

CREATING TOURISTIC ITINERARY IN THE REGION OF PRESPA

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ABSTRACT

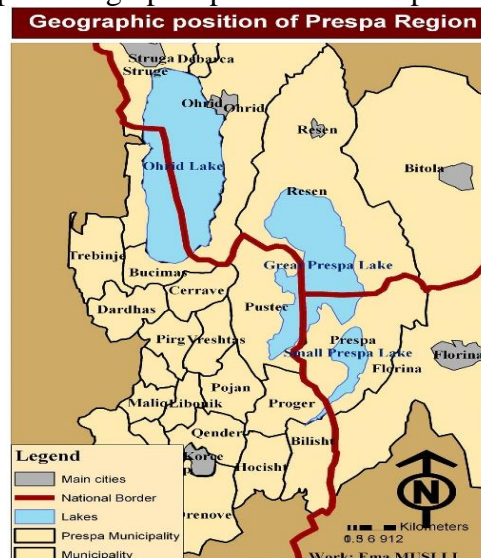
The Prespa Region is located on the Balkan Peninsula, between the countries of Albania, Macedonia and Greece. It includes Greater Prespa Lake and the surrounding beach and meadow areas, designated agricultural use areas and the towns of Pustec, Resen and Prespes. This region is now a part of the Trans-Boundary Biosphere Reserve 'Ohrid-Prespa Watershed. Greater and Lesser Prespa lakes plus Ohrid Lake are included in the UNESCO world Heritage Site. This area has been known historically for its diverse natural and cultural features. Prespa Region is currently covered by Prespa National Parks in Albania and Greece and Galichica and Pelisteri National Parks in Macedonia. The natural environment and the cultural heritage are a key element designated for the development of the region's sustainable tourism. This study was enhanced via the Geographic Info System (GIS) digital presentation showing the opportunities for nature tourism in the Pustec and Resen commune. The article also includes two touristic itineraries that will help a better promotion of the tourism in the Prespa Region.

Keywords: Touristic potential, cultural heritage, nature heritage, touristic itineraries.

INTRODUCTION

The Greater Prespa Watershed is located in the southeastern region of Albania and in the southwestern part of Macedonia, in the region of Korçë, commune of Pustec in the Albanian part, in the Resen commune in the Macedonian part and in the Prespe commune in Greece. The Watershed of Prespa stands at an elevation of 850-1200m above sea level surrounded by mountains assuming thus more continental features in the Macedonian part. In this region it is located the Greater and Lesser Prespa Lakes in the girdle of brown mountainous lands and fulvous forest; in the vegetation girdle of oak, beech and alpine pastures.

Map 1. Geographic position of Prespa Region



Work: Ema Muslli, Software Arc GIS 10

The commune of Pustec is located in the northeastern part of Korçë about 30 km away. Liqenas has a surface of 160.1km²(Local Plan of Development 2008) whereas Resen is a commune with a surface of 737.4km², with 45 dwellings(www.resen.com).The Resen commune has been included in the statistical region of Pellagonia.The Prespa commune in Greece is part of the prefecture of Florina.

The natural heritage of the region is composed of three categories of natural areas which are under protection. Category I (Strictly Protected Reserve) is represented by the Natural Reserve of Ezeran. Category II (National Park) is represented by the National Park of Prespa in Albania and Greece, National Park of Pelister and Galica in Macedonia. Category III (Natural Monuments) is represented by the Island of Maligrad, Zaver Hollow, Island of Golem Grad, Greater Prespa Lake, Oaks of Manastir, and Kallamas Juniper.

The Natural Reserve of Erzeni lies in the northern part of the shore of the Greater Prespa. This reserve is located between two villages in the commune of Resen, Sir Han and Asamat. Erzen covers a surface of 2800 hectares and stands at an elevation of 855m above sea level. On 5th March 1995 this area was one of the first areas of the Macedonian country accepted in the Ramsar Convention. In 1996 the area was declared by the state of Macedonia as a Strictly Protected Reserve. In the (Naumoski, 2012,41) frame of touristic activity Ezerani is known as a bird watching site. The region of Prespa is a natural habitat for about 200 species¹ of birds like the wild goose, the pelican, the swan etc. 62 from these species are in the list of the protected species compiled in the Bern Convention. Four of these species are included in the Red Book of the species in danger of extinction in an international scale.

