses these capacities in order to offer long-term conservation and co-management for the good of heritage and for the good of the community (Fig. 5). It also has the potential to identify and tackle issues that have emerged when the relationship between people and heritage has been weakened due to an imbalanced management system. Taking a people-centered approach does not simply mean increasing community participation within a management system. Instead, it is about addressing a core component of heritage management – the people who are connected to heritage – and ensuring that people are an integral element in heritage management (Court & Wijesuriya, 2015).

Heritage places are considered a “living” part of their community. Management approaches must accommodate the shift to a wider, more inclusive approach to heritage and to a greater emphasis on community engagement (Wijesuriya et al., 2013). Field experience by one of the authors (Aleksova), shows that, in practice,

heritage management systems are often failing to involve local counterparts. Even when community involvement does take place, the level of participation in the decision-making processes and the capacity of local stakeholders to actually engage and make contributions are often limited. Regarding the Ohrid region, we do not get the impression that people in this region have been consulted in any way by the competent authorities. It is their obligation to implement legal mechanisms without, however, having the possibility to be heard and their views to be considered before a decision is made. Their biggest engagement is in urban planning, where they must comply and integrate the immovable cultural heritage in the new plans. A participatory approach that fails to engage all interest groups, particularly those who are often marginalized, can actually do more damage than good. It can lead to flawed projects because heritage specialists may have failed to properly inform the public about important aspects or because of misunderstandings that delay or block projects (De Caro & Wijesuriya, 2012).

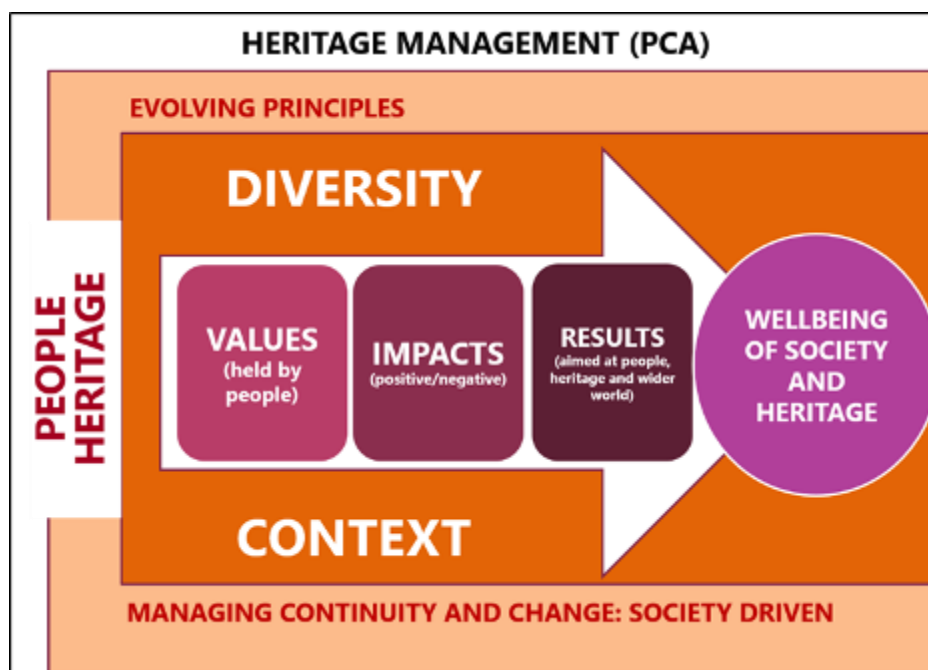


Figure 5: Management of Heritage ©ICCROM, Wijesuriya 2016,p 7

The sustainable development paradigm that relates to heritage, which talks about heritage, should contribute to the sustainable development of society. The spectrum of possibilities for the use of heritage in the Ohrid region is quite limited by the local government or the local community. A World Heritage property is a unique resource for the promotion of tourism and a stage for cultural, artistic and outdoor events. It offers many opportunities for job creation with priority to be given to the local

population. The possibility of public-private partnerships is one of them too, where the management and protection of the heritage would leave the responsibility to the "partner", will result in certain socio-economic benefits for the user (UNESCO et al, 2013).

The PCA focuses heavily on engaging communities and by promoting this, policy-makers are able to be seen engaging in much broader debates on sustainable development, promoting measurable opportunities for community engagement, opening up democratic processes and improving government transparency.

Tourism is often cited as being the means by which heritage can provide economic benefits to communities, although it can also bring both negative impacts. Other broader benefits for community members should be considered, including: greater sense of ownership; stronger cultural identity; spirituality; increased employment opportunities; increased economic returns through heritage "added value"; contributions to sustainable development; more sustainable communities; increased cultural and social inclusion and intergenerational integration; more life-long learning experiences; more varied leisure opportunities; poverty alleviation and improved intercultural understanding (Court & Wijesuriya, 2015).

