

# Nepokretna kulturna dobra UNESCO-a u Hrvatskoj i njihov značaj za turizam

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**Nepokretna kulturna dobra UNESCO-a u Hrvatskoj i njihov  
značaj za turizam**

**Croatian immovable cultural heritage on the UNESCO list and its  
significance for tourism**

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Opatija, 2024.

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Kolegij: **Cultural and historical heritage  
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## **Abstract**

This final work describes Croatian natural and cultural monuments on the UNESCO World Heritage List, it gives a brief overview of each of them before examining their importance to the tourism industry and discussing how to optimise their potential while ensuring their preservation for future generations. The immovable heritage on the UNESCO list has a great impact and contribution to the economic image of the destinations. These jewels of Croatian heritage create jobs, encourage sustainability, promote, and contribute to development. With them, we also encounter numerous challenges that need to be carefully researched and implemented in a defined manner. One of the key things is the involvement of the local community in the development process, considering that both sides complement each other for mutual prosperity and collective satisfaction. The future of tourism, and Croatian natural and cultural heritage under the UNESCO protection, should develop in a sustainable direction, with an innovative and attractive offer that constantly develops and meets the requirements of the time.

Key words: Croatian heritage; UNESCO; Sustainable development

# Contents

<b>Introduction .....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>1. Historical Background of UNESCO Listing .....</b>	<b>2</b>
1.1. Importance of UNESCO listing for Croatian tourism.....	2
<b>2. Croatian sites on the UNESCO list.....</b>	<b>4</b>
2.1. Historical complex of Split and Diocletian's Palace .....	4
2.2. The old town of Dubrovnik.....	5
2.3. National Park Plitvice Lakes .....	7
2.4. The complex of the Euphrasian Basilica in the historic centre of Poreč.....	8
2.5. The historical city of Trogir .....	10
2.6. Cathedral of St. James in Šibenik.....	11
2.7. Stari Grad Plain, Hvar .....	13
2.8. “Stećci”.....	14
2.9. Defence systems of the Republic of Venice in the 16 <sup>th</sup> and 17 <sup>th</sup> centuries in Zadar and Šibenik.....	15
2.10. Pristine beech forests of the Carpathians and other regions of Europe.....	17
<b>3. Significance of UNESCO Listing for Croatian tourism .....</b>	<b>19</b>
3.1. Impact on Tourism Revenue .....	19
3.2. Cultural Preservation and Promotion .....	21
3.3. Tourist Experience Enhancement.....	23
3.4. Boost in International Recognition .....	25
3.5. Preservation of Cultural Identity and Heritage.....	26
3.6. Creation of Sustainable Tourism Practices .....	28
3.7. Economic Development and Job Creation .....	29
3.8. Enhancement of Destination Appeal and Competitiveness .....	30
<b>4. Challenges and Opportunities in the management of immovable heritage on the UNESCO list.....</b>	<b>32</b>
4.1. Preserving Authenticity While Catering to Tourist Demands .....	32

4.2. Balancing Conservation and Development .....	33
4.3. Collaborating with Local Communities .....	34
<b>5. Future outlook for Croatian Immovable Cultural Heritage on the UNESCO List.</b>	<b>36</b>
<b>Conclusion.....</b>	<b>38</b>
<b>Bibliography .....</b>	<b>39</b>
Tables .....	41
Pictures .....	41

# Introduction

“UNESCO was born from a clear vision: to achieve lasting peace, economic and political agreements between states are not enough. We must bring people together and strengthen the intellectual and moral solidarity of humanity through mutual understanding and dialogue between cultures.”<sup>1</sup>

This final work, first covers the historical context of the establishment of UNESCO and the inscription of cultural and natural sites on the UNESCO World Heritage List, focussing particularly on the List of immovable cultural property of Croatia. It then continues to the significance of this recognition for Croatia's tourism industry and economy, examining sites of particular importance such as Diocletian's Palace, the Old Town of Dubrovnik and Plitvice Lakes. The paper also analyses and explains the various impacts generated by these sites, as well as their contribution to tourism development. In addition, it examines the opportunities and challenges posed by managing tangible immovable property under UNESCO protection, including preserving the authenticity and protection of cultural and natural monuments while balancing commercial interests with the requirements of the local community. The final paper also explores ways to maximise profits while engaging local communities. Finally, the future of Croatia's intangible immovable heritage under UNESCO protection is addressed and how to promote more sustainable development and ensure the long-term conservation of these cultural treasures. Through a comprehensive examination of Croatia's UNESCO-listed sites, following aims to provide a nuanced understanding of the complexities and benefits of UNESCO recognition for Croatia's cultural and economic development.

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<sup>1</sup> UNESCO, "History"



# 1. Historical Background of UNESCO Listing

The UNESCO World Heritage List is a collection of outstanding cultural and natural sites around the world, recognized by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) as being of outstanding universal value. This list was established in 1972, and the first sites were added in 1978.

The criteria for inclusion in the list are based on the cultural, historical, scientific, or natural significance of the site. To prevent their destruction and damage and to protect and promote them, UNESCO adopted the convention on the protection of world cultural and natural heritage. Countries can nominate sites that must meet one or more of the ten criteria set by UNESCO. These include a masterpiece of human creativity, representing a unique or exceptional cultural tradition, or containing exceptional natural beauty or geological formations. Since its inception, the list has grown to include more than 1,100 locations in more than 160 countries.

These sites range from ancient archaeological ruins and historic cities to natural wonders such as national parks and wildlife sanctuaries. The list is updated regularly as new places are discovered and recognized for their exceptional value.

Picture 1: Official logo of UNESCO



Izvor: UNESCO, "Logo and Patronage", accessed in 2024, <https://www.unesco.org/en/logo-patronage>.

## 1.1. Importance of UNESCO listing for Croatian tourism

The preservation of UNESCO-listed cultural and natural heritage sites is crucial, as they hold immense value and contribute significantly to the local community's identity. Recognized for

their extraordinary importance, these sites require special treatment and adherence to specific rules to ensure their preservation for future generations.

The following segment that is important to mention is the preservation of authenticity and recognition, that makes it an attractive destination for tourists. The designation recognised by UNESCO brings unparalleled international prestige and global recognition to the sites and makes their cultural and historical importance visible to a worldwide audience. All of the above-mentioned segments bring and have the potential to contribute to an increase in visitors numbers and tourism revenue for the destination and site. Promotion, advertising and marketing for the UNESCO listing act as a special seal and guarantee of the value of the site, enchanting the reputation and value of the location and attracting tourists interested in exploring unique and significant locations of natural and cultural heritage sites. Furthermore, one of the most important segments of today's tourism industry is certainly the economic value or earnings. The attraction of UNESCO sites can bring great economic benefits to local communities, both by creating jobs, generating income for businesses and by promoting sustainable development. Visiting UNESCO World Heritage Sites promotes cultural exchange and understanding between tourists and local communities and foster mutual respect for different cultures and traditions. Overall, UNESCO registration plays an important role in promoting sustainable tourism and protecting valuable cultural and natural heritage for future generations to enjoy.

As already mentioned, the UNESCO Convention was founded in 1972, but the first monuments were registered until 1978. Only one year later, in 1979, two Croatian cultural sites were registered, the Old Town of Dubrovnik and Diocletian's Palace in Split, as well as natural site, the Plitvice Lakes.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Inga Vilogorac-Brčić, Hrvatska i UNESCO, 11

## **2. Croatian sites on the UNESCO list**

### **2.1. Historical complex of Split and Diocletian's Palace<sup>3</sup>**

The historical complex of Split with Diocletian's Palace is one of the most important UNESCO World Heritage Sites in Croatia. This site was inscribed on the UNESCO list in 1979 due to its exceptional historical and architectural significance.

“The Roman Emperor Diocletian chose Split as the place where he would live for the rest of his life and he had the magnificent palace built there, the construction of which lasted from around 295 AD to 305 AD. The names of two of its builders, the Greeks Zotikos and Philotas, were carved into one of the capitals of the Palace. It was built from stones from Brač and from Seget near Trogir. “<sup>4</sup> Diocletian's Palace is one of the best-preserved Roman palaces in the world and an outstanding example of Roman imperial architecture. The importance of the historical complex of Split and Diocletian's Palace lies not only in its historical and cultural significance, but also in its unique combination of Roman, medieval, and modern architecture.