Prespa National Park is located in the Pustec Commune. The area was nominated National Park in 1999 and has an area of 27,750 hectare. The main reasons why this area was nominated a protected area are the overuse of the natural resources of the Great Prespe Area during the communist regime and also the rich biodiversity it offers. The park itself is a hotspot (Fremuth. W, Shumka.S, 2013) of biodiversity. Experts have found so far 1130 plants. About 60 plants are threatened and endangered in a national level from which 11 have the status of globally threatened or endangered plants like: *Fritillaria graeca* *Buxbaumia viridis*.

In total in the area of Prespa are registered 60 species(Fremuth. W, Shumka.S, 2013) of mammals amid which part of the rare, endemic, globally endangered species like the lynx and deer have not been seen in the area for years. While the wild goat and the hare are rare because of illegal hunting.

In the park there are 132 species of waterfowl. Among these 132 species one is categorized as exposed to danger, two are almost threatened and 129 other species are considered less endangered using the IUCN system.

In the park there are 23 types of reptiles and 11 types of amphibians. In the Greater and Lesser Prespa Lake there are 23 types of fish, 9 of which are endemic and 15 are considered as “endangered”. In the Albanian “Red Book” two types of long antenna beetle are described as “endangered” (Siering, G. 2013).

The Galichica National Park is a natural continuation of the Prespa National Park. The area was nominated as National Park in 1958 more because of the natural diversity rather than the need for environmental protection. The park lies along the Galichica Mountain Range, between Ohrid Lake and Greater Prespa Lake covering an area of 227km².

The Galichica Park has comparatively had a good environmental management. The flora species are larger in number than the ones in the Prespa Park in Albania. Furthermore, a considerable part of the flora species which was moved from Albanian part of the Prespa National Park was sent to Galichica Park.

Inside the park there are more than 1000 types of plants. A great number of species date back to the time before the glacial era thus are considered as relics such as *Morina Persica*, *Stipa mayeri*, *Ramonda nathaliae*, etc. Moreover, in the area there are endemic plants such as *Ajuga piskoi*, *Erodium guiccardii*, *Oxytropis purpurea*, *Astragalus baldaccii*, etc.

In the park (Naumoski, 2012, 40) there are 171 species of vertebrates, 10 species of amphibians, 18 species of reptiles, 124 species of birds and 19 types of reptiles. Among them it can be mentioned the wild goat, the lynx and the bear which are turning into rare species in the rest of the Europe. Among the species of birds there is the pelican. Part of the Galichica Park belongs to the Resen Commune excluding the Greater Prespa Lake.

Prespa National Park, Greece includes the lake of Lesser Prespa and Greater Prespa which are divided by the island of Ism. The main types of vegetation are the areas of reeds. There is also found a formation of aquatic plants which are set in the pan of the lake like *Ceratophyllum sp.*, *Myriophyllum sp.*, and *Potamogeton sp.* The park is also important for the growth and breeding of aquatic waterfowls. In the area are thought to belong in total 200 types of species which have been noticed alongside the lake and the surrounding forest. Especially important are the colonies of the *Pelicanus crispus* (wild pelican) and *Pelicanus onocrotalus* (the red pelican). The aquatic fauna is also important because of the high number of endemic species. In the sub species level, 80% of them are endemic species. The coast is in some part rocky, craggy and in others low created by the sediments of the stream with dense vegetation. The coast of the Lesser Prespa is known for the dense aquatic vegetation and for the rare species like the wild goose, the pelican which attract the attention of the international scientific institutions (www.visitgreece.gr).

The Greater Prespa Lake has an area of 261.8 km² included in a reservoir basin of 1370 km². The surface of the lake part of the Albanian side is 47.9 km². 176.3 km² of the surface of the lake are part of the Macedonian territory. Only 37.6 km² of the Greater Prespa is in the Greek territory. The lake stands at an elevation of 850m above sea level and has a tectonic-carstic origin. The lake is fed by rain water and underground water. The water of the lake is well known for being transparent. The Greater Prespa is a shallow lake with an average depth of 28m. The average water temperature is 12°C. The minimal temperature in winter is 0.6°C. The maximal temperature in summer is 22°C. The Peninsula of Sihagore and the peninsula of Ism divide the Greater Prespa from the Lesser one. The surface outflow is poor while the system of the underground artesian waters is more developed. The most important surface outflow is the one of the stream of Liqenas 2.1km (Perikli Qiriazhi, p.93). There can also be mentioned the stream of Zaroshkë, Goricë.

