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THE IMPACT OF TOURISM ON QUALITY OF LIFE: COMMUNITY PERCEPTION IN THE ALBANIAN AREA AROUND OHRID LAKE

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Abstract. *The development of tourism plays an important role in the quality of life of the residents. This study deals with the perceptions of residents regarding the impact of tourism on their quality of life in the Albanian area around Lake Ohrid. By exploring the social, economic, cultural and environmental dimensions, we aim to inform the balanced development of tourism. In our research we used methods such as literature review, fieldwork and interviews with community members. A Google Forms questionnaire with 39 questions was used for data collection. The survey was conducted using a sample of 159 residents. The findings highlight the community's awareness of the importance of Lake Ohrid and the potential for sustainable use. By analyzing this data using the R-Studio program, business plans and long-term strategies can be developed for the responsible management of tourism in the touristic Albanian part of Lake Ohrid.*

Keywords: *Quality of Life, Ohrid Lake, impact of tourism, community perception, R-Studio Program.*

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Introduction

The Quality of life is a multidimensional concept that encompasses both material well-being and subjective satisfaction. According to Campbell (1976), quality of life is closely linked to income levels, while Michalko (2013) emphasizes the dual nature of well-being—objective indicators such as income and infrastructure, and subjective elements like personal fulfilment and social cohesion.

Tourism has emerged as one of the most dynamic sectors of the global economy, contributing significantly to economic growth, employment, and cultural exchange. In Albania, tourism has experienced rapid expansion, with over 12 million visitors recorded in 2023 (INSTAT, 2022). This growth has positioned the country as a rising destination in Southeastern Europe, offering diverse tourism experiences due to its geography, climate, history, and cultural heritage.

The region surrounding Lake Ohrid, located in southeastern Albania, holds substantial potential for tourism development. As a UNESCO World Heritage site, it attracts both domestic and international visitors. However, beyond its natural and cultural appeal, tourism in this area has a profound impact on the local population's quality of life. Understanding community perceptions of tourism is essential for designing sustainable development strategies that align with residents' needs and expectations.

Literature Review

The relationship between tourism and quality of life has been widely explored in academic literature. Campbell (1976) identifies income as a key determinant of life satisfaction, while Michalko (2013) expands the concept to include subjective well-being. Economic development across various sectors, particularly tourism, has been shown to enhance both objective and perceived quality of life.

Tourism is now considered a vital component of the global economy, with scholars such as Cizreliogullari (2022), Puczko (2011), and Ivanov (2007) highlighting its transformative role. Dhimiter (2005) and UNWTO (2019) describe tourism as a priority activity in the 21st century, with countries like France, the United States, Spain, Italy, and China leading in international arrivals.

In the Albanian context, tourism contributes approximately 8% to the national GDP (Bakiu, 2011). The country's strategic location and rich cultural landscape have made it increasingly attractive to Southern European tourists, who account for around 90% of total arrivals (INSTAT, 2022). Lake Ohrid's region exemplifies the intersection between tourism and community well-being. Puczko (2011) argues that tourism fosters social interaction, personal development, and identity formation. Cizreliogullari (2022) emphasizes that residents' perceptions of tourism impacts are crucial for the successful implementation of future tourism programs.

Recent studies have focused on how communities living in World Heritage destinations perceive tourism-related changes. These perceptions significantly influence policy-making and the sustainability of tourism initiatives. Community engagement, through the lens of local perceptions, plays a pivotal role in shaping tourism strategies that are inclusive, resilient, and culturally sensitive.

Study area

Lake Ohrid is located on the Balkan Peninsula, between North Macedonia and eastern Albania. This lake is one of the deepest and oldest in Europe, with an origin dating back 2–5 million years ago (Qiriazhi, 2019; Albrecht, 2008; Pano, 2015). It covers an area of 358 km², of which 111.4 km² belong to Albanian territory. The lake's origin is primarily tectonic, although karst processes have also played a significant role in its formation. With an average elevation of 1157 meters above sea level, Lake Ohrid is classified as a mountain lake (Qiriazhi, 2019; Pano, 2015). Lake Ohrid stands out for its abundant biodiversity with unique aquatic ecosystem (Albrecht, 2008; Matzinger, 2006).

