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## **TOURIST VALORIZATION OF "STUDENCHISHTE MARSH" AS AN ATTRACTIVE NATURAL RESOURCE OF OHRID**

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### **Abstract**

Tourism contains certain characteristics that determine it as a spatial phenomenon, which is in an interactive relationship with spatial conditions. A process of tourist valorization is necessary for sustainable tourism development. Tourist valorization represents a complex assessment of natural and anthropogenic values that are important for the development of tourism in one place, region or country. Valorization is the starting point for changing tourist resources into attractions and for the protection of those resources. Studenchishte Marsh represents a huge natural value for Ohrid as a tourist destination and for Republic of Macedonia as well.

**Keywords:** tourism, tourism valorization, Lake Ohrid, Studenchishte Marsh

### **Introduction**

Tourism represents a complex multidimensional and multifunctional process and phenomenon that can be considered as a type of specific industry or economic branch. Tourism offers a range of economic benefits and represents a global phenomenon in which the number of participants continuously increases. Its percentage share in the countries' GDP records a solid share, ranging from 5-8% of national GDP.

Tourism development should include sustainable components that can be realized through tourism valorization. Valorization determines a particular value that a specific resource has for someone. One of the most general valorizations in tourism is the determination of a quantitative and qualitative framework of phenomena, processes, and relations in tourism. As fundamental elements of tourist valorization it is worth mentioning the attractiveness of the tourist values that one tourist place has and the distance from the emissive tourism sphere<sup>1</sup>. The

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<sup>1</sup> Emissive sphere is a sphere where the tourist need is created and from where the tourists come.

volume and type of tourist movements, directly and indirectly depend on the type of tourist values and the traffic connection, which is considered primary in tourist valorization.

The valorization of the Studenchishte Marsh as an attractive natural resource is necessary to manage the natural resources of the city of Ohrid as a tourist destination. The role of the Studenchishte Marsh refers to the protection of Lake Ohrid and the possibilities for its inclusion in various educational purposes. However, it also has a role for inclusion in tourist purposes to attract more tourists and enriching the tourism offer.

## **1. What is tourism valorization?**

Tourism is an economic branch that mainly depends on quality space that is usually limited and conditioned by the characteristics of the tourism development. Some essential tasks of spatial planning in tourism are the separation of some attractive spaces for tourism development, their systematization according to attractiveness, connection, and equipment, the determination of the offer according to the possibilities, and the prediction of future development. That is why it is necessary to make an inventory and valorization of the factors of tourism development (Velkovik 1998, 262).

The process of tourist valorization consists of evaluating the natural and anthropogenic values, i.e., evaluating the factors of tourism development (attractive, communicative, and receptive), primarily as an opportunity for tourism development and for achieving appropriate economic effects. Through criteria, norms, and standards, the attractive factors are the most significant for tourist movements. It is important to evaluate the geo-tourism and geo-traffic position as a factor that conditions the availability and the possibility of including some space in the tourist market. Based on the performed valorization the construction of hotel and catering facilities is foreseen, as well the offer of certain attractive and unique content for tourists.

The width of values in tourism indicates the need to determine the following components: (Marinoski 2015, p. 251)

- concept and definition of tourist values;
- axiological dimension of tourism, and
- tourist valorization.

The tourist value relates to the human attitude towards himself and the tourist components surrounding him. Valuation is present in the overall tourism system of phenomena and relations. In tourism, the elements in all spheres of tourist activity are valued, and that valuation depends on the goals that tend to be achieved. Tourist valorization is carried out with a predetermined purpose. The initial process of valorization is the inventory, which is followed by the determination of the value, i.e. the usefulness of the elements in tourism (Marinoski 2015, p. 251).