Golem Grad Island is also known as the island of snakes because of the considerable number of water snakes found along the coast of the island. Starting from 14 July 2008 the island was able to be visited by tourists. Golem Grad is under the protection of the staff of the National Park of Galichice. The island is well known for its rich natural diversity, but the interest of the biologist, researchers is more concentrated on the species of reptiles and amphibians like water snakes, lizards, turtles (<http://www.arvati-etnoselo.com>). There is a study ongoing in the island concerning finding and cataloguing the existing and new species

of the flora and fauna as part of a request by UNESCO. Golem Grad conserves traces of the history of Prespe during the Roman Empire but this aspect of Golem Grad will be expanded in the cultural heritage.

The Island of Maligrad is a geo monument found in the Macro Prespa Lake, 900m above the sea level, 700-800m long and 180-200m wide. It is made of calcareous stone and it represents remnants of the sinking of the Prespa graben. (Qiriazi, Sala, 2006, 48-49).

The Zaver Hole is located in the western coast of the Macro Prespa Lake, near the village of Lesser Gorice. It is formed in the crossing of two tectonic ruptures. The water of the Greater Prespa penetrates near it which continues in Ohrid Lake (Geology Institut, Korca, 2013). The cave, where there was water until 20 years ago, is full of galleries, wells and a "lake". It is soon to be explored. It has particular scientific, didactic, touristic values.

The area in study was inhabited by the pallasgus, Illyrians and it is, for the most part, still inhabited by Albanians. This is confirmed by the archeological findings in the island of Maligrad represented by the St Mary church (see page). Kallamas is a village in the commune of Pustec which lies in the northeastern part of the coast of Greater Prespa Lake. In the archeological site of Kallamas were discovered traces of the neolite period like pieces of pottery and processed stone. There can be found a considerable number of churches in the Albanian part of Prespa. Whereas in the Macedonian part it can be found also objects belonging to the ottoman period like mosques. There are included four churches in the list of cultural monuments.

The church of St Mary in the Island of Maligrad is located in a natural rock hollow, on the southern part of the island of Maligrad in Greater Prespa, in the east of the village of Pustec. The church is a quadratic paraklesis mainly composed of the altar and naos. These two areas are divided by two wooden iconostases from each other. The older of which dates in 1345 while the later one dates in 1604. The church was built in XIV century (Culture Institut in Korca 2013). St Mary of Pustec preserves in a good condition a mural created in three different phases with numerous inscriptions as well as the family portrait of Kesar Novak in the western front, which are an important historic source, bespeaking of important data in relation to the artistic taste of local nobles and in relation to the organization of the iconographic program in one nave, arched churches.

The cave of St Mary Glluboko is located in the east of Kallamas village, near the Macedonian border, on the shore of the lake. The cave is composed of two natural hollows, the lower one was used as paraklesis while the other one as a sleeping chamber for the anchorite. The importance of the upper hollow lies in the representation of St Mary in the Orantha version painted in one part of the hollow.

The church dates back to the end of the XIII century (Culture Institut in Korca 2013). The cave of St Mary Glluboko is in the east of the village of Bezmisht, near the lake. The murals are preserved in a good condition. The cave is an important expression of birth and organization of life as well as the organization of monastery life in the coast of Greater Prespa while its paintings constitute an important, transitory phase towards a more advanced style of the byzantine visual art which was developed at the beginning of the XIV century. The painting of St Mary Glluboko dates back to the end of the XII century. The paraklesis conserves a considerable number of paintings with an expanded iconographic cycle such as: Gospel, Birth, Ipapandia, Baptism, Resurrection of Righteous Lazar etc as well as

representation of individual saints, compositions that were adapted to the space of the natural hollow. From the analysis of the pictorial ensemble of St Mary of Glluboko it results that its style is Byzantinesque and it has been appraised for the spirit of liberty, advanced, vital, realistic inclination which differentiate it from the other paintings of the area. Thus it has been considered as precursor of the most advanced style of byzantine painting of the XIV century.

St George Church lies in the slope of mountain Pelister, in the village of Kurbinovo. The church dates back to 1191. It was rebuilt during the XIX-XX century (Prespa Region, SWG). Three unknown painters decorated the walls of the church with scenes from the life and miracles of Jesus Christ. The painting date back to the XII century and represent masterpieces of painting in Macedonia. The earliest painting of the church is the one of St Methodius which is also one of the earliest paintings of the Byzantine period.