Today, Diocletian's Palace is a living monument within its ancient walls. Overall, the historical complex of Split and Diocletian's Palace is an excellent testament to Croatia's rich historical and architectural heritage and attracts visitors from all over the world to explore this unique UNESCO Heritage Site.

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<sup>3</sup> Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Croatia, "National Institute for the Protection of Cultural Heritage"; Visit Split, "Diocletian's Palace"; UNESCO World Heritage Centre, "Historic City of Split".

<sup>4</sup> Inga Vilogorac-Brčić, *Hrvatska i UNESCO*, 21

Picture 2: Diocletian's palace in Split



Source: EcoNMB, "Spalato (Split) Dalmatia Croatia", accessed in 2024, <<https://ecobnb.com/blog/2018/04/spalato-dalmatia-croatia/>>.

## 2.2. The old town of Dubrovnik<sup>5</sup>

The Old Town of Dubrovnik is another Croatia's UNESCO World Heritage Site and inscribed on the World Heritage List in 1979. The historical city also known as the "Pearl of the Adriatic", is known for its well-preserved medieval buildings, city walls and stunning architecture.

The old town of Dubrovnik is of great cultural and historical importance due to its long history as a major maritime trading centre on the Adriatic. „Non bene pro toto libertas venditur auro (Freedom is not sold for all the gold)" is the motto of the Republic of Dubrovnik, a republic that managed to maintain its independence for four hundred years thanks to wise diplomacy and trading skills.<sup>6</sup> The city flourished in the Middle Ages and Renaissance, leaving behind an impressive legacy of stone buildings, churches, palaces and public squares. One of the main attractions of the old town are the imposing city walls that surround the historic centre and offer a panoramic view of the Adriatic Sea and the red-tiled roofs below. The city walls were built in the 13<sup>th</sup> century and are one of the best-preserved fortifications in the Mediterranean. Visitors

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<sup>5</sup> UNESCO, "Old Town Dubrovnik"; Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Croatia; UNESCO World Heritage Centre, "Old City of Dubrovnik"

<sup>6</sup> Inga Vilogorac-Brčić, Hrvatska i UNESCO, 13

to Dubrovnik can explore the picturesque streets of the Old Town, visit famous landmarks such as Dubrovnik Cathedral, the Duke's Palace, the Sponza Palace, and stroll along the historic “Stradun” (main street). The city's well-preserved Baroque and Renaissance architecture, combined with the coastal beauty of the coastline, makes it a popular tourist destination and a UNESCO Heritage Site.

„The whole of Dubrovnik is a historical monument with important examples of fortification architecture (city walls with fortresses, towers and bastions from the 12<sup>th</sup> to 17<sup>th</sup> centuries), Gothic-Renaissance churches, monasteries and chapels, the most important of which are the Duke's Palace from the 15<sup>th</sup> century and 16<sup>th</sup> Sponza) “<sup>7</sup>

Picture 3: Dubrovnik old town



Source: Best of Croatia, "Old Town of Dubrovnik - 6 UNESCO destinations", accessed in 2024, <https://bestofcroatia.eu/hr/unesco-odredista-detalji/stari-grad-dubrovnika-6>.

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<sup>7</sup> Višnja Grabovac, UNESCO sva blaga svijeta, 50

### 2.3. National Park Plitvice Lakes<sup>8</sup>

Plitvice Lakes National Park is a UNESCO World Heritage Site located in central Croatia. It was inscribed on the UNESCO list in 1979 for its breath-taking natural beauty, unique geological formations and rich biodiversity.

„Plitvice is a unique natural phenomenon and our most valuable nature reserve. It was declared a national park in 1949. According to archaeological excavations, the Plitvice area has been inhabited since prehistoric times.“<sup>9</sup> This national park is famous for its stunning cascading lakes, waterfalls, and clear turquoise water. The park is a cascade of 16 interconnected lakes, surrounded by lush forests and diverse flora and fauna. These lakes are known for constantly changing colour, from azure to green to grey, depending on their mineral content and exposure to sunlight. Visitors to Plitvice Lakes National Park can enjoy panoramic views of waterfalls and landscapes while exploring a network of boardwalks and hiking trails that circle the lakes. The park offers the opportunity for boating, swimming, and spotting numerous animal species, many varieties of bird species, deer, bears, and other wildlife. The park is also home to a variety of plant species such as rare orchids, ferns, and mosses, making it a paradise for botanists and nature lovers.

Overall, Plitvice Lakes National Park is a natural wonderland that showcases the beauty of Croatia's natural landscape and is a must-visit destination for nature lovers and outdoor enthusiasts. The park is a UNESCO world heritage site, contributing to its protection and preservation for future generations.

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<sup>8</sup> Plitvice Lakes National Park, <np-plitvicka-jezera.hr>; UNESCO World Heritage Centre, "Plitvice Lakes National Park"; Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Croatia.

<sup>9</sup> Inga Vilogorac-Brčić, Hrvatska i UNESCO, 29



Picture 4: Plitvice lakes



Source: Plitvice Lakes National Park, "Amazing facts about Plitvice Lakes", accessed in 2024, <https://np-plitvicka-jezera.hr/en/amazing-facts-about-plitvice-lakes/morning-over-waterfalls-in-plitvice-park-croatia/>.

## 2.4. The complex of the Euphrasian Basilica in the historic centre of Poreč<sup>10</sup>

The Euphrasian Cathedral complex in the historic centre of Poreč is another part of Croatia's UNESCO Cultural Heritage Sites. Dating back to the 6<sup>th</sup> century, the cathedral is an outstanding example of early Byzantine architecture and is of great cultural and historical importance.

The Euphrasian Cathedral, named after Bishop Euphrasius, was built during the reign of Emperor Justinian I. This cathedral combines Roman, Byzantine, and early Christian architectural styles and is a unique and important monument in the Mediterranean region. The Euphrasian Cathedral complex includes the cathedral itself, the sacristy, the atrium, the baptistery, and the bishop's palace surrounded by Romanesque walls. The cathedral's main attraction is the stunning mosaic decoration on the walls and ceiling of the main chapel, which provides valuable insight into early Christian iconography and symbolism. Visitors to the

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<sup>10</sup> UNESCO World Heritage Centre, "The Old City of Dubrovnik". Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Croatia.

Euphrasian Basilica can admire intricate mosaics depicting scenes from the life of Christ, the Virgin Mary, and various saints. Inside the cathedral are intricately carved marble columns, a marble pulpit, and a bishop's throne, all of which reflect the sophistication of the art and architecture of the time. „The apse is richly decorated with figurative mosaics, which represent one of the most significant examples of this type in Europe“.<sup>11</sup> „The introduction of triple apse in the basilica represents an innovation in the sacral architecture of that period and is particularly important because of the very rich decoration of Byzantine character. The mosaics in the central apse are among the most important monuments of this type from the 6<sup>th</sup> century.“<sup>12</sup>

The inscription of the Euphrasian Basilica on UNESCO's World Heritage List will help raise awareness of its cultural significance and ensure its preservation and protection for future generations to enjoy and learn from.

Picture 5: Euphrasian basilica



Source: My Poreč, "Discover Poreč", accessed in 2024, <https://www.myporec.com/en/discover-porec/mosaic/56>.

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<sup>11</sup> Croatia.hr, Complex of the Euphrasian Basilica in Poreč

<sup>12</sup> Branko Kladarin, Višnja Grabovac, Petra Somek, UNESCO vodič kroz svjetsku baštinu, 110



## 2.5. The historical city of Trogir<sup>13</sup>

The historic town of Trogir is another of the UNESCO World Heritage Sites located in Croatia. Situated on an island between the mainland and the island of Čiovo, Trogir is known for its well-preserved medieval architecture, rich history, and cultural importance. „With its numerous buildings from the Romantic, Gothic, Renaissance, and Baroque periods, Trogir is an important example of a town with clearly visible continuity.“<sup>14</sup>

Trogir was founded by the Greeks in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century BC and later developed into a large port and trading centre under Roman rule. The city's strategic location on the Adriatic coast has allowed for historical prosperity and cultural exchanges with other Mediterranean civilizations. The historic town of Trogir is characterized by labyrinth streets, narrow alleys, medieval walls and well-preserved buildings from different historical periods. The town's architectural complex includes Romanesque churches, Renaissance palaces, Venetian towers, and Gothic sculptures, all part of the variety that shaped Trogir over the centuries. One of the highlights of Trogir is St. Lawrence Cathedral. The Cathedral is a masterpiece of Romanesque and Gothic architecture, with stunning doors carved in the 13<sup>th</sup> century by local sculptor Radovan. The cathedral's bell tower offers panoramic view of Trogir and the surrounding islands, making it a popular destination for tourists. In addition to its architectural treasures,

The ancient town of Trogir is on the UNESCO World Heritage List due to its universal value and cultural significance. By protecting and preserving the unique heritage of Trogir future generations will be able to enjoy its beauty and historical significance.