WHY TO ENGAGE COMMUNITIES IN THE HERITAGE MANAGEMENT OF THE OHRID REGION?

Engaging communities is a key focus of the PCA and it is about strengthening their ability and empowering them to participate meaningfully in the process of making conservation and management decisions for themselves and their heritage (Court & Wijesuriya, 2015).

Where heritage places appear to be successful visitor attractions, like the city of Ohrid (Fig.6), it is not clear if communities, such as local residents, are still allowed to enjoy their heritage as it was originally intended and if they benefit from tourism. This discussion is often approached through the lens of sustainable development. Not only does this sustainability discourse suggest measuring the success of a heritage place in terms of economic, environmental and social factors, but also it places an emphasis on conservation as the only way of ensuring that future generations will enjoy heritage resources. Heritage needs to take on a more dynamic role where it

can produce results beyond its confines, reaching equilibrium with the community, which will see more reasons to safeguard it. Change must be rooted in local understanding of needs and opportunities, so that such change brings long-lasting benefits to the community.



Figure 6: The Old Town Nucleus of Ohrid ©Ana Aleksova

The rights of individuals and communities associated with World Heritage Sites matter as an integral part of the World Heritage Convention's approach and contribution to the 5th 'C', social equity and sustainable development. Recent research concerning the Ohrid Region, suggests that a great part of the local population is not aware of their rights to participate in the processes, and thus, there is low awareness of the significance and importance of their own cultural and natural heritage (Aleksova, 2016). The barrier between them and the World Heritage property probably results in their passivity and apparent indifference to the situation. Hence, it is necessary to conduct various educational programs to raise the public awareness of the essence of the protected property, its history, and its values, as well as organize public debates where the people's voice would be heard.

WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF A PCA TO HERITAGE MANAGEMENT?

In order to improve the relationship between heritage and society, it is helpful to think in terms of working with specific groups of people in order to support the

development of their capacities so that they would be given a possibility to contribute. The World Heritage Strategy for Capacity Building targets practitioners, institutions (described as “decision- and policy-makers”), and communities and networks. Each of these groups brings capacities and can gain benefits from their contribution to heritage conservation (UNESCO, 2011).

It is very much unfortunate, that the majority of the people in the Ohrid Region are unaware of their right to heritage (Aleksova, 2016), as well as the low level of awareness for the value and significance of the World Heritage property. The impression is that the government institutions and the responsible entities avoid including the local communities in the management of the World Heritage Property because of the lack of trust which results with revolted and unsatisfied communities.

If there would be adequate training for the local population, it will simultaneously increase their awareness of the necessity to deal with issues affecting heritage. Therefore, they will become equal partners in the process, providing long-term protection and monitoring of the World Heritage property, as well as strengthened capacities, which are apparently among the priorities and a great necessity in this sector in the Republic of Macedonia.

A change in focus is emerging from expert driven and state sector-run heritage processes towards community and non-state sector driven endeavors. At the outset, one has to acknowledge the complexity of engaging communities in the heritage process. Communities are not always homogeneous groups with unequivocal support for heritage conservation. Diverse views and values bring conflicts. Consequently, we switch from the term ‘conservation’ to the term ‘management’. The diverse outputs communities can bring to the heritage process can be vital to the well-being of the World Heritage property and the protection of its values (De Caro & Wijesuriya, 2012).

CHANGES WITHIN THE MANAGEMENT SYSTEM TO PROMOTE PCA

As mentioned previously, the communities in the Ohrid region have very little role, if any, in heritage management. Therefore, it is out of utmost importance to strengthen their voice within the heritage sector, through all components of the

management system mentioned above or by making reforms in the heritage sector is to revise the existing management system on a state and local level, as well on site level. In most cases the system will be operating at a national level or local level addressing multiple sites.

The legislative framework for the protection of the Ohrid Region is granted through several laws and by-laws in accordance with national and international regulatory standards. Although the legislative arrangements are adequate, there are conditions that hinder effective implementation. In addition, the environmental regulation and enforcement are currently weak in Macedonia. A variety of legislative reforms have helped to decentralize the environmental enforcement functions and have given limited authority to the local authorities. Although several projects in the region have initiated a number of environmental enforcement actions over the last few years, more additional agreements are needed. These might include updating regulations, educating the public about key legal provisions and the appropriate enforcement agents in their areas (including judges, administrators, educators, NGO's and others), and establishing clear and enforceable requirements for environmental reporting, the right of access to environmental information, and an effective sanctioning process to deter or punish violators (Avramoski et al., 2004).