Tourist valorization can be understood as placing tourist values on the domestic and foreign tourism market, measured by the amount of tourist consumption. Tourist values are those facilities, contents, curiosities, and landmarks in the space that satisfy some tourist needs (recreational, cultural, health, and events). In fact, the categorization of resources according to different groups represents a valorization. The categorization of resources represents only the

determination of a primary basis for further valuation of resources and their transformation into tourist attractions (Risteski, 2019, p. 20).

The valorization of the factors of tourist development in certain geo-space is a systematic, scientifically based activity through which the existing and possible types of tourist activity in the operating area are perceived as well the general goals of the development (Velkovik, 1998, p. 263). The factors of tourism valorization are divided into internal and external. Internal factors refer to the specificity of the quality and value of objects, phenomena, and processes, which can function as tourism in terms of their degree of utilization. The external factors of tourist valorization include those elements that are important for their use in terms of facilitating accessibility, emphasizing attendance, emphasizing certain specificities, and their recognition in the tourism market.

## **2. Methodology of tourist valorization**

The methodology of space valorization is a scientific discipline, where it is necessary to perceive the relations between the methodology of space valorization and other scientific disciplines, as well as the methodology of space valorization as a tourism and spatial science discipline. When defining the methodological principles, it is necessary to consider the tourism phenomenon's complexity, heterogeneity, and unity. As methodological principles for tourist valorization can be mentioned: (Marinoski, 2012, p. 23)

- Cause-effect relationships, common conditions and dependence of the components of tourism as a phenomenon that constitute the basic methodological principle;
- Another principle is systematization. Tourism is characterized by systematic features, and various sub-systems that are connected to each other;
- The genetic-evolutionary methodological principle refers to the fact that phenomena and relations in tourism should be followed through the prism of their origin and development;
- The principle of comparability means that phenomena and relationships in tourism must be put in a comparable relationship with similar and different phenomena.

In a tourist area, the valorization of natural tourist resources depends on various endogenous and exogenous factors in nature and the influence of the human factor. If one tourist place has natural tourist resources that will be adequately valorized and promoted, the greater will be the interest of tourists for visiting that place or destination. Tourist valorization can be carried out on various geo-morphological resources and relief forms (mountains, mountain passes, gorges, canyons, post-volcanic forms), climatically attractive resources (insolation, winds, rains, snow), hydrographic and hydrological attractive resources (oceans, seas, lakes, rivers, swamp ecosystems, thermo-mineral springs, geysers, glaciers), bio-geographic attractive resources (plants, forests, animal communities, insects), anthropogenic attractive resources (ethno-social, cultural-historical, manifestations, environmental).

The most used methods for tourism valorization are the quantitative-qualitative method and a more complex method that Hilary du Cros set up. Essential elements for tourism valorization according to the quantitative-qualitative method are: the accessibility of resources,

tourist services and equipment (existing accommodation facilities, complementary tourist offer, and tourist services - information, commercialization, and others), the ambience, the specificity of resources, the meaning of resources and the artistic value. The essential characteristics in Hilary du Cros method for tourism valorization are the sub-indicators and the degree of their grading, especially for the tourism sector and the sector for the management of cultural assets, but also for the assessment of the sensitivity of cultural assets and their capacity to receive visitors (Bjeljac, 2014). According to the Hilary du Cros method, the essential elements of tourism valorization are divided into two groups. In the first group, there are the sub-indicators (the degree of recognition of the natural good, the evocative component, the attractiveness of the natural good for special needs, the existence of complementary natural and cultural goods, access to the natural good, distance to the natural good and service amenities) with which the tourist attractiveness is evaluated as well as the factors of importance for programming tourism as a tourist product. In the other group are the sub-indicators (scenic attractiveness and experiential component of tourism, educational and scientific-research importance) with which the management of tourist values is evaluated. Also, in this method there are sub-indicators that indicate the rarity, representativeness of the destination, sensitivity, management, and regular monitoring in tourism, as well as the sub-indicators that evaluate the possibility of a negative impact of the large number of visitors.