St Mary Monastery is located in the village of Slivnicë and dates back to 1607. In 1994 the dormitory was modernized. The paintings and icons belong to the year 1612 but part of them is damaged (info@macedoniavision.com). That is why in 1645 part of the icons was substituted with new paintings. The iconostases have been preserved in their original state. Two of them are “Royal Doors” and “Sacred Cross” carved in wood. Outside the monastery there is a spring of sacred water which is believed to possess curative properties.

Ahmed Niyazi Bey Saraj, Resne is located in the city of Resen. It was built in 1908 in French style by Ahmed Niayzi Bey (Where nature, culture ancient history meet, GTZ). Ahmed Niyazi was one of the Young Turks leaders. Today this building is a House of Culture where are exhibited ceramics made by the Ceramic Colony of Resen, in the village of Hoteshovë, and it is member of the international academy for ceramic in UNESCO, as well as museum of a well known Macedonian painter Keraca Visulceva.

Ethnographic Museum of Podmočan is situated in the village of Podmočan, in the private house of Jone Eftimovski. The museum includes on the richest ethnographic collections in Macedonia with more than 2000 artistic objects including: jewelry, weapons, coins and more than 160 traditional costumes from different regions in Macedonia (info@macedoniavision.com).

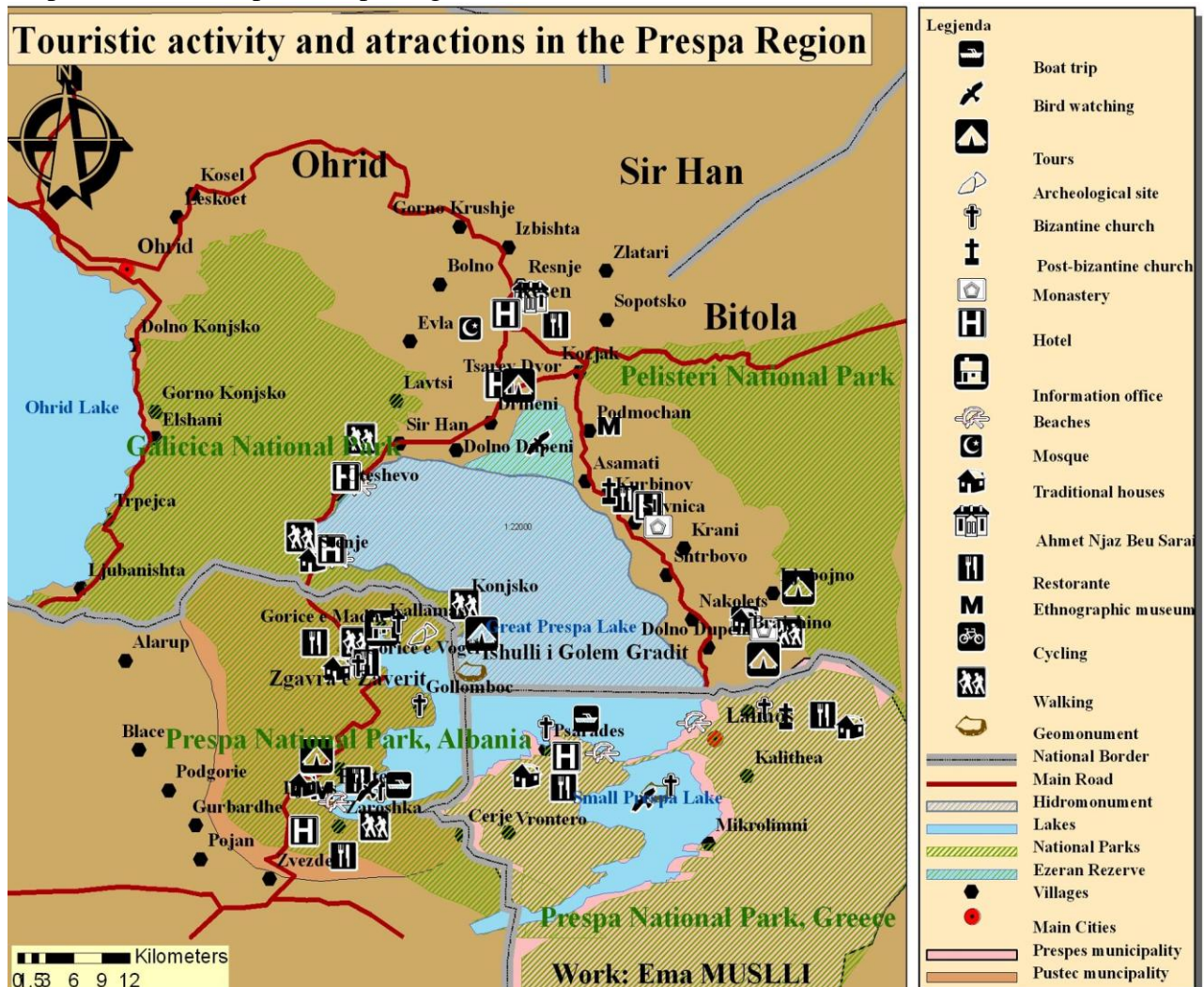
The villages are distinguished for the characteristic houses made of stone as well as for the particular tradition in culinary, garments, songs and folk dance. The population is distinct for the craftsmanship of stone, ceramics, and wool. The culture of the area of Prespa is a mixed Albanian-Macedonian –Greek culture. The population there is well known for being hospitable, generous and lively.