When it comes to reforms in the institutional framework in a way to enable more inclusive management approach, it has to be considered whether the institutional framework is transparent and accessible to the public. This is vital to favor accountability and staff motivation and to facilitate participatory approaches, among other things. Hybrid institutional frameworks that include public heritage authority organizations with new entities can serve to address World Heritage obligations. They can leave a positive legacy for the long-term management of the property and its well-being (UNESCO et al., 2013). When it comes to the resources, joining forces with others and promoting partnerships can increase resources (enhancing publicity and consolidating fundraising initiatives) and improving their deployment to deal with the particular challenges of the World Heritage property. Occasionally, such is the case with the Ohrid Region, whereas central ministries/institutions pursue the World Heritage status for a property without sufficiently involving local heritage authorities and even property-level staff, who then find themselves having to guarantee compliance.

For the effective engagement of communities, their involvement in the main heritage process – the continuous cycle of planning, implementation and monitoring process – is of primary importance and needs to take place in all stages of the cycle. Harder but just as important to achieve, is the involvement of communities in establishing the objectives of the management system in terms of outcomes and outputs and revising them periodically according to changes in the site and its context. Ongoing community engagement in identifying the purpose of the management system and its processes is particularly important since the management system must aim at protecting heritage, but also at harnessing the mutual benefits available to communities and the site itself (UNESCO et al., 2013).

The product of these reforms would be an empowered community with a strong role in the decision making process that will provide a long-term protection of the World Heritage Property.

CONCLUSIONS

It becomes clearer that heritage and its inextricable link to people should be recognized. Consequently, communities should be engaged in the conservation and management of heritage as this brings them a reinforced sense of identity and belonging. Recent work, including training courses for heritage practitioners, has been undertaken by ICCROM, IUCN and other partners, on engaging the communities in the conservation of Nature and Culture. In October 2015, was undertaken the first international course on Promoting People-Centered Approaches: Engaging Communities in the Conservation of Nature and Culture, followed by its second edition, the regional course which took place in October 2016 in Albania and Macedonia. The short courses brought together heritage practitioners and professionals from the nature and culture field, providing them the necessary knowledge and tools to work more efficiently with stakeholder communities in the conservation and management processes³.

The Republic of Macedonia is extremely rich in heritage (cultural and natural) which witnesses the evolutionary and social development of the country. This is a good prerequisite for engagement and involvement of the non-governmental and civil sector in its protection and promotion. Given the positive experiences worldwide

³ Authors note: More information available on: <http://www.iccrom.org/priority-areas/living-heritage/>

where the management of protected sites and monuments is led by non-governmental and civil organizations, heritage institutions in Macedonia could take a step forward and delegate, if not all, at least, a part of the responsibilities, to the specialized organizations in this field.

Heritage management in Macedonia is seen as a responsibility of the central government. Local governments or municipalities are minimally involved in heritage-related processes. It would be desirable to make changes in the organizational structure of the municipalities, so the protection and management of the World Heritage will be decentralized by creating specialized departments within the municipalities. They should be equipped with appropriate staff in the relevant field to tackle the everyday challenges. This will lead to an allocation of more funds from the municipal budget, resulting in a responsible management of the property, as well as a higher appreciation of heritage in general. In order to implement these practices and methods, it is first necessary to make legal changes in the existing legal framework that regulates the protection and management of the World Heritage property.

Through analysis of the laws that are of interest to the protection and management of the Ohrid Region, primarily the Law on Protection of Cultural Heritage, it has been recognized that the role of the local government and the local community is almost absent or at least extremely small. The special law adopted for the protected urban nucleus of the town of Ohrid, is simply full of restrictions for the local community in terms of the use and management of the protected property. There is a need for legislative changes that will lower or eliminate these barriers, in a way that will ensure a more direct participation of the local community and the local authorities. This can be regulated by amending new articles in the laws which address the protection of the World Heritage property and the Law on Local Self-Government. In addition, it could share the tasks and responsibilities with the competent institution for conservation work, where the professional staff at their disposal could educate and train local people to work in this field.

If at least some of these recommendations are implemented, the parties involved – the institutions, the local government (municipalities) and the local community – will no longer operate as independent entities, and thus without sufficient knowledge of their own and others' competencies, and this will increase the trust and cooperation between the concerned parties. One of the key questions which can improve the

World Heritage management system is the inter-institutional and inter-sectoral collaboration and an interdisciplinary approach. If these recommendations are not observed, the abyss between them will only increase, the mistrust and resentment will grow, and heritage will suffer to an irreversible extent.

Regardless of the fact that a resident owns the immovable good or it is in the hands of the state, the care for the irreplaceable World Heritage is a responsibility of every individual and everyone should take care and look after of it with great respect. Thus, our roots, our identity, will continue to exist for present and future generations.

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