Economic methods for valorization primarily refer to the processes of valuation of natural tourist areas, but the same methods are used to valorize cultural resources. Economic valorization is particularly complicated to apply to cultural resources that are put in the function of tourism. The specificities of cultural resources cannot be expressed through monetary indicators.

As modern methodological approaches for tourism valorizations are: (Risteski, 2020, p. 257)

- ETIS - the approach (European Tourism Indicators System for sustainable destination management) where the valorization of natural tourism resources dominates;
- HIA - the approach (Heritage et al.) which refers primarily to the valorization of cultural resources;
- FAS - methodology (Valorization of subsystems "Factors," "Attractors" and "Support Services") which is a more complex approach for valorization of individual elements of tourist spaces: supply, demand, competition and market trends.

### **3. The tourist value of Studenchishte Marsh and its valorization**

The irrational and unreasonable use of limited and non-renewable natural resources is humanity's significant problem. The uncontrolled growth and development of tourism (especially mass tourism) deepens that problem. A considerable number of visitors to a particular tourist destination can lead to the degradation and, often, to the complete devastation of the natural environment in that destination. The valorization of the various protected areas contributes to protecting the environment, in which significant role has so-called indicators of environmental value and zoning. Valorization can be different, ranging from evaluating the degree of

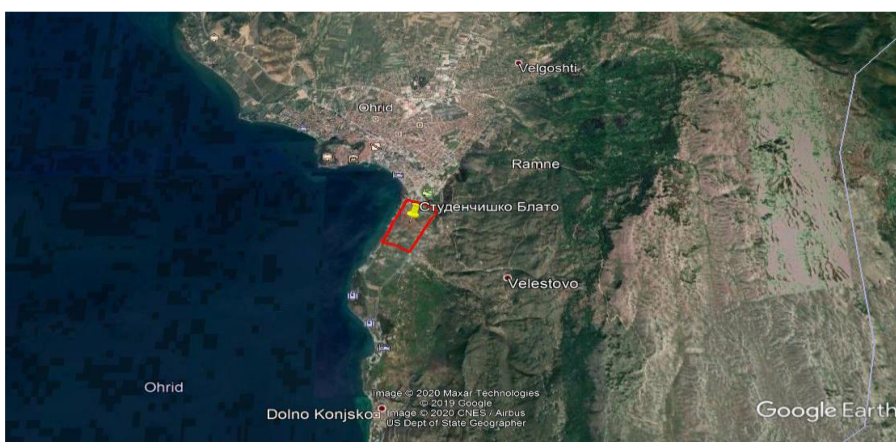
degradation (or the degree of threat from degradation/devastation) to evaluating the ecological value of the considered spatial areas.

Lake Ohrid is located in the Southwestern part of the Republic of Macedonia, in the Ohrid-Struga valley, around which are the mountains Galichica and Petrino, Jablanica, Karaorman, Mokra, Ilinska and Plakenska mountains. It is located at 695 meters above sea level. The size of Lake Ohrid is 348.8 km<sup>2</sup>, of which 229.9 km<sup>2</sup> belong to the Republic of Macedonia, and the rest to the Republic of Albania. The entire length of the coast is 86.1 km. Lake Ohrid is the deepest tectonic Lake on the Balkan Peninsula, with a maximum depth of 286 meters and an average of 144.80 meters.

Europe's oldest inland water containing over 200 world-unique flora and fauna species and has been a UNESCO World Heritage Site since 1979. Lake Ohrid has long been recognized for its extraordinary biological values. The Lake's low-nutrient, high-oxygen environment boasts one of the highest rates of biodiversity of any inland water body on Earth when measured by surface area: it hosts 1,200 species, with over 200 of them endemic and many of them protected, such as the freshwater snail (*Acroloxus macedonicus*), the endemic belvica (*Salmo ohridanus*) and the velvet duck (*Melanitta fusca*). It includes Studenchishte Marsh on the eastern shore, which features alkaline nutrient-filtering marshes and fens that provide nesting, spawning, and wintering grounds for birds and fish (Ramsar).