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<sup>13</sup> Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Croatia; Visit Trogir, "History of Trogir"; UNESCO World Heritage Centre, "The Historic City of Trogir".

<sup>14</sup> Branko Kladarin, Višnja Grabovac, Petra Somek, UNESCO vodič kroz svijetsku baštinu, 110

Picture 6: Historical city of Trogir



Source: Croatia Yachting Charter, "Trogir: Your Foolproof Guide to this UNESCO Town", accessed in 2024, <https://www.croatia-yachting-charter.com/en/blog/trogir-your-foolproof-guide-this-unesco-town>

## 2.6. Cathedral of St. James in Šibenik<sup>15</sup>

The Cathedral of St. James in Šibenik is a masterpiece of Renaissance architecture and an important cultural and historical landmark in Croatia.

Construction of Cathedral began in the 15<sup>th</sup> century and was completed in the early 16<sup>th</sup> century. „The Cathedral of St. James, was built entirely of stone, using the original Renaissance technique and this building that heralded the period of humanism in Dalmatia.“<sup>16</sup> It is one of the most important Renaissance buildings in Croatia and is famous for its innovative architectural design and intricate decorative elements. One of the most impressive features of St. James Cathedral is that its entire dome is made of stone and is considered a marvel of engineering and craftsmanship. The façade of the Cathedral is decorated with intricate carvings

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<sup>15</sup> Croatian tourist portal, "Cathedral of St. James in Šibenik; Šibenik tourism portal, "Cathedral of St. James"; UNESCO World Heritage Centre, "The Historic City of Trogir and its Harbour".

<sup>16</sup> Inga Vilogorac-Brčić, Hrvatska i UNESCO, 46

and intricate details that demonstrate the skill of the craftsmen who built it. Inside the cathedral, visitors can admire the magnificent friezes, reliefs, and sculptures that decorate the nave, chapel, and altar. The interior of the cathedral is a masterpiece of Renaissance art and architecture, impressing all visitors with its ornate stonework, vaulted ceilings, grandeur and beauty.

It is the culmination of a long tradition of church architecture in Šibenik and is a testimony to the artistic and architectural achievements of the time. The cathedral continues to attract visitors from all over the world to admire its beauty, history and architectural splendour.

Picture 7: Cathedral of St. James



Source: Šibenik tourism portal, "Cathedrals of St. James", accessed in 2024, <https://www.sibenik-tourism.hr/lokacije/cattedrale-di-san-giacomo/1/en.html>.

## 2.7. Stari Grad Plain, Hvar<sup>17</sup>

The Stari Grad Plain in Hvar is a unique agricultural landscape on the Croatian island of Hvar. Due to its historical value and preservation of traditional agricultural practises for more than 2,400 years, it is a UNESCO Cultural Heritage Site.

„Greeks from the island of Pharos in the Aegean Sea founded the town of Faros on Hvar in 384 BC. The vineyards, olive groves and pine forests around today's old town are an example of a landscape that has remained almost unchanged since the time of Greek colonization.“<sup>18</sup> The Stari Grad Plain is a classic example of the ancient Greek system of land division "chora", which dates to the 4<sup>th</sup> century BC. The terrain consists of stone walls and fields used for cultivation of vineyards, olive groves and crops. The agricultural landscape of the Stari Grad Plain has remained largely unchanged for centuries, with farmers continuing to use the same agricultural techniques and methods passed down from generation to generation. This traditional farming method not only preserves the landscape, but also the cultural heritage and character of the local community. The site is not only of great historical value, but also of great ecological significance. The field is a sustainable agricultural system that supports biodiversity and promotes the preservation of traditional crops and agricultural practises. Visitors can explore terraced fields, stone walls and ancient irrigation channels that have been carefully maintained over centuries.

The fields are living proof of Hvar's rich historical and agricultural heritage and attracting tourists who want to in experience the unique landscape and cultural traditions of the region.

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<sup>17</sup> Croatian tourist portal, "Starogradsko polje"; Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Croatia; UNESCO World Heritage Centre, "Old City of Dubrovnik".

<sup>18</sup> Branko Kladarin, Višnja Grabovac, Petra Somek, UNESCO vodič kroz svjetsku baštinu, 110



Picture 8: Stari Grad Plain



Source: Visit Stari Grad, "Starogradsko polje", accessed in 2024, <https://www.visit-stari-grad.com/hr/sto-vidje/unesco-bastina/starogradsko-polje-ager/>.

## 2.8. “Stećci”<sup>19</sup>

“Stećci” are medieval tombstones that can be found in several countries in the Balkans, including Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Montenegro, and Serbia. These tombstones are unique in construction and design and hold great cultural and historical significance.

„The site comprises 28 areas with around 4,000 medieval tombstones, located on the territory of 4 countries. These tombstones mainly were created mainly between the 13<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries, and their development can be traced to the Turkish invasions. “<sup>20</sup> “Stećci” are known for their unique shapes, which usually consist of rectangular stone slabs placed on stone feet. They are often decorated with intricate carvings, including symbols, patterns, and inscriptions that provide insight into the beliefs, customs and cultural practices of the medieval societies that created them. They serve as grave markers and are often found in cemeteries, churchyards

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<sup>19</sup> Croatian tourism portal, "Stecci, medieval tombstones"; Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Croatia; UNESCO World Heritage Centre, "Stećci medieval necropolises.

<sup>20</sup> Branko Kladarin, Višnja Grabovac, Petra Somek, UNESCO vodič kroz svjetsku baštinu, 411

and other sacred places. “Stećci” are considered as an outstanding example of medieval funerary art and architecture in the Balkans.

Their intricate carvings and unique designs reflect the cultural and religious influences of the time and combine elements from Slavic, Christian and Islamic traditions. The “Stećci” are a testament to the rich cultural heritage of the region and the many influences that shaped its history.

Picture 9: “Stećci”



Source: Croatia Travel Reviews, "Crlijvice Stećci and Bunari", accessed in 2024, <https://croatiatravelreviews.com/crljivicki-stecci-i-bunari/>.

## **2.9. Defence systems of the Republic of Venice in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries in Zadar and Šibenik<sup>21</sup>**

The Venetian Republic's defensive systems at Zadar and Šibenik are historical fortifications designed protecting these coastal towns in present-day Croatia. The „Venetian defence system of the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries" is an exceptional historical, architectural and technological

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<sup>21</sup> Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Croatia; UNESCO World Heritage Centre, "The Fortified City of Suomenlinna"; Croatian National Tourist Board, "UNESCO: Venetian Works of Defense between the 16th and 17th Centuries".

testimony of the "alla moderna" defence system developed on the territory of the former Venetian Republic in response to the introduction of new defence technologies in the army.

The defence system of Zadar, the military and administrative centre of Dalmatia, is the largest and strongest fortress on the Adriatic and an important point for the defence of the sea route between Venice and Corfu, which also played a crucial role against threats of the Ottoman Empire.<sup>22</sup> The Republic of Venice, a powerful maritime republic, controlled these territories during this period and invested in complex defence structures to secure its coastal territories from potential invaders. In Zadar, one of the most important defensive buildings built by the Venetians is the Terraferma Gate. Built in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, this impressive gate serves as the city's main entrance and features a drawbridge, heavy ramparts and defensive towers. The land gate was strategically located to guard the land routes of Zadar and played an important role in defending the city from possible attacks. Another important fortification in Zadar are the Venetian Walls, which surround the historic city centre and provide protection against threats from the mainland. The city walls consist of bastions, towers and gates. The Venetian Republic built St-Nicolas's fortress (Fortica) to protect the city's harbour and prevent invasion by sea. Built on a rocky island at the entrance to the port, the fortress has thick walls, cannons and is strategically located to control the Šibenik harbour port. The fortress of St. Nicolas played a key role in the defence of Šibenik and is a prominent symbol of Venetian military engineering in the region. The defence systems of Zadar and Šibenik reflect the strategic importance of these coastal cities to the Venetian Republic in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries. Defensive structures, including gates, walls, and fortresses, bear witness the Venetia's commitment to protecting their maritime territories and securing important coastal areas from potential threats.