Agios Germanos is the largest village in the east of the Prespa commune. The territory is composed mostly of granite rocks. It is known for the beautiful nature and particular traditions and culture. It stands at an elevation of 1100m above sea level and it is 7km far from the lake. The village had 1900 inhabitants in 1900 while today there are only 150 because of the civil war in Greece. It is one of the few villages of the area of Greek Prespa which preserves the characteristic architecture of the area. The buildings are made of stone. In the village you can visit the St Germano church built in the XI century during the byzantine period; as well as the St Athanasios Church built in the second half of the XVIII century, which is considered as an example of byzantine and post byzantine architecture. The church is known for the well preserved murals. (info@prespespetrino.gr).

Psarades is a village facing Golem Grad. The area is composed of limestone and the vegetation is made of mostly bushes and pines. In 1991 the number of inhabitants was 144 compared with 167 in 1981. Inside the village of Psarade you can find boats (40 euro) which accompany you to see the anchorite caves. (info@prespessetrino.gr)

Agios Achillios is an island which is thought to have been the old capital city of Tzar Emanuel who brought the remains of St Achilios in the island and built a splendid basilica. It is a three-aisled basilica with a narthex from the mid-Byzantine period, is one of the largest 10th century basilicas in the area of Macedonia and the most important monument on the island of St. Achilles. From 1018 to the beginning of the 15th century, the church served as a Cathedral. Today, specimens of murals are saved, both from the School of Ohrid and samples influenced by the Kastorian styles. A grave, attributed to St. Achilles, has also been discovered. The Museum of Florina houses some frescoes from the early 11th and 12th centuries(IPA Cross-border program Albania- Greece,2013 p.67).

Map 2. Touristic map of Prespa Region



Work: Ema Muslli, Software Arc GIS 10

Touristic Itinerary

Day One. The itinerary will begin in the Albanian part of Prespë from the city of Korçë. The tourists will set off in the morning from Korçë. The journey will continue in the village of

Zvezdë. The itinerary continues towards the touristic village of Zaroshkë and Pustec which are situated in the National Park of Prespë (see Page 2). Several meters away from the coast of the lake it can be found the island of Maligrad (see Page 3) which is a geo monument with natural and cultural values. The tourists will get to the island in a boat and will have the opportunity to admire the pelicans that fly around the island and also visit the St Mary church dating from the XIV century (see Page 4).

From Diellas they will continue towards the village Gollomboc and then towards the village Little Gorica where tourist can visit the geo monument the Zaver Hollow (see Page 3). Afterwards they will continue towards Kallamas where tourists can visit the St Mitri church which is located in the center of the village as well as St Mary Cave (see Page 4) which is in the east of Kallamas.

In Kallamas they can also visit (depending on the wishes of the group) the Neolithic site of Kallamas. In this village they will have lunch and then travel towards the border of Gorica to the touristic village of Otoshevo where they will rest.

Day Two. The tourists will set off from the village of Otoshevo at 8:00 to visit the island of Golem Grad (see Page 3). In Otoshevo they will take a boat along the itinerary Otoshevo-Stenje-Konjsko-Golem Grad. They can also visit the village of Stenjë, the village of the fishermen Konjsko, the island of Golem Grad which is known for the particular fauna and historical sites (see page 3). The trip includes lunch with traditional dishes from the area and will last about two hours. After the end of the tour in Golem Grad the tourists will return in Otoshevo where they can rest at the beach near the hotel.