Studenchishte Marsh is the last glacial relict remnant of the swamp vegetation in the Republic of Macedonia. The Marsh is located in the southwestern parts of the Republic of Macedonia, within the borders of the territory of the Municipality of Ohrid. Studenchishte Marsh belongs to the Sub-Mediterranean-Continental Lake area (Ohrid-Struga area). It is located between the Studencishte River (today the Studencishta Canal) to the north and the Racha River to the south and between the Ohrid - St. Naum regional road to the east and the shores of Lake Ohrid to the west.

**Figure 1: Satellite image of Studenchishte Marsh**



In the past Studenchishte Marsh was an integral part of Lake Ohrid and with numerous canals was connected to Lake Ohrid. Any change in the water level of the Lake directly affected the Marsh. With the digging and deepening of the Studenchiste Canal, due to the decrease in the speed of movement of the water of the Studenchiste River, the natural canal begins to be filled

with sediment and overgrown with reeds. Over time, the last natural traces of the former Studencishte River have been lost, and now an artificial canal has been created for parking boats and ships. With the intensified urbanization, the surface of the Marsh recedes within the borders to the south of the Studenchiste Canal.

**Figure 2: Studenchiste Canal, 1943**

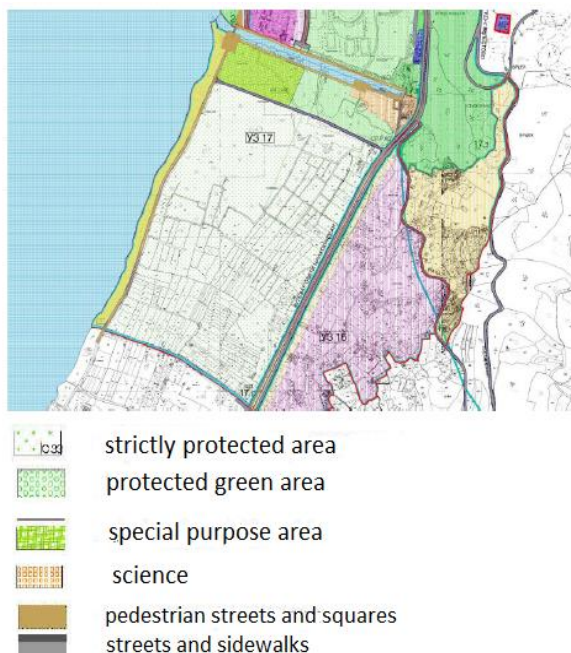


Studenchishte Marsh has a large number of endemic, relict, and rare species. Therefore its protection and revitalization are necessary, especially since the canal is in direct connection with Lake Ohrid. In Studenchishte Marsh there are a variety of higher plants, diatom algae, birds, dragonflies, butterflies, runners, fish, earthworms, amphibians, reptiles, otters, foxes, skunk, and marten. From natural and semi-natural habitats there are alkaline swamps, swamps, and wet meadows, but there are also anthropogenic ones: orchards, fields, gardens, houses, and infrastructure objects.

**Table 1: Area of the proposed protection zones in Studenchishte Marsh**  
(source: Study for the valorization of Studenchishte Marsh)

| Zone                   | Area (ha)    | Percent    |
|------------------------|--------------|------------|
| Strict protection zone | 5.33         | 8.85       |
| Active management zone | 15.08        | 25.04      |
| Sustainable use zone   | 39.82        | 66.11      |
| <b>Total</b>           | <b>60.23</b> | <b>100</b> |

**Figure 3: Synthesis plan of GUP (General Urban Plan) of the municipality of Ohrid**  
(2002-2012) for Studenchishte Marsh  
( source: Study for the valorization of Studenchishte Marsh)



Almost 11 rare species were found in the Marsh. More than half of them, i.e., five species are extinct, two species are probably extinct, while three species are threatened with extinction from the Marsh (Study for the valorization of Studenchishte Marsh). The reed belt in Ohrid Bay is strongly reduced and degraded, and earlier, it was connected to the reed belt in the Studenchishte Marsh and represented a common entity. Today, due to the construction of the pedestrian path and various catering facilities, this belt has been cut off from the Marsh. Due to eutrophication, pollution, and constant degradation of this belt, it is possible that a large part of the endemic species will disappear completely.