Today, visitors to Zadar and Šibenik can explore these well-preserved defence systems and admire the architectural and historical significance of the Venetian fortifications. These sites are a reminder of the rich history of the region and lasting influence of Venice on Croatia's coastal defence heritage.

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<sup>22</sup> Croatia.hr, The Venetian defense system under UNESCO protection



Picture 10: St. Nikola's fort



Source: Croatian Tourist Board, "Venetian defense system of the 16th and 17th centuries", accessed in 2024, <https://croatia.hr/hr-hr/unesco/venecijanski-obrambeni-sustav-16-i-17-stoljeca>.

## 2.10. Pristine beech forests of the Carpathians and other regions of Europe<sup>23</sup>

Beech rainforests in the Carpathians and other parts of Europe in Croatia are an exceptional natural heritage that showcases the beauty and biodiversity of ancient forest ecosystems. „On the territory of Croatia, a beech forest is protected in the Paklenica National Park, and on Hajdučki and Rožanski kukov in the North Velebit National Park, in the realm of karst and a labyrinth of rocks characterized by furrowed cliffs “<sup>24</sup>.

The forests, characterized by dense canopies of European beech, these forests have been declared a UNESCO World Heritage Site for their outstanding universal value and ecological importance. One of the most significant areas in Croatia where there are still unspoilt beech forests is the area of the North Velebit National Park. Located in the Velebit Mountains, this national park is home to vast beech forests untouched by man and harbours diverse flora and fauna. These beech forests are crucial for the conservation of biodiversity and the ecosystem

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<sup>23</sup> UNESCO World Heritage Centre, "Northern Velebit"; Government of the Republic of Croatia, "Beech forests on the UNESCO World Heritage List.

<sup>24</sup> Branko Kladarin, Višnja Grabovac, Petra Somek, UNESCO vodič kroz svjetsku baštinu, 407



services they provide, such as carbon sequestration, soil protection and water regulation. The beech forests of these systems are not only aesthetically pleasing, but also play an important role in preserving the natural heritage of the region. Pristine beech forests in the Carpathians and other parts of Europe in Croatia are a testament to the importance of preserving and protecting natural habitats in order to ensure the long-term sustainability of the biodiversity. „These forests are a precious source of genetic material of beech and other species related and dependent on this forest ecosystem and are an exceptional example of the process of colonization and development of terrestrial ecosystems after the Ice Age, which is still ongoing.“<sup>25</sup> These forests serve as a valuable resource for scientific research, education and outdoor recreation, offering visitors the opportunity to get in touch with nature and appreciate the unique ecosystems found in Croatia.

Preserving these pristine beech forests requires ongoing conservation efforts, sustainable management practices and public awareness. To safeguard the well-being of our planet, it is essential that we prioritize the conservation of ancient forests, recognizing their immense value in preserving biological diversity and mitigating the impacts of climate change.

Picture 11: Beech forests of Velebit



Source: Croatia Week, "Beech Forest in Croatian National Parks on UNESCO World Heritage List", accessed in 2024, <https://www.croatiaweek.com/beech-forest-in-croatian-national-parks-on-unesco-world-heritage-sheet/>.

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<sup>25</sup> Branko Kladarin, Višnja Grabovac, Petra Somek, UNESCO vodič kroz svjetsku baštinu, 407

### **3. Significance of UNESCO Listing for Croatian tourism**

„Croatia has a rich cultural heritage, a well-preserved historical heritage, a developed cultural and creative industry, and great potential for tourism use and added value, but currently the promotion, management and quality of the experience for each destination is limited. A strong resource base provides a lot of potential for growth throughout the investment cycle. To be competitive in the international market, we need to leverage modern technology to assess, interpret, preserve, market and create unique experiences for major tourist attractions. Most planning activities require further community involvement to ensure the quality of the plan and its implementation, as well as the correct interpretation of cultural heritage.“<sup>26</sup>

#### **3.1. Impact on Tourism Revenue**

The impact of Croatia's UNESCO World Heritage Sites on tourism revenues is significant as these declared cultural and natural heritage sites attract many tourists from around the world. “The number of visitors to of UNESCO World Heritage Sites is very difficult to estimate, as most of them are located in public areas (e.g. in cities), while only some objects require an entry fee and are not visited by all visitors”<sup>27</sup> Croatia as home to several UNESCO sites, which include historic cities, national parks, and archaeological sites, plays a vital role in promoting tourism and strengthening the country's economy. “In 2017, tourism generated 9.5 billion euros in foreign exchange revenues, which corresponds to a share of 19.4 percent of GDP. In 2017, tourism employed 99,467 persons, representing 7.2 per cent of total employment.”<sup>28</sup> One of the most famous UNESCO world heritage sites in Croatia is the Old Town of Dubrovnik, known for its well-preserved medieval architecture and stunning location on the Adriatic coast. These sites attract millions of tourists every year, who contribute significantly to the local economy through accommodation, restaurants, shopping, and cultural experiences. Another heritage site in Croatia that has a significant impact on tourism revenues is the Plitvice Lakes National Park, an amazing natural wonder with waterfalls, crystal clear lakes, and lush vegetation. The financial significance and profit are difficult to present as a single figure. The importance of the

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<sup>26</sup> Narodne Novine, "Decree on declaring the "Beech Forest" area in the National Parks "Sjeverni Velebit", "Plitvički jezeri" and "Sjeverni Velebit" a protected area - UNESCO World Heritage List"

<sup>27</sup> McKercher and du Cros, Cultural tourism. The partnership between tourism and cultural heritage management, Routledge, New York/London, 2009.

<sup>28</sup> The Institute of Economics Zagreb, 2018

locality is great, and its international recognition attracts many visitors who stay, shop, eat, rest, and use various other services in the region. The cumulative contribution of the locality is truly great.

The table below shows the financial results of Plitvice Lakes, one of the measurable localities, which generates the following revenues through direct visits by tourists, and it is obvious that the revenue is growing.

Table 1: Plitvice lakes financial achievement 2023/2024

Name	Achievement 2022	Rebalance 2023	Plan 2023	Achievement 2023	Index in comparison with a plan
Business income	46.608.551,99	56.034.603,00	56.034.603,00	57.804.261,71	<b>103,16</b>
Income from the sale of non- financial assets	12.622,47	0,00	0,00	0,00	<b>0</b>
<b>Total income</b>	46.621.174,46	56.034.603,00	56.034.603,00	57.804.261,71	<b>103,16</b>
Business expenses	29.301.005,90	45.040.465,00	45.040.465,00	38.862.891,44	<b>86,28</b>
Expenditures for the acquisition of non-financial assets	2.398.189,70	6.645.325,00	6.645.325,00	2.387.534,03	<b>35,93</b>
<b>Total expenditures</b>	31.699.195,60	51.685.790,00	51.685.790,00	41.250.353,47	<b>79,81</b>
Difference – Surplus/Deficit	14.921.979,86	4.348.813,00	4.348.813,00	16.553.908,24	<b>380,65</b>

Source: Plitvice Lakes National Park, "Finances", accessed in 2024, <https://np-plitvicka-jezera.hr/o-nama/financije/>.

This national park attracts visitors seeking outdoor adventure and natural beauty and generates revenue through entrance fees, guided tours, accommodation, and related services. Croatia's UNESCO heritage sites, such as the historic town of Trogir, Diocletian's Palace in Split and the Episcopal Euphrasian Ruins in Poreč, generate revenue for the region by attracting tourists,

encouraging longer stays, and fostering cultural exchange and respect for heritage. Protecting and promoting Croatia's UNESCO World Heritage Sites is key to sustainable development and increasing tourism revenue.

„Croatia is characterized by an exceptional natural landscape that has been preserved with a multitude of diversity in a relatively small area, from the sea and rugged coastline, karst reliefs through mountainous areas, rivers to rural areas in the lowlands. There are numerous protected areas in Croatia (9.22% of the total area)<sup>29</sup>, including 8 national parks and 12 nature parks that contribute to the preservation of nature and plant and animal species, and which are particularly attractive to tourists. The number of visitors to the national parks of Croatia is steadily increasing (2,060,353 in 2009, and 3,876,152 in 2019). “<sup>30</sup>

### **3.2. Cultural Preservation and Promotion**

Preservation and promotion play an important role in guarding the rich history of Croatia's UNESCO sites through strategies and initiatives such as cultural events, educational programs, and tourism promotion. Every effort is being made to preserve these sites for future generations while raising awareness and appreciation of our cultural heritage.