Day Three. The tourists set off at 9:00 to go to the Reserve of Ezeran (see Page 2) which is known for watching waterfowls. Later on the tour continues towards the city of Resen where they will spend the night. The tourists will be able to visit the Ahmed Niyazi Bey Saraj and enjoy the art created by the Ceramics Colony. They can also see the works of art of the painter Keraca Visuleva (see Page 4). Afterwards they will go to Podmochan to visit the Ethnographic Museum (see Page 5) at the house of Jone Eftimovi. The rest of the day will be spent travelling to the village of Kurbinovo where they will visit the touristic village, in particular the church of St George from the XI century and they will also have the possibility to rest.

Day Four. The day will start at 8:00. The tourists will set off from Kurbinovo and visit the touristic villages of Slivnicë, Kran, Brajcin, Ljubojno. They could travel by car or ride bicycles or even walk. In Ljubojno they will have the lunch break and the rest of the day will be spent travelling from the border of Niki towards Botla in the Greek part of Prespa. They will rest in Florina.

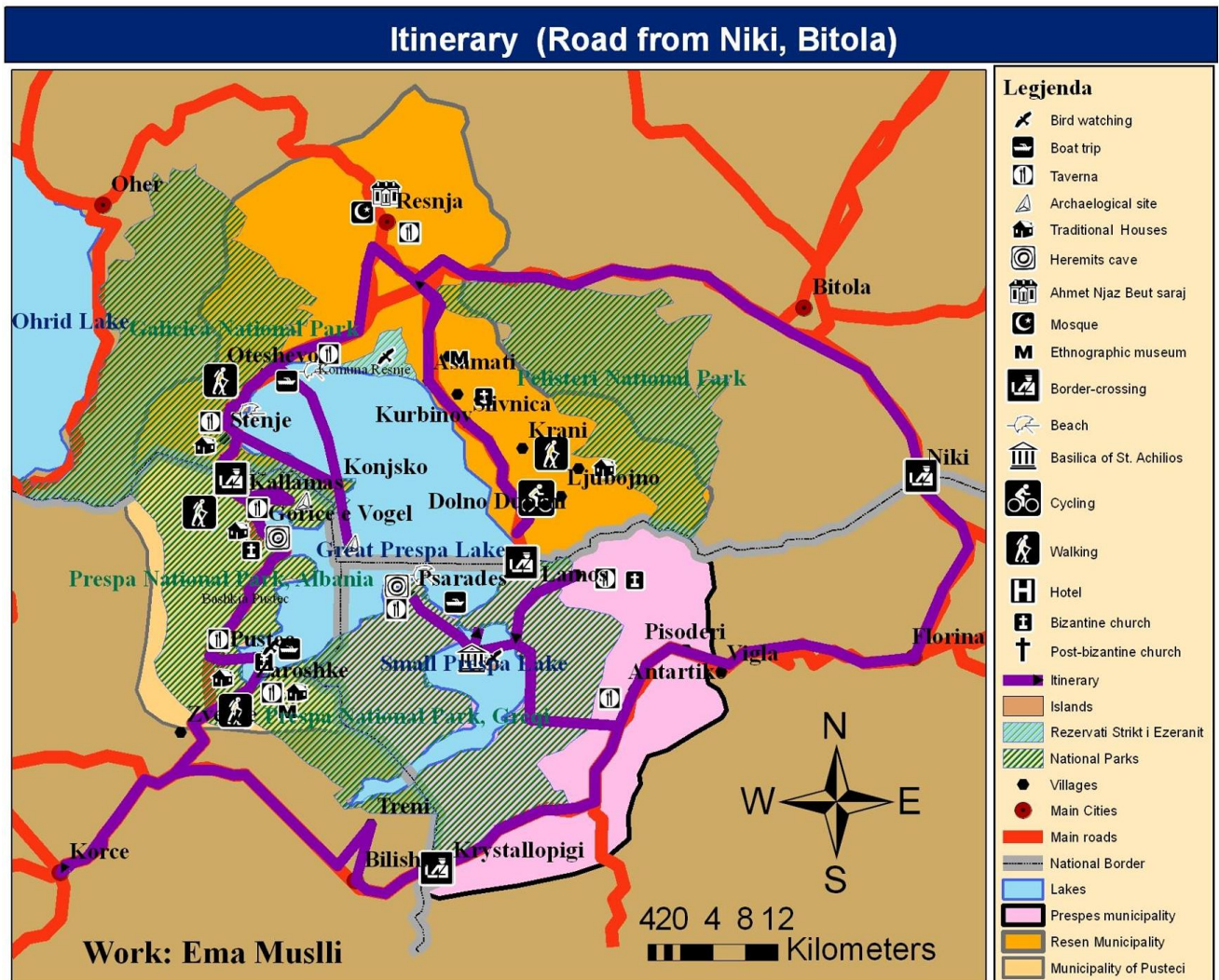
An opportunity to be considered in the future would be the opening of the border of Dolno Dupen (part of Resen commune) which would shorten considerably the journey to the Greek part of Prespe and which would allow tourists a more complete view of the region of Prespa. In this case the tourists would rest in Agios Germanos.

