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OPPORTUNITIES FOR DEVELOPMENT OF AGRO AND FAMILY TOURISM IN THE AREA OF LAKE OHRID ON THE EXAMPLE OF LAKE BOLSENA – ITALY¹

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ABSTRACT

We live in turbulent times, marked by the hope of entering a post-pandemic period and gradually overcoming the deep economic crisis caused by Covid-19. One of the most severely affected industries - tourism requires special attention. This report examines the opportunities for further development of agro and family tourism in the Ohrid region, taking into account the available advantages and disadvantages. The certain similarity of the considered territories gives an opportunity to transfer some good practices by the same way for the purpose to create a better tourist product and its management. It's made an attempt for a comparative analysis of accommodation, food, tourist attractions and related products, through which to look for points of contact between the two regions. The author is also looking for opportunities to implement ready-made models in order to increase the competitiveness of Ohrid and the region.

KEY WORDS: Tourism, camping, agriculture, advantages

The COVID-19 Crisis continues to be one of the most seriously articulated events of our time. All hopes that it and its consequences will be overcome quickly today seem chimera. As a result, our lives and business relationships have changed dramatically.

¹ professional paper

One of the industries that has experienced the greatest difficulties is tourism. Its essence and the main recipients it handles - humans, have led to lasting changes in the relationship between supply and demand. Today, categories such as "safe", "remote", "no clusters", "fresh air", "remote", "where there is good health care", etc. take precedence in forming a choice for the purchase of a tourist product or service.

This change in the worldview of tourists, imposed by the danger and anxiety of spreading the infection, intensified the process of forming certain competitive advantages of businesses and territories, which began with the establishment of the Wellness idea or the concept of proactive lifestyle - stay, rest, sports, outdoor life. Having space, not being in a crowded hotel, has become the number one goal of consumers.

In this line of thinking, the traditional top resorts, attracting millions of tourists concentrated in too small an area, have become increasingly unattractive to tourism, despite repeated attempts to reduce prices, especially during longer holidays. Fear of a potential morbidity boom, due to the lack of opportunity to limit close contact or compliance with anti-epidemic requirements, prevailed despite all measures and led to the need to change the supply of tourism products and services.

It is here that the focus is on the vast territories, which, purely natural and geographic, are carriers of a certain potential - mountains, lakes, dams, remote settlements and more.

The subject of the present study are two such territories, which are carriers of certain geographical similarities, but at the same time economic and purely organizational differences - Lake Ohrid (Republic of Northern Macedonia) and Lake Bolsena (Italy).

The aim of the study is to make a comparative analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of the territories under consideration, as well as to look for opportunities for exchange of good practices, which will increase the attractiveness of Lake Ohrid.

To achieve the set goal, the following tasks are solved successively:

- A brief geographical description of the regions is proposed;
- The competitive advantages of the territories are considered (according to the views of the author);
- Models for copying good practices are proposed;

- The possibilities for formation of competitive advantages on the territory of Ohrid and the region are indicated.

Lake Ohrid is the deepest lake on the Balkan region, occupying an area of 353.9-362.6 km², of which nearly 2/3 (248 km²) is located in the territory of the Republic of Northern Macedonia, and 1/3 (105 km²).), in Albania. The altitude is 697.17 m, and in its longest part it is 30 km and its width reaches 14.5 km. The coastline is 88 km and the deepest point is 287.4 m.² In comparison, Lake Bolsena is almost twice smaller than the Macedonian part of Lake Ohrid - 113.5 km². It has an almost oval shape with a length of 13 and a width of 11 km, and the deepest point is 151 m, at an altitude of 305 m. The total length of the coastline is 43 km. From the point of view of tourist resources, the two urbanized islands are a huge plus: Bisentina (the larger one - 17 ha) and Martana, respectively 10.3 ha. The capitals of Bolsena, Martha and Capodimonte have had serious historical accumulations, culminating in the thirteenth century when they joined the Kingdom of Italy, although there has been evidence of urbanization since their Phoenician and Etruscan periods. On the other hand, Ohrid is much older and multi-layered, dating from the V and IV century BC, when for the first time in these places is mentioned Lihinda, lying on the road Via Ignatius.

Historical accumulations are a fact in both locations. It is no coincidence that the importance of the city and the nature around it are recognized by UNESCO and in 1979 Lake Ohrid was declared a world natural heritage, and the following year Ohrid as a world cultural heritage site.³ This fact can be considered as a major competitive advantage

Second in importance, but no less as a burden, is the comparison in agrarian terms. The Ohrid Lake region has serious competitive advantages over the territory affected by the study on the Italian side. It has a large number of small farms in which a variety of production is organized, which is characterized by:

- the high quality and, above all, the variety of agricultural and agricultural products, refracted through the prism of relatively lower costs;

² По данни от Сибиновиќ, Милорад. Езера Преспанско и Охридско, Скопје 1987

³ <https://whc.unesco.org/en/documents/137763>

- traditional varieties and methods of cultivation, which distinguish in taste the production, which is a leading element in the development of gourmet tourism;
- presence of a very favorable climate for growing many crops; (One of the biggest advantages of the region compared to the far south Bolsena)
- availability of labor, which isolates the negative effect of intensification and over-mechanization in the sector
- pastoral and natural appearance of the small farm, which gives high tourist value to the offered products.
- very good taste qualities of the produced and processed products.

The presence of many private farms, which have a certain flexibility, as well as the naturalness of their condition is very attractive and appealing to tourists.