By involving of local communities, government agencies and international organisations, sustainable efforts can be made to preserve the sites and showcase them to a global audience, contributing to Croatia's cultural identity and economic growth. “Cultural tourism is mostly associated with art, humanities, museums, festivals, food, music, theatre and special celebrations “<sup>31</sup>. To ensure the longevity and importance of these sites, balance between preservation and promotion is essential. “The concept of culture has evolved significantly over the last 75 years. UNESCO's actions over the past decades bear witness to the many ways in which humanity has sought to understand how culture can strengthen the sense of who we are – from the awareness of the need to protect heritage from destruction at the end of World War II, to the launch of international campaigns to safeguard World Heritage Sites and the concept of living and intangible heritage, the focus on the creative industries and the need to sustain cultural jobs and livelihoods. ”<sup>32</sup> By investing in infrastructure, interpretive signage, and education programs, we can ensure sustainable management while promoting the historical and

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<sup>29</sup> Croatian Agency for Nature and Environment Protection, "Bioportal"

<sup>30</sup> Croatian National Tourist Board, "Tourism in numbers"; Croatian Bureau of Statistics.

<sup>31</sup> Edgell, S., 2006

<sup>32</sup> UNESCO, "7 Successes of UNESCO's Preservation Work"

cultural value for visitors. Collaboration between government agencies, local communities and private sector stakeholders is essential to implementing effective conservation and promotion. By emphasising the unique stories and significance of each UNESCO site, we strengthen their cultural identity and promote them. One of the campaigns is the “Discover the Beauty of Diocletian's Palace” campaign in Split. The campaign which uses social media platforms, targeted advertising, and partnerships with travel influencers to showcase the historical importance and architectural beauty of Diocletian's Palace. The campaign focuses on the unique cultural heritage and fascinating stories behind this iconic site, attracting domestic and international tourists through visually appealing content, virtual tours, and interactive experiences. By developing digital marketing strategies and storytelling techniques, this campaign effectively promotes Diocletian's Palace as a must-visit destination in Croatia and increase its overall visibility and appeal to travellers. Research and educational efforts can be further collaborating by working with academic and cultural institutions to ensure a deeper understanding and dissemination of the importance of these very important places. "Protection and conservation measures consist of many branches implemented by various sectors. They are taken to preserve cultural assets as well as possible and for as long as possible. Legally prescribed measures for the protection and preservation of cultural assets. Research of cultural property, documentation and monitoring of the condition of cultural property, marking of immovable cultural property, determination of the system of protection measures, determination of special conditions for the protection of immovable cultural property in the process of issuing a location permit, prior approval for works on cultural property, prior approval for activities in immovable cultural property, approval for making a replica of cultural property, export of cultural property abroad, import and importation of cultural property, return of cultural objects illegally brought from other countries, protection of endangered cultural property, emergency protection measures, protection of cultural assets under exceptional circumstances"<sup>33</sup>. By prioritizing the protection and promotion, the country can not only protect its cultural heritage but also promote tourism and economic development in the region. An example of a project focusing on the cultural asset's preservation is the ongoing restoration work at the Stari Grad Plain on the island of Hvar. Ancient agricultural landscape has been continuously cultivated for over 2,400 years and is a unique testimony to sustainable agricultural practises. The project aims to preserve the traditional dry-stone walls, irrigation channels and historical agricultural technique, while promoting sustainable agriculture and

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<sup>33</sup> Antolović, 2009

ecotourism in the area. “The goal of UNESCO projects is to establish links and encourage cooperation between local communities, national and international non-governmental organizations and tourism agencies to provide employment for the local population, that is, to involve them in income-generating activities related to tourism. The activities of the projects relate to the training of local tourist guides, the production of high-quality products, the promotion of private accommodation, and at the same time fully involving the communities in profit generating activities. Also, the Department of Cultural Tourism must task of contributing to the creation of cultural and tourism policies and sustainable strategies, such as strategies that respect cultural identities, preserve cultural heritage preservation and contribute to local development. In addition, it aim is the education of future "decision makers" who will implement cultural tourism policies and the improve of international co-operation in the field of cultural tourism through a joint association”<sup>34</sup>

Through community engagement, educational programs and co-operation with local farmers, this initiative protects the cultural heritage of the Star Grad Plain ensuring its preserved for the future in a long term.

### **3.3. Tourist Experience Enhancement**

By investing in infrastructure, interpretation facilities, visitor services, and cultural programs, we can enrich the visitor experience at these iconic sites and help visitors to explore and learn about the country’s rich cultural and natural heritage.

Tourists primarily seek satisfaction when visiting destinations, and satisfaction is a key factor in determining the quality of their experience, as well as the overall quality of the tourist offer at a particular destination. Considering the fact that new consumer trends, new technologies, market fragmentation, globalization, care for the environment concerns, economic integration and other phenomena are strongly influencing the tourism sector, in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is yet to change. The emergence of new markets is influenced by changing economic conditions, changed consumer behaviour and new technologies, so the composition of the tourist population is also changing. The proportion of elderly people in tourism is increasing, emphasis is being placed on vacations for individuals. Awareness of the need to protect the environment and preserve tourist resources, which are fragile and limited, is also growing, so there is a need for tourism planning, that is, for an ecological, long-term approach

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<sup>34</sup> Jelinčić, 2009

to tourism planning.<sup>35</sup> To succeed in the global tourism industry, it is crucial to adapt to changing consumer preferences and create exceptional experiences through the collective efforts of tourism business and their employees. User satisfaction is a measure used to determine the conclusion about how the final product meets the requirements and needs of a certain group of users.<sup>36</sup> Accordingly, user satisfaction can be defined in another way, satisfaction is the result of a comparison of the consumer's expectations and the actual perception of the attributes of the final product. Enhancing the visitor experience at UNESCO Sites can be achieved by upgrading the quality of content and services provided, including information centers, interpretive signage, guided tours, and audio guides. Providing informative and engaging resources can help visitors to visit them, learn about their history and significance, and gain a deeper understanding of the cultural and natural values they embody. Interactive exhibits, multimedia presentations, and educational programs also enhance the visitor experience, providing visitors with immersive, hands-on opportunities to learn about the heritage and stories of these iconic landmarks. By organizing cultural programs and events that showcase the region's intangible cultural heritage, we can offer rich and authentic experiences that connect visitors to the living traditions of local communities. Encouraging environmentally friendly practices, supporting local businesses, respecting cultural norms, and reducing environmental impact will contribute to the long-term protection and enjoyment of these special places, ensuring they remain sustainable for future generations to experience and enjoy. If the overall experience during or after visiting a certain tourist destination meets or exceeds the initial expectations of the tourist, it will be considered that the level of tourist satisfaction has been achieved. "The tourist offer is increasingly individualized, oriented towards the visitor, and as a result, new forms of tourism are emerging, adapted to each individual traveller. It can be said that such an offer is an innovative offer that offers unusual experiences, surprises and incentives, thus providing the tourist with additional emotional benefits in the form of ambience, experience, fun, adventure, contact with others and the like."<sup>37</sup> But if the perceived experience fails to meet or exceed the tourist's initial expectations, then it will be considered that the tourist's satisfaction has not been achieved. It can be said that a satisfied tourist is more likely to recommend a tourist destination to others, and this form is the cheapest and most effective form of marketing and promotion.

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<sup>35</sup> Bašić, 2015

<sup>36</sup> Hill, Alexander, 2003

<sup>37</sup> Vuković, 2006

By creating memorable, informative, and engaging experiences for visitors, we can showcase Croatia's unique cultural and natural heritage and inspire curiosity, appreciation and respect for its UNESCO heritage sites.

### **3.4. Boost in International Recognition**

The UNESCO World Heritage Committee actively promotes the UNESCO Cultural Heritage in various parts of the world and strives to make the Croatian cultural heritage known throughout the world. Increasing the international visibility of Croatian UNESCO sites is an important endeavour that requires a multi-faceted approach.