An integrated study on the condition of the rest of the Studenchishte Marsh and taking measures for its revitalization was started during the period from 2010 to 2012, and the revision was made from 2019 to 2020. Several experts and their assistants were involved in the preparation of the study for the valorization of the Studenchishte Marsh. The need to establish formal protection of the Studenchishte Marsh is noted in the Spatial Plan of the Republic of Macedonia (2000-2020). The proposal for the Studenchishte Marsh was revalued within the project to establish a Representative National Network of Protected Areas.

The national and international significance of the Studenchishte Marsh is perceived through the fact that it is:

- Important site of the National Ecological Network (MAK-NEN) which is part of the Pan European Ecological Network (PEEN);
- Important bird site;
- Significant site for plants;
- Important site for butterflies;
- Emerald site<sup>2</sup>;

<sup>2</sup> The Emerald Network is an ecological network made up of Areas of Special Conservation Interest. Its implementation was launched by the Council of Europe as part of its work under the Bern Convention, with the

- Ramsar site<sup>3</sup>;
- World Natural Heritage (under the protection of UNESCO);
- Proposed "Natura 2000" site.<sup>4</sup>

The Ministry of Environment and Spatial Planning of Republic of Macedonia placed Lake Ohrid and the Studenchishte marsh on the Ramsar List of Wetlands of International Importance.<sup>5</sup> On 20 March 2018, at its 60th session, the Government of the Republic of Macedonia adopted the decision for the nomination of Lake Ohrid together with Studenchishte Marsh for Ramsar, the re-proclamation of Lake Ohrid and the declaration of Studenchishte Marsh as a monument of nature.<sup>6</sup> Ohrid hosted the European conference of the Society of Wetland Scientists Europe Chapter, in which 45 experts came out with a Declaration on the protection of the Lake Ohrid ecosystem (in the original: Declaration on the protection of Lake Ohrid ecosystem).

Studenchishte Marsh, the last fully functioning wetland on the inland water's coast and a focus of Society of Wetland Scientists engagement, has been included in the new Ramsar Site's boundary, which may now offer some insulation against development pressures.<sup>7</sup> The habitats of endemic species such as the iconic *Salmo letnica* (Ohrid trout), *Gocea ohridana* (a critically endangered gastropod) are now Ramsar-validated as globally important, alongside biogeographically significant populations of *Mergus merganser* (goosander), *Netta rufina* (red crested pochard) and *Microcarbo pygmeus* (pygmy cormorant), freshwater snail *Acroloxus macedonicus*, the endemic belvica fish *Salmo ohridanus* and the velvet duck (*Melanitta fusca*), with a whole host of other birds, fish, invertebrate species across multiple categories, and, of course, Studenchishte's 5,000-year old peatlands.<sup>8</sup> At least 9 amphibian species have sustainable populations in the wetland, all of which are classified as strictly protected or protected fauna species (Apostolova 2016). The most important ones at the European level are the Macedonian crested newt (*Triturus macedonicus*) and the yellow-bellied toad (*Bombina variegata*). Regarding reptiles, at least 4 snake species have been found in Studenchishte: *Emys orbiculari*, *Elaphe quatuorlineata*, *Natrix natrix*, and *Natrix tessellata* (Spirovska et al. 2012), which are also listed in Annexes II and III of the Bern Convention.