Day Five. Awakening at 8:00 a.m. from Florina it will be possible to visit two byzantine and post byzantine churches of St Germano from XI century and St Athanosios from XVIII century. Later on they can take a boat with which they can visit various parts of the area of Prespa. The boat ride will start in Psarades where they can admire the rock with byzantine

murals. Later they can visit the basilica of St Achilios, Mikolimnia, Koula beach and the observatory to watch rare birds. At lunch tourists will be able to enjoy some typical dishes and desserts of the area in one of the traditional taverns.

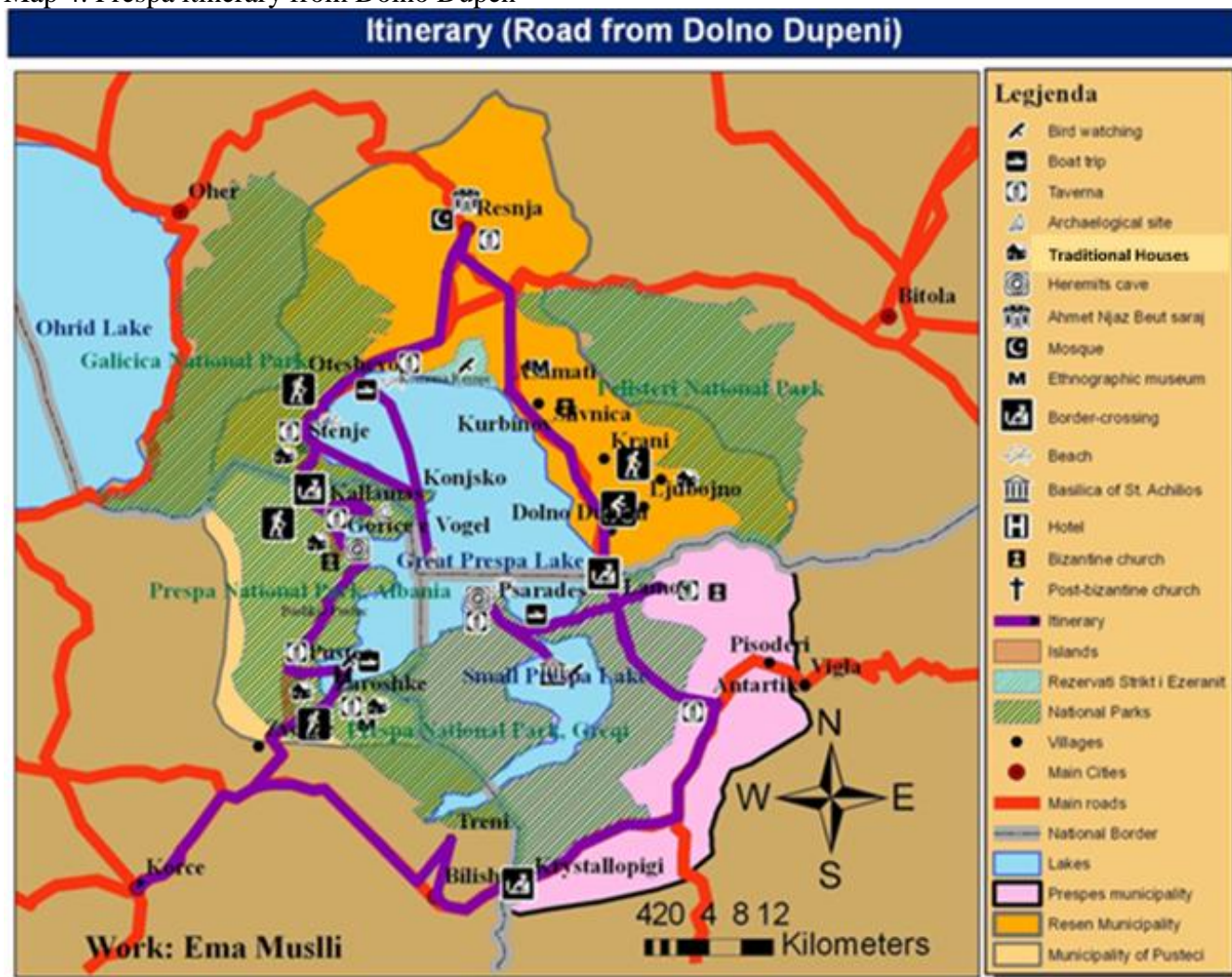
Day Six. Return to Korçë through the border point of Kapshticë. Afterwards they will travel towards the city of Bilisht to visit the cave of Tren and have lunch in one of the restaurants of the area. After lunch they will travel back to Korçë.