One of the core strategies is to bring together key stakeholders, including government officials, tourism industry experts, heritage conservation experts, and community representatives, to promote and preserve these cultural treasures and to organize seminars to discuss innovative methods. These seminars aim at sharing best practises in sustainable tourism management, promoting cooperation with international organizations, implement digital marketing strategies and cultural diplomacy initiatives to raise awareness and appreciation of Croatia's UNESCO Sites on the world stage. "An important part of this segment of work is globalization, which is the source of constant changes that affect all economic activities, including tourism. In this sense, some of the most important factors affecting the development of tourism today are market growth limitations, quality, destination renewal and differentiation, responsible or social marketing, changes in political structures, changes in distribution in tourism."<sup>38</sup> Sophistication is the main element of tourism that aims to satisfy contemporary demand, as tourists want to satisfy their cultural and intellectual interests in addition to vacations. The offer is becoming more and more individual and focused on the specific needs of tourists. Mass tourism is no longer the dominant paradigm. Tourists are becoming more experienced, more informed, more educated, more independent and knowing exactly what they want. The main reasons for traveling are the 3 E's: entertainment, excitement, education. By focusing on utilization, by promoting knowledge exchange, networking opportunities and strategic partnerships through marketing, ultimately attracting a diverse range of visitors from around the world, which can ensure long-term sustainability and culture significance. One example of a project to increase the international recognition of UNESCO Croatian Heritage

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<sup>38</sup> Nedeljković, Jovanović, Đokić, 2013



Sites is the development of virtual tours and digital experiences for popular attractions such as Dubrovnik Old Town and Plitvice Lakes National Park. By creating an immersive online platform that allows people around the world to virtually explore these UNESCO sites, we have been able to showcase our cultural and natural heritage to a global audience. These digital initiatives not only increase awareness and appreciation of Croatia's UNESCO Sites, but also attract more international visitors to experience these destinations in person, contributing to their long-term preservation and sustainable development.

### **3.5. Preservation of Cultural Identity and Heritage**

By protecting the tangible and intangible heritage of these renowned places, we can preserve their unique cultural identity, history and traditions and ensure that they are transmitted and nurtured for future generations. "Identity became a complex concept in a today's globalized society. It has become as consisting of "customary practice and of beliefs, values, sanctions, rules, motives and satisfactions associated with them."<sup>39</sup>

The owners and communities that inherit the property, together with the local, county and state authorities, are obliged to take all possible measures to preserve the property, which is implemented in most cases. Cultural heritage, as a reflection of cultural diversity, "is one of the key elements for recognizing, defining and affirming cultural identities."<sup>40</sup> Preservation is generally required by the Croatian Constitution, which states that the preservation of intangible cultural assets is carried out through the creation and preservation of records about them, as well as through promotion of their transmission and preservation in their original and other forms. Depending on the type of property, basic conservation measures, they are prescribed, which are compiled based on the peculiarities of intangible heritage and UNESCO's recommendations. Preservation measures include, in addition to inclusion of the property in planning programs, ensuring the sustainability of the property through education, identifying, promoting, increasing its value, transferring it through formal and informal education, revitalizing the property, professional and scientific evaluation of the property and further research and public awareness. "Culture and heritage have been increasingly recognised as means of sustainable social and economic development and an important element of tourist motivation. However, the recent development of cultural tourism indicates the problem of

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<sup>39</sup> Jensen et al, 2011

<sup>40</sup> Baran V., Grabovac V., Puuljić A., "Protection of Natural and Cultural Heritage with Special Emphasis on Euphrasius Basilica"

massification, offering conventional products based on serial reproductions of culture. “<sup>41</sup> One of the ways to protect the cultural identity and heritage of Croatian UNESCO, as mentioned above is to implement an effective conservation and management strategy that prioritizes the protection of the historical, architectural and natural values of Cultural Heritage Sites. Maintenance, restoration, and monitoring activities are regularly carried out to prevent degradation, reduce threats and safeguard these special places in the long term so that future generations can appreciate and enjoy them. One example of a project that helps preserve the cultural identity of a Croatian UNESCO Site is the Traditional Stone Masonry School in the town of Trogir. This initiative trains local craftsmen in the traditional techniques of stone masonry that have been used for centuries in the construction and restoration of the historic buildings in Trogir, a UNESCO World Heritage Site. By passing down these skills and knowledge to the younger generation, the school ensures that the authentic craftsmanship and cultural heritage of Trogir's architecture are preserved for the future. The project not only supports the sustainability of the site, but also strengthens the connection between the community and its cultural identity, fostering a sense of pride and continuity in the preservation of Trogir's unique heritage. Community involvement and participation in heritage conservation activities is also key to protecting the cultural identity and heritage of sites. Promoting sustainable tourism practices and responsible tourist behaviour is another key aspect of protecting the cultural identity and heritage. “Due to factors such as globalisation and the importance of cultural diversity and identity creation in postmodern society, it is essential to place the recognizable and unique cultural heritage and identity of destination in the centre of contemporary touristic strategies “<sup>42</sup>. Another example of a project aimed at preserving the cultural identity of a Croatian UNESCO site is the Local Traditional Cuisine Revival Initiative in the vicinity of the Plitvice Lakes National Park. This project focuses on reviving and promoting the traditional culinary practices and recipes of the local communities surrounding the national park, which have been passed down through generations. By partnering with local farmers, producers, and chefs, the initiative supports sustainable agriculture, celebrates local ingredients, and preserves age-old cooking methods unique to the region. Through culinary workshops, food festivals, and farm-to-table experiences, the project not only safeguards the gastronomic heritage of the area but also promotes a deeper understanding and appreciation of the cultural significance of food in the context of the UNESCO-designated site. This initiative helps to strengthen the bonds between residents, visitors, and the cultural landscape,

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<sup>41</sup> Lana Domšić, kulturna baština i identitet u suvremenom razvoju turizma

<sup>42</sup> Lana Domšić, kulturna baština i identitet u suvremenom razvoju turizma

contributing to the overall preservation and promotion of the cultural identity of Plitvice Lakes. By conducting archaeological, historical, and ethnographic research, Croatia deepens its understanding of the history, importance and cultural context of the sites, enriching the visitor experience and ensuring the accuracy of the stories and values.

In short, protecting the cultural identity and heritage of Croatia's UNESCO World Heritage Sites requires a comprehensive approach that combines conservation, community engagement, sustainable tourism activities and cultural interpretation. By prioritizing the protection, promotion, and enhancement of its cultural heritage, we can preserve the authenticity and significance of world heritage sites for future generations.

### **3.6. Creation of Sustainable Tourism Practices**

Only the type of tourism that "harmonises" all three dimensions at the same time can be called sustainable tourism. In other words, sustainable tourism does not harm natural and cultural resources, does not conflict with the needs and wishes of the local population or the tourists themselves and guarantees a certain return on the funds invested.<sup>43</sup>

Sustainable tourism and development are best explained by the so-called Brundtland's definition from 1987, which reads "Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of present generations, without compromising the future."<sup>44</sup>

The establishment of sustainable tourism practices is important for protecting the country's natural and cultural heritage, supporting local communities, and promoting responsible tourism that benefits visitors and the environment. "Cultural tourism has often been described as a sustainable alternative to mass tourism"<sup>45</sup>. Based on a detailed analysis of the state of tourism in the Republic of Croatia, ten key challenges of Croatian tourism today were identified: temporal and spatial unevenness, the impact of tourism on the environment and nature, the interrelationship between tourism and climate change, adaptation to accelerated technological changes in tourism, the quality of life and well-being of the local population, insufficient human potential in number and quality, inadequate structure and quality of accommodation capacities, unfavourable business and investment environment, insufficiently effective legislative and management framework, impact of crises on tourism and changes in

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<sup>43</sup> Nives Vidak, Joško Sindik, *Pravci razvoja suvremenog turizma – pretpostavke za održivi turizam u Hrvatskoj*, 299

<sup>44</sup> WCED, 1987

<sup>45</sup> Edgell, 2006

the behaviour and needs of tourists.<sup>46</sup> By applying sustainable tourism practices, we can ensure the long-term protection and preservation of its iconic landmarks, stimulate economic development, and improve the overall tourist experience. One of the key aspects of establishing a sustainable tourism practice is the promotion of responsible passenger behaviour among tourists. One example of a project helping to create sustainable tourism practices at a UNESCO site in Croatia is the development of eco-friendly accommodation, transport options and cultural experiences near the Plitvice Lakes National Park. By working with local businesses and communities, the project aims to minimize the environmental impact of tourism activities, promote responsible travel behaviour, and support the protection of the park's unique ecosystem. Initiatives such as ecolodges, electric car rentals, nature walks led by trained local guides and waste reduction programs not only enhance the overall visitor experience but also contribute to the long-term conservation of the UNESCO Site and surrounding areas. “Sustainable development of tourism is closely connected to the stimulation of micro-business development”<sup>47</sup>. Through education, community engagement and collaboration with stakeholders, the project highlights the importance of sustainable tourism practices for the benefit of the environment and future generations.