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adoption of Recommendation No. 16 (1989) of the Standing Committee to the Bern Convention. The Republic of Macedonia, as a contracting party to the Bern Convention, in 2002 started pilot activities for the establishment of the Emerald network.

<sup>3</sup> The Ramsar Convention on Wetlands of International Importance Especially as Waterfowl Habitat is an international treaty for the conservation and sustainable use of Ramsar sites. It is also known as the Convention on Wetlands. It is named after the city of Ramsar in Iran, where the convention was signed in 1971. The Convention on Wetlands is the intergovernmental treaty that provides the framework for the conservation and wise use of wetlands and their resources. Almost 90% of UN member states, from all the world's geographic regions, have acceded to become "Contracting Parties".

<sup>4</sup> Natura 2000 is a network of nature protection areas in the territory of the European Union. It is made up of Special Areas of Conservation and Special Protection Areas designated under the Habitats Directive and the Birds Directive, respectively.

<sup>5</sup> <https://balkangreenenergynews.com/lake-ohrid-becomes-north-macedonias-third-wetland-of-international-importance/>

<sup>6</sup> <https://vlada.mk/node/25145>

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.sws.org/2021/04/01/lake-ohrid-soon-to-become-a-ramsar-wetland/>

<sup>8</sup> <https://balkangreenenergynews.com/lake-ohrid-becomes-north-macedonias-third-wetland-of-international-importance/>

Studenchishte Marsh has been identified as an essential wetland within the National Ecological Network, which is significant from the point of view of bird migration and other mobile species associated with wetland habitats. The Marsh is proposed for protection in the Special Nature Reserve category. According to the Law on Nature Protection, Studenchishte Marsh is proposed to receive protection status in category IV - Nature Park.

The inclusion of Lake Ohrid and Studenchishte Marsh on the World Ramsar list means international recognition and recognition of the specific and rich biodiversity and endemic and rare species, as well as the presence of many habitats and species of national and European significance in this area. It leads to its wiser and more responsible management, improvement of the ecological character of the area and protection of species and habitats, and encouragement of scientific research activities and international cooperation. That will increase the publicity and valuation of the area and will increase the offer for eco-tourism in the region.

As a necessity for the future management and protection of the Marsh, it is the need for its restoration and revitalization of the natural habitats. The sustainable development and survival of the Marsh consists of how the connection with the Lake will be built and how the permanent communication of the waters from the Marsh with the waters of the Lake will be resolved. At the same time, specific steps will have to be taken to clean the canal from vessels and enable natural connections with the Marsh, but also to consider the prevention of sources of pollution and disturbance to the environment. The Marsh will undoubtedly have its function for developing sustainable and eco-tourism, but also for various scientific and educational purposes for visitors.

Hydrobiological Institute in Ohrid, as a significant scientific institution, must take some role to enrich the tourist offer for all those visitors who want to be informed about the natural values of Lake Ohrid and the Studenchishte Marsh and for the promotion of them. It will be necessary to apply traditional and ecological practices in the sustainable use zone in the Marsh in order to preserve and to make more attractive for tourists.

### **Wetland tourism**

Wetlands represent some of the world's richest and most productive ecosystems. They are essential for carbon sequestration. While covering less than 10% of Earth's surface, they contain about 35% of global terrestrial carbon (Ramsar Convention Secretariat 2013). Wetlands provide numerous other services, such as provisioning and purification of water and floodwater detention. Their services are also crucial for socioeconomic reasons, offering fishery and forestry resources and recreational and tourism opportunities.

Wetland tourism is a type of tourism that is dependent on a natural element preserved in a quasi-natural state (Ceballos-Lascuráin, 1996). Interest in wetland tourism has grown recently. Finding a balance between wetland conservation and sustainable tourism development is often challenging because tourism can generate additional environmental and social problems for the very regions it needs to protect (van der Duim, R and Henkens, R, 2007).