It was declared a World Cultural and Natural Heritage Site by UNESCO in 1979 and later became a Transboundary Biosphere Reserve of Ohrid and Prespa in 2014 (UNESCO MAB). In 2019, the Albanian part of the lake was also registered on the World Heritage list. Tourist attractions include:

- The city of Pogradec: A peaceful historical and cultural city on the western shore of Lake Ohrid, preferred by thousands of Albanian and foreign tourists.
- The village of Tushemisht: A picturesque village near the lake, known for its traditional way of life and Tushemisht Springs.
- The Drilon Springs: A complex of natural springs offering serene environments and opportunities for boat rides.
- The Lin Peninsula: Home to the ancient settlement of Lin and its attractive mosaics.

Gastronomic tourism is also developed in the region, with local specialties such as koran fish and belushka (a type of trout) attracting food enthusiasts. Lake Ohrid offers not only natural beauty but also cultural heritage and a harmonious coexistence of tradition and modernity. Tourism plays a significant role in the economic development of the area, especially in the city of Pogradec and the tourist villages of Tushemisht and Lin.

Table 1. Statistics of the number of domestic and foreign tourists for the years 2020-2023 for the City of Pogradec and the settlements around Lake Ohrid in the Albanian part

Year	Foreign tourists	Domestic tourists	Total
2020	5.055	55.879	60.934
2021	4.447	55.391	59.838
2022	11.871	67.970	79.841
2023	14.559	77.258	92.817

Source: Municipal offices of the city of Pogradec

According to the data in Table 1 provided by the local institutions of the Municipality of Pogradec, the number of tourists from 2020 to 2021 has decreased by 1106 tourists. However, from 2021 to 2023, the number of tourists has increased by 20,003 from 2021 to 2022 and by 12,976 from 2022 to 2023.

The most visited areas by tourists are: The Basilica of Lin, the Monumental Tombs of Selca, the Golik Bridge, the Stone of Kamje, the City Castle, the Historical Museum of the city, Driloni, Tushemishti and the old quarter of the city “Topleci”. Some of the tourist activities that take place in this area are: “Lake Day”; “Wine and Chestnut Festival” (includes the central city together with administrative units). “Mokra N’Fest”, “Festa e teto Ollga”, “Festival of the Koran fish”, “Balkan Film Festival”, “Enkelana marathon”. Tourism significantly contributes to the well-being of the community. Besides the development of gastronomic tourism, the lakeshore of Lake Ohrid offers excellent opportunities for ecotourism, climate-based tourism, medical tourism, cultural and historical tourism.

Methods

The study aims to explore the effects of tourism on the quality of life for people living in the city of Pogradec and the touristic rural areas around Ohrid Lake in the Albanian part. In this area live a total of 41 237 people. The study involved a survey conducted 159 participants between July 2023 and February 2024, using random sampling. To assess the perception of residents, a 41-question survey was conducted. Responses were collected using Google Forms, and data processing was carried out using the R program.

The questionnaire was organized into four sections as follows:

Section I: Consists of 9 questions related to general data about respondents (such as gender, residence, education, income, employment, and knowledge of Lake Ohrid’s status). These data were measured at the nominal level.

Section II: Contains 3 questions that assess residents’ interest in tourism development near Lake Ohrid. Questions Q10, Q11, and Q12 were measured on a Likert scale, ranging from “Not important” to “Very important”.

Section III: Comprises 22 questions exploring residents’ perception of the possible impact related to the socio-economic, cultural, and environmental dimensions around Lake Ohrid. These items were measured at the ordinal level using a five-point Likert scale (Likert, 1932) ranging from “Strongly disagree” to “Strongly agree”.