### **3.7. Economic Development and Job Creation**

Croatia's rich cultural heritage, represented by World Heritage Sites, has a significant impact on the country's economic development and job creation. The preservation and promotion of these locations, such as the historic city of Dubrovnik, the Plitvice Lakes National Park and the ancient city of Trogir, attract millions of tourists every year, generating significant income and creating employment opportunities in the hospitality, tourism and cultural sectors. In addition, the preservation and management of these sites also leads to job creation in fields such as archaeology, history, and conservation, contributing to the country's economic growth and development.

„When considering the importance of natural and cultural heritage, the attitudes of the local population are also important, so primary research on the attitudes of local residents showed that respondents more strongly perceive the positive ecological and sociocultural effects that tourism generates in their counties; 59% of respondents agree that tourism promotes an increase

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<sup>46</sup> Ministarstvo turizma i sporta, Strategija razvoja održivog turizma do 2030.godine.

<sup>47</sup> Jelinčić, 2002.

in awareness of the importance of environmental protection, while 55.8% of them believe that tourism also affects the protection and improvement of the quality of the environment. In addition, as many as 75.5% of respondents believe that tourism promotes the production of indigenous food and beverages, and 75.3% of them agree that tourism promotes the preservation of cultural heritage. <sup>48</sup> „Local human resources are crucial for the sustainable development of tourism, therefore targeted investments in human resources are needed in the entire tourism value chain. By ensuring better living and working conditions, actively encouraging self-employment and the involvement of local small and medium-sized entrepreneurs, quality and sustainable jobs will be ensured, value chains will be strengthened, and the multiplier effects of tourism on other economic branches will be increased. <sup>49</sup>

### **3.8. Enhancement of Destination Appeal and Competitiveness**

In all tourist destinations registered in the UNESCO World Heritage Sites, Croatia is a rare natural reserve in the world, and it demands extensive knowledge of its unique status and authority, as well as future. According to the Committee on Tourism and Competitiveness of the UNWTO, the competitiveness of a tourism destination is the destination's ability to effectively use natural, cultural, human, artificial and capital resources for the offer and development of quality, innovative, ethical and attractive tourism products and services. The goal is to achieve joint sustainable growth within the framework of the set vision and strategic goals that add value to tourism, improve and expand its market components, and optimize attractiveness for its visitors and local equal benefit. “Tourism causes intensive economic, socio-cultural and environmental impacts in destination areas.”<sup>50</sup> To increase the attractiveness and competitiveness of its UNESCO sites as a tourist destination, as mentioned before in the final paper, the country can focus on developing high-quality infrastructure, such as improved transport links and amenities, as well as enhancing the visitor experience through innovative storytelling, interactive exhibitions, and immersive experiences. In addition, we can invest in digital marketing and e-commerce platforms to increase visibility and accessibility, while promoting sustainable tourism practices and responsible travel behaviour to protect the cultural and natural heritage of these sites. Of the great importance for this segment is the definition of

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<sup>48</sup> Narodne Novine, Strategija razvoja održivog turizma do 2030. godine

<sup>49</sup> Narodne Novine, Strategija razvoja održivog turizma do 2030. godine

<sup>50</sup> McKercher and du Cros, Cultural tourism. The partnership between tourism and cultural heritage management, Routledge, New York/London, 2009

creative tourism, UNESCO defines creative tourism as a “travel directed toward an engaged and authentic experience, with participative learning in the arts, heritage, or special character of a place which provides a connection with those who reside in this place and create this living culture”<sup>51</sup>. „The creative tourists are deeply involved in the culture of the destination, where they take part in different activities – crafts, arts, culinary and other creative activities. That creates a close link between the tourists, the local population and its cultural heritage “<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> UNESCO, 2006.

<sup>52</sup> Richards and Wilson, 2006

## **4. Challenges and Opportunities in the management of immovable heritage on the UNESCO list**

### **4.1. Preserving Authenticity While Catering to Tourist Demands**

Protecting authenticity while serving the needs of tourists is a delicate balance that Croatia must adhere to in managing its UNESCO Heritage Sites. Sites such as the Old Town of Dubrovnik, Diocletian's Palace in Split, and Plitvice Lakes National Park are not only important sites of cultural and natural heritage, but also popular tourist attractions that attract millions of visitors every year. "UNESCO defines heritage as "our legacy from the past, what we live with today, and what we pass on to future generations"<sup>53</sup>." One of the main challenges in protecting the authenticity of Croatia's UNESCO World Heritage Sites is managing the impacts of mass tourism on the natural, cultural, and environmental integrity of these sites. Mass tourist flows, especially during the high season, can strain infrastructure, damage monuments and nature, disrupt local communities and undermine the overall tourist experience. To overcome these challenges, we can use visitor management strategies such as crowd control measures, visitor quotas, timecards and marked visitor routes to ensure that the carrying capacity of the sites is not exceeded and that the authenticity and sustainability of the sites is preserved for the future. Furthermore, to preserve the authenticity of Croatia's UNESCO World Heritage Sites, conservation, restoration and maintenance measures must be taken that support the value and significance of these sites while meeting the needs of modern visitors. The adoption of sustainable tourism practices, such as green infrastructure, waste management systems, energy-saving technologies and environmentally friendly modes of transport, can help reduce the environmental impact of tourism activities and promote the long-term protection of natural and cultural heritage. Protecting the uniqueness of Croatia's UNESCO World Heritage Sites involves not only environmental protection but also preserving the cultural heritage, traditions and identity of the local communities that are closely linked to these sites. Involving local communities in decision-making processes, creating economic opportunities, supporting traditional crafts and practices and promoting cultural exchange and dialogue contribute to the protection and promotion of the authenticity and vitality of these communities. By involving

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<sup>53</sup> UNESCO, 2020.

local stakeholders in the management and promotion of its UNESCO World Heritage Sites, Croatia can foster a sense of ownership, pride and responsibility among local residents, while enhancing the overall experience and appreciation of visitors for the true cultural heritage of the place. In other words, meeting tourism demand while preserving the authenticity of Croatia's UNESCO World Heritage Sites requires a multi-faceted approach that combines heritage protection, sustainable tourism practices, community engagement and visitor management strategies. By striking a balance between protecting the authenticity and integrity of these iconic landmarks and meeting the needs and expectations of modern visitors, Croatia can ensure that its UNESCO World Heritage Sites remain vibrant, sustainable and culturally rich destinations that offer unique experiences and connect visitors with the country's nature. Encouraging curiosity and respect for Croatia's cultural and natural treasures.

## **4.2. Balancing Conservation and Development**

Coordinating the preservation and development of UNESCO World Heritage Sites in Croatia is a complex and delicate task that requires careful planning, cooperation, and a commitment to sustainable practises. The protection of the cultural and natural heritage of iconic sites must be carefully managed to ensure long-term sustainability. Responsible sustainable development simultaneously benefits local communities, the economy and tourism. One of the main challenges in balancing the preservation and development of UNESCO World Heritage Sites in Croatia is managing the impact of tourism growth on these delicate and irreplaceable heritage sites. “The image of a destination is based on both physical assets and a set of experiences built around those assets, generally extending to the “living culture” and the atmosphere of a place. “<sup>54</sup> Increasing visitor numbers, infrastructure development, commercial activities and human pressures can threaten the authenticity, integrity, and preservation of these sites. To address these challenges, we can adopt sustainable tourism management practices such as visitor limitations, capacity assessments, zoning regulations and conservation plans to ensure the protection of the cultural and natural values of these tourist attractions while supporting responsible and sustainable tourism development. “The selected cases in Croatia have confirmed that the most common way to valorise cultural heritage is trough tourism”<sup>55</sup>. Balancing the preservation and development of Croatia’s UNESCO World Heritage Sites

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<sup>54</sup> Richards and Wilson, 2006

<sup>55</sup> McKercher and du Cros, Cultural tourism. The partnership between tourism and cultural heritage management, Routledge, New York/London, 2009



requires a holistic approach that considers the needs and priorities of multiple stakeholders, including local communities, government agencies, tourism partners, cultural heritage institutions, and international organizations. Dialogue, cooperation, and partnerships between these different stakeholders help to define common goals, priorities, and strategies for the sustainable development of these areas while protecting their cultural and natural heritage values.