Wetland parks are important destinations especially for domestic tourists and city dwellers. Wetlands play increasingly important roles in recreational activities and tourism. Tourism operations need to be profitable and, at the same time, ecologically sustainable; thus, tourism should provide satisfying experiences to visitors while, at the same time, having a

positive impact on the residents' standard of living. Decision making at the local level on developing tourism in wetland areas is part of a much larger and more complex process in which stakeholders with often-competing interests need to work together to find common solutions and bridge their differences.

One good example for wetland tourism is Kuala Gula Wetlands in Malaysia. Kuala Gula Wetlands, located in the northern most region of Larut-Matang Mangrove Forest Reserve in Malaysia, illustrates how wetland conservation and tourism can go hand in hand (van der Duim, R and Henkens, R, 2007, p. 8). Between 2003 and 2005, Wetlands International implemented a community based tourism project in order to provide alternative incomes for the local communities, thus reducing the pressure on fisheries and mangrove resources. Through the project, two formal, community-based organisations were created; their members were trained to carry out tourism activities at the site. As a result of this work, the local community and local government agencies were made more aware of the importance and values of the Kuala Gula wetlands to local livelihoods and the local economy. The local community enhanced their knowledge and understanding of the conservation and management of the Kuala Gula wetlands. The local communities understood the importance of maintaining a cleaner environment in Kuala Gula to improve their health and as a pre-requisite for enhancing the ecotourism and business potential of the area. The villagers found the training programme useful for the local community. About a quarter of the villagers interviewed agreed that extra income was generated through tourism activities. The increased number of tourists to Kuala Gula has resulted in income generation for those involved as chalet and boat operators and nature guides, as well as seafood restaurant and grocery shop owners. However, local people reported that most of the tour groups were arranged by agencies, and that the tours had insufficient emphasis on the values of nature, particularly of mangroves. The tour agencies failed to convey the conservation message.

**Figure 4: Tourist visitors in Kuala Gula Wetlands**



Many wetlands are prime locations for tourism. Consequently, tourism has been and is able to contribute to a growing awareness of the value of nature in general and wetlands in particular. In this way tourism can create public support for the conservation of wetlands. Through appropriate valorization and methodology the natural resources of Studenchtishte Marsh can become an attraction for all the visitors and tourists. The improvement of the quality of the tourism offer will play a significant role in the development of tourism. Valorization will help to

determine the internal and external conditions related to the Studenchishte Marsh as part of the tourism offer.

### **Conclusion**

Valorization is a necessary research process in the management and development of tourist destinations. The area where tourism develops is an essential development category that should undergo detailed valorization. The Ohrid tourist area has many significant, unique, attractive natural and cultural values. Studenchishte Marsh located in Ohrid is one of those unique and attractive natural values that should be valorized for tourism purposes and for protection purposes.

Studenchishte Marsh is the only surviving wetland on Lake Ohrid's shore. Studenchishte Marsh matters from two perspectives: its significance and its role in the resilience of the broader ecosystem of Lake Ohrid, so immediate and appropriate conservation, protection, and valorization are more than needed. The valorization of Studenchishte Marsh will undoubtedly represent an economic gain for the municipality of Ohrid. In addition to the economic benefit, its natural and aesthetic function is also a priority, namely the functions it performs as a water purifier, flood protector, biodiversity maintainer, fish hatchery, birds nesting place, carbon dioxide collector, microclimate regulator, and place for recreation.

Development of sustainable tourism is not possible without the support and involvement of the local community. The valorization of the Studenchishte Marsh should not be considered a process that will mean an additional cost burden on the municipality of Ohrid (at the local level), but as an investment that, over time, will contribute to the development of tourism and the protection of Lake Ohrid. Studenchishte Marsh must receive the form of protection it deserves not only because of UNESCO's recommendations, but also because of its geological and biological values, above all because of the presence of habitats and species of national and European importance.

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