Map 3. Prespa itineraru from Niki, Bitola



Work: Ema Muslli, Software Arc GIS 10

Map 4. Prespa itinerary from Dolno Dupeni



Work: Ema Muslli, Software Arc GIS 10

CONCLUSIONS

The Region of Prespa is distinguished as an important ecological value locally (district of Korçë), nationally (Republic of Albania, Republic of Macedonia and Greece), internationally (the area is also known as a site of natural heritage by UNESCO). The favourable natural position, the climate features, the relievo formation, the geological composition, the presenc of Greater Prespa Lake, the rich vegetation are combined to create a myriad of ecosystems. Some of the most widespeard types of ecosystems are the mountainous, forestal, boggy, lake ecosystem. The area has been classified as a “hotspot” of biodiversity. The area is known for the diversity of vegetation and fauna which are included in species in danger, endemic species and relic species. According to the EUNIS classification (European Union Nature Information System) the land and aquatic ecosystem of the Park are qualified as a site of Nature 2000 (Wolfgang Fremuth, Prof. Dr. Spase Shumka 2014). The diversity of habitats, flora and fauna of the area of the Greater Prespa makes it possible to be developed different types of tourism which promote the stable development of tourism.

The area of Prespa offers opportunities to see closely the religious, architectural and folk heritage. There are opportunities to visit churches with particular values especially connected

to the religious art. Among them it can be distinguished the paleochristian church of St Mary in the island of Maligrad and the cave of St Mary in Bezmisht where anchorites have lived who have propagated the Christian religion in the area of Prespa.

The visual art in the churches belong to the byzantine and post byzantine period. Icons and frescoes of the byzantine period have been found in the church of St Mary, Bezemisht, , St Mary, Maligrad. Whereas the mural art of the post byzantine period is expressed in the icons and frescoes of the St George church in the village of Kurbinov.

During the communist period the practice of religion was forbidden and as a result the artistic works of the byzantine and post byzantine period were not valued and maintained thus a great part of the medieval cultural heritage was lost. The icons and frescoes of the byzantine period, being more fragile in preservation and restoration, did not survive time. Thus the icons and frescoes found in the cave of St Mary, Bezemisht and St Mary church in Maligrad are valuable works of art part of the Albanian cultural heritage today. There have been found in Prespa traces of the ottoman occupation displayed in the cultural monuments like Ahmed Niyazi Bey Saraj in Resen, which was built in the western style of French castles. Today it is a cultural center. In the Saraj are exhibited ceramic objects created in the Ceramics Colony in Otoshevo.

Prespa is a touristic destination which offers relaxing vacation for those visitors who want to get away from the noises of the city. The types of tourism that can be developed are the rural tourism, ecotourism, cultural tourism and family tourism. Whereas for those that are fond of an active holiday can be engaged in sports like bike riding, mountain climbing. The creation of touristic itineraries, despite the ample possibilities for the development of tourism, encounters many problems in the social and economic life like poverty; migration, which hamper the development of tourism in the area of Greater Prespa. In the future the reopening of Dolno Dupen border will make possible for tourist to arrive and visit the Prespa region more easily.

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