### **4.3. Collaborating with Local Communities**

„The local population can resist tourism development if they do not find a benefit for themselves in it, so such resources would remain forever lost for tourist use. On the other hand, it is important that tourism does not remain the only source of income for the local population, but that it becomes an incentive for a diversified economy.“<sup>56</sup>

Collaboration with local communities is essential for successful conservation and sustainable management of Croatia's UNESCO Sites. Local communities play a key role in protecting the cultural and natural heritage, as these sites are often the source of traditional knowledge, cultural habits and practices that have been passed down from generation to generation by guardians of sustainable management. “Host communities benefit from preserved and often re-valored culture, as well as from more dynamic and cultural life, generated by activities organized for tourists”<sup>57</sup>. By involving local communities in decision-making processes, conservation activities, tourism development initiatives and cultural heritage protection activities, we can improve the authenticity, integrity and long-term sustainability of its UNESCO Heritage Sites, while fostering a sense of ownership, pride and awareness of their protection. One of the main benefits of working with local communities in Croatia's UNESCO heritage sites is the protection and transmission of traditional knowledge, cultural practices and intangible heritage that are key to the interpretation, preservation, and sustainability. Local communities not only have a wealth of knowledge about the history, traditions, customs, and rituals associated with these landmarks, but also practical skills in traditional crafts, agriculture and sustainable land management practices that have sustained these places for centuries. By working closely with local communities, we can leverage this valuable base of knowledge and expertise to develop

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<sup>56</sup> Nives Vidak, Joško Sindik, Pravci razvoja suvremenog turizma – pretpostavke za održivi turizam u Hrvatskoj, 299

<sup>57</sup> Williams, 2009

conservation strategies, heritage interpretation plans, tourism development plans and community participation initiatives that respect and celebrate the cultural heritage of these areas.

In addition to safeguarding traditional knowledge and encouraging community participation, working with local communities at UNESCO Sites in Croatia can promote sustainable livelihoods, economic empowerment and social well-being of residents who depend on these sites for their cultural, social, and economic survival. „In the modern world, safety, health, ecology, and culture are considered factors on which modern tourist flows are based. They are the trends that lead to the globalization of the world tourism product. Modern tourists are becoming more demanding, travel more often and increasingly turn to specific forms of tourism in search of new experiences. “<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Cohen Erik, *The Changing Faces of Contemporary Tourism*. 330-333

## 5. Future outlook for Croatian Immovable Cultural Heritage on the UNESCO List

The prospects for the inscription of Croatia's immovable cultural heritage on the UNESCO list are full of opportunities and challenges. "UNESCO cultural heritage in Croatia (with the exception of Stećci) is located within towns and is therefore managed by local administrative units, whose governments are responsible for managing the areas."<sup>59</sup> While Croatia continues to attach great importance to the protection, promotion and sustainable management of its UNESCO World Heritage Sites, there are several important factors that will shape the future of these iconic landmarks. Sustainable heritage management is key. By integrating conservation, tourism development, community engagement and stakeholder cooperation into a comprehensive management plan, Croatia can reconcile heritage protection and sustainable development, safeguarding the authenticity, integrity, and cultural significance of these sites for future generations. Responsible tourism development is also one of the most important factors. As the Croatian tourism industry continues to grow and develop, the country must prioritize the implementation of responsible and sustainable tourism in its UNESCO-listed sites in order to mitigate the negative impacts of overcrowding, overexploitation, and environmental degradation. By implementing visitor management strategies, carrying capacity assessments, and conservation plans, Croatia can ensure that tourism growth supports, rather than undermines, the preservation and sustainability of these iconic landmarks, while improving the visitor experience and the economic benefits for local communities. Community participation and empowerment is key. By enabling local communities to participate in heritage protection, tourism activities, economic opportunities, and cultural initiatives. "For many, the Covid crisis has prompted us to turn our attention to elements of the nature around us, opening new insights about our human, non-human and built environment relationships and has allowed us to glimpse new ways of being."<sup>60</sup>

In conclusion, if Croatia continues to prioritize sustainable heritage management, responsible tourism development, community engagement, environmental sustainability and international co-operation, the prospect for Croatia's immovable heritage inscribed on the UNESCO list are good. With a holistic and integrated approach that balances conservation and

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<sup>59</sup> McKercher and du Cros, *Cultural tourism. The partnership between tourism and cultural heritage management*, Routledge, New York/London, 2009

<sup>60</sup> Maria Beatrice Andreucci, Antonino Marvuglia, Milen Baltov. *Rethinking Sustainability Towards a Regenerative Economy*, 9

development, we can ensure the long-term protection and sustainability of its iconic landmarks, while promoting the value, importance, and benefits of its cultural and natural heritage for present and future generations, while also carefully, respectfully appreciating and managing it.

## Conclusion

Croatia's UNESCO-listed Cultural Heritage Sites have become a cornerstone of the country's tourism industry, cultural identity, and economic development, fuelling a sense of national pride and pride of the people of Croatia. However, managing these immovable cultural assets brings unique challenges, such as preserving their authenticity while catering to the needs of visitors, balancing preservation and development, and striking a delicate balance between preserving the past and embracing the present. To ensure the long-term protection and enhancement of its rich cultural heritage, Croatia must continue to work with local communities to develop sustainable practises and find innovative solutions that meet the demands of tourism while preserving the integrity of its cultural monuments. The protection and promotion of Croatia's immovable cultural heritage not only generates significant tourism revenue and contributes to the country's economic growth but also plays a crucial role in preserving the country's cultural identity and heritage. It is imperative for Croatia to address the challenges of harmonizing conservation efforts with needs of tourism, fostering effective co-operation with local communities, and ensuring sustainable practices to continuously improve the attractiveness of the destination. In addition, Croatia must remain committed to preserving its cultural legacy for future generations by using state-of-the-art conservation technologies, promoting digital conservation methods, and developing educational programs that raise awareness of the importance of cultural heritage conservation. By doing so, Croatia can ensure that its UNESCO-listed sites remain a source of national pride, cultural identity, and economic prosperity for generations to come.

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## Tables

- Table 1: Plitvice lakes financial achievement 2023/2024

## Pictures

- Picture 1: Official logo of the UNESCO (Source: <https://www.unesco.org/en/history>), 04.2024.
- Picture 2: Diocletian's palace in Split (Source: <https://ecobnb.com/blog/2018/04/spalato-dalmatia-croatia/>), 04.2024.
- Picture 3: Dubrovnik old town (Source: <https://bestofcroatia.eu/hr/unesco-odredista-detajli/stari-grad-dubrovnika-6>), 04.2024.



- Picture 4: Plitvice lakes (Source: <https://np-plitvicka-jezera.hr/en/amazing-facts-about-plitvice-lakes/morningoverwaterfallsinplitviceparkcroatia/>), 04.2024.
- Picture 5: Euphrasian basilica (Source: <https://www.myporec.com/en/discover-porec/mosaic/56>), 04.2024.
- Picture 6: Historical city of Trogir (Source: <https://www.croatia-yachting-charter.com/en/blog/trogir-your-foolproof-guide-this-unesco-town>), 04.2024.
- Picture 7: Cathedral of St. James (Source: <https://www.sibenik-tourism.hr/lokacije/cattedrale-di-san-giacomo/1/en.html>), 04.2024.
- Picture 8: Starigrad plain (Source: <https://www.visit-stari-grad.com/hr/sto-vidjeti/unesco-bastina/starogradsko-polje-ager>), 04.2024.
- Picture 9: “Stećci” (Source: <https://croatiatravelreviews.com/crljivicki-stecci-i-bunari/>)
- Picture 10: St. Nikola’s fort (Source: <https://croatia.hr/hr-hr/unesco/venecijanski-obrambeni-sustav-16-i-17-stoljeca>), 04.2024.
- Picture 11: Beech forests of Velebit (Source: <https://www.croatiaweek.com/beeceh-forest-in-croatian-national-parks-on-unesco-world-heritage-list/>), 04.2024.