Section IV: Includes 7 questions aimed at identifying the main problems faced by Lake Ohrid in its Albanian part. This item is measured at a nominal level and covers issues such as waste pollution, lack of infrastructure and sewage pollution. In summary, understanding the impact of tourism on quality of life is essential for sustainable development, especially in rural areas such as those around Lake Ohrid. Policymakers can be informed by the findings of this study in designing strategies for developing sustainable tourism to improve the quality of life in the community.

Results

In the first step, the data set is loaded into R. It is provided in the form of a comma-separated values (.csv) file, and subsets of items are collected in a separate data frame. In the first group of data, nominal categorical and ordinal categorical data were entered.

Table 2 presents the demographic attributes of the respondents according to the nine questions from the first part of the questionnaire (gender, education, residence, employment,

monthly income, connection with tourism, the season when the number of tourists is greater, information on the status of the Lake Ohrid, the type of tourists and the existence of other facilities and attractions in this area).

Table 2. Descriptive statistics of the Q1,..., Q9, Q14 and Q15

Item	Freq.	%	Item	Freq.	%
Q1. Gender			Q6. Related to tourism		
Male	46	28.9	Partly	54	34
Female	113	71.1	None	102	64.1
Q2. Education			All	3	1.9
Elementary	1	0.6	Q8. The season most visited by tourists		
Secondary	9	5.7	Spring	5	3.1
University	149	93.7	Summer	144	90.6
Q3. You are a resident of			Autumn	1	0.6
City of Pogradec	131	82.4	Winter	2	1.3
Rural Area	28	17.6	All	7	4.4
Q4. Occupation status			Q9. Information about the status of Ohrid Lake		
Self-employed	7	4.4	Yes	137	86.2
Private sector	35	22	No	22	13.8
Public sector	100	62.9	Q14. Visited by		
Student	12	7.6	Both sides	134	84.3
Unemployed	5	3.1	Foreign tourists	15	9.4
Q5. Monthly income			Domestic tourists	10	6.3
Under 50000 Lekë (500\$)	56	35.2	Q15. Other attractions		
50000-100000 Lekë (500-1000\$)	87	54.7	Yes	122	76.7
Over 100000 Lekë(1000\$)	16	10.1	No	37	23.3

Table 2 reveals that 28.9% of the participants were male and 71.1% were female. The majority (93.7%) of the participants were university graduates, while 5.7% had completed secondary education, and only one had completed primary school. Most participants (82.4%) reside in the city of Pogradec, with 17.6% living in rural areas around Ohrid Lake.

In terms of profession, 62.9% were employed in the public sector, 22% in the private sector, 7.6% were students, 4.4% were self-employed, and 3.1% were unemployed. Regarding monthly income, the majority (54.7%) reported earning between \$500 and \$1000 per month; 35.5% earned less than \$500 (50,000 ALL), and 10.1% earned more than \$1000 per month.

When asked if their monthly income was related to tourism, 64.1% responded “not at all”, 34% said “partially”, and only 1.9% said “completely”. As for the season with the highest number of visitors, 90.6% indicated summer, 4.4% said all seasons, 3.1% chose spring, 1.3% winter, and only one participant (0.6%) mentioned the winter season.

Regarding knowledge of the protection status of Lake Ohrid and its surroundings, 86.2% answered “yes” while 13.8% answered “no”. It is notable that the largest number of tourists visit during the summer season, with 90.6%—a significantly high percentage compared to other seasons.

Concerning the origin of tourists, most respondents indicated both foreign and domestic tourists; 9.4% mentioned foreign tourists alone, and 6.3% said the largest number of tourists are domestic. When asked if there are other tourist attractions besides Lake Ohrid, 76.7% answered “yes”, and 23.3% answered “no”.

The second section includes three questions that determine residents' perception of tourism and the importance of Lake Ohrid for tourism development.

Summary findings are presented in Table 3. The World Heritage (WH) status for Lake Ohrid aims to promote the sustainable development of the area by protecting its natural and cultural resources, attracting visitors, generating economic benefits, and thereby improving the quality of life for its inhabitants. This enhancement in the quality of life impacts the demographics of Pogradec and its surroundings.

In response to the question, “How important is the World Heritage status of Ohrid Lake in tourism development?”, 71.07% of respondents consider the UNESCO World Heritage status of Ohrid Lake to be very important for tourism development; 20.13% find it important; 5.66% believe it is sufficiently important; and only 3.14% think it is not important.

Table 3. Descriptive statistics of the Q10, Q11 and Q12

Nr.	Item	Survey participant responses (in %)			
		Not Important	Sufficiently	Important	Very important
Q10	How important is his status WH in tourism development	3.14	5.66	20.13	71.07
Q11	How important is tourism for the development of your settlement	1.26	2.51	20.13	76.10
Q12	How important is Lake Ohrid for the development of tourism	1.89	1.89	6.29	89.93

When asked, “How important is tourism for the development of your settlement?”, 76.1% of respondents consider tourism to be very important; 20.13% find it important; 2.51% believe it is sufficiently important; and only 1.26% think tourism is not important for settlement development.

Regarding the question, “How important is Lake Ohrid for the development of tourism?”, 89.93% of respondents consider Ohrid Lake to be very important for tourism development; 6.29% find it important, and 1.89% believe it is sufficiently important.

These data highlight the critical role of tourism in the development of settlements and emphasize the importance of Lake Ohrid as a key asset for tourism growth.

The third section examines the relationships between residents' perceptions of their country's image, the impacts of tourism, and local government support for development. Tourism generates numerous positive and negative economic, socio-cultural, and environmental impacts that affect the daily lives of host communities. It is essential to consider the possible effects of tourism on the host community.

Table 4. Descriptive statistics of the Section III

Nr.	Item	Survey participant responses (in %)				
		Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
Q16	Lake Ohrid creates a good image in the local community for the development of tourism	0	0	3.77	16.35	79.88
Q17	The development of tourism is useful for the protection of the culture of the area	0	0.63	8.18	28.30	62.89
Q18	The development of tourism creates problems such as prostitution, drugs, crime, etc.	24.53	47.17	23.90	3.14	1.26
Q19	Tourists show respect for Lake Ohrid and for the natural and cultural objects around	0.63	0.63	29.56	34.59	34.59
Q20	The development of tourism increases the opportunities for opening new businesses	0	0	3.15	28.30	68.55
Q21	The development of tourism affects the increase in the number of employees	0.63	0.63	6.29	23.90	68.55
Q22	The development of tourism affects the increase in the prices of local products	0.63	3.15	22.64	38.36	35.22
Q23	The development of tourism affects the increase in the income of residents	0	1.89	13.20	32.08	52.83
Q24	The development of tourism affects the growth of opportunities for local entrepreneurs	0.63	0	6.29	37.73	55.35
Q25	The development of tourism affects the destruction of the natural (wild) habitat	6.92	35.22	38.36	15.10	4.40
Q26	The large number of tourists affects the pollution of the local environment	3.77	23.27	47.80	17.61	7.55
Q27	The development of tourism affects the destruction of aquatic flora and fauna	8.81	44.65	30.19	10.69	5.66
Q28	The development of the tourist infrastructure is affecting the reduction of the life expectancy	9.43	42.77	27.67	12.58	7.55
Q29	The development of tourism has positively influenced	0.63	4.40	22.64	42.14	30.19
Q30	The community has service facilities	4.40	11.32	28.93	32.71	22.64

Q32	The development of tourism affects in the leisure time	0	1.26	16.98	45.91	35.85
Q33	The large number of tourists during different periods leads to transportation difficulties	6.29	22.01	30.19	25.16	16.35
Q34	There are no contradictions between the development of tourism and religious beliefs	1.26	5.66	5.66	30.19	57.23
Q35	I am satisfied with living here	0	0	3.14	12.58	84.28
Q36	The role