There is a serious potential for increasing the number of farms and holdings that offer tourist products and services, especially in the areas of rural, ecological and family tourism. The forecast for access to funds from the European pre-accession funds for the development of these areas is also optimistic, and after the accession of the Republic of Northern Macedonia to the EU, these opportunities will increase even more.

One of the aspects in which Ohrid and the region lag behind is camping tourism - one of the most beneficial forms of family tourism. It is here that the Ohrid region is not very well developed. Directly, it should be taken into account the presence of more than fifteen accommodations of this type, of which seven - eight are highly rated, then their number is insufficient, and their presentation on the Internet - below satisfactory. For comparison, in the region of Bolsano (which as a territory is about 40% smaller than that of the Ohrid region) are located over 35 campsites, 3 of which are in the top 20 of the best campsites in Italy.⁴ The most representative of them have the capacity to welcome between 600-1000 + people, and the majority are equipped with swimming pools, shops, restaurants, etc.⁵

⁴ <https://www.camping.it/en/trentinoaltoadige/bolsena/>

⁵ <https://www.camping.it/it/ricerca/?q=bolsena>

The proximity to nature, clean air, space, relaxing views, the opportunity to perform a number of outdoor activities, etc. are becoming an increasingly important motive in choosing this type of tourist trip, respectively accommodation. The tranquility of nature, the lethargic mood and the timelessness in which one falls is a counterpoint to the dynamic, stressful, highly revolving lifestyle that most people lead. The ability to influence the rules somewhere or to establish them yourself, to get out of the cliché or just to radically change everyday life is rather a function of the pursuit of free thought, some primacy or just an attempt to minimize the influence of society, position in society or formal environment. Recreation in nature is a matter of philosophy, which rejects the rational and the conventional and rather focuses on the unchanneled, the unknown, even the problematic. This other view on how to spend the time during which the individual must prepare for the new work cycle is shared by more and more tourists and this is quite normal and logical. The change in worldview follows the rhythm of time and its changing values. Today, the focus of global society is becoming environmentally friendly, natural, etc., and all efforts channeling the business-consumption system are aimed at establishing these new categories. All these are the basis for an upgrade in the existing traditional business relationships.

It is because of these changes in traditional demand that the need for investment in the development of camping tourism is becoming more and more noticeable, which, especially as a result of the pandemic, has established itself as a "well-forgotten" new way to spend free time.

Last but not least, it is worth paying attention to the opportunities for entertainment and leisure. Traditionally, the attention of tourists in the area of Bolsena and the lake, along with the towns of Martha and Capodimonte are offered:

- Seven urban beaches with sunbeds, umbrellas, bars, shops, etc.
- Rental of water equipment (sailing boat with and without crew, motor boats of different power, jets, water skis, canoe, kayak, pedal boat)
- motorbike rent

- Surfing and windsurfing (specialized school and camping for surfers)
- Boat trip, boats, catamarans
- Diving
- Mini amusement railway, with a route of about 14 km
- Organized walking tours (including the whole lake with 6 nights in different campsites)
- Gourmet and wine tours
- Horseback riding
- Rock climbing
- One-day bus trips (more than 10 destinations provided by travel agencies)
- Organized bicycle tours, including electrical bicycles and other for small children, tandem bicycles

Probably these are some of the opportunities that the region offers to its tourists. It is impressive that most of these proposals are highly profitable and over-exploited by tourists. If we assume that on an annual basis, however, Ohrid receives about 250 thousand tourists⁶ (data are before the pandemic), then Lake Bolsano attracts over 1 million people annually.

However, the similarity of the two is serious and it can be thought that a number of business initiatives can be borrowed from investors from Ohrid and the region, which will improve on the one hand the attractiveness and on the other the profitability of tourism.⁷

The author also offers a tabular comparative description of the regions, with an assessment of strengths and weaknesses.

	Size of district	Pure water	Climate	History	Food and wine	Food quality	Quality of beach
Ohrid lake	**** **	***** *	*****	**** **	*****	***** **	****
Bols	****	*****	*****	****	*****	*****	*****

⁶ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tourism_in_North_Macedonia

⁷ <https://www.bolsena.com/en/tourism/#top>

ena lake				*			
	Natural resources	Bars, restaurants, coffees	Quality of Shops	Tour options	Accommodation	Camping's	Entertainments
Ohrid lake	**** ***	*****	****	**** *	***	**	***
Bolsena lake	***	***** **	*****	**** ***	*****	***** *	*****
	Rent options	Hospitality	Infrastructure	Health coverage	Communications	Safety	Relation price - quality
Ohrid lake	**	***** **	****	**** *	*****	*****	***** *
Bolsena lake	**** **	*****	***** **	**** ***	*****	***** *	*****

Table 1. Comparison between Ohrid and Bolsena lakes

* These assessments are the author's subjective perception of the state of the two regions based on personal experience gained in May-July 2021, have no scientific basis and can be used only as a potential starting point for more in-depth research.

From the study it can be concluded that in the end the competitive advantage in terms of accommodation, tourism products and services tends to Lake Bolsena. However, the potential for development of Lake Ohrid is not to be underestimated. A more targeted government policy is needed to promote entrepreneurship and better channel investment.

All eyes are on next year, hoping the pandemic will be a memory of the past. Having said all that, analyses predict a boom in tourist travel in 2022 - a challenge that Ohrid and its lake can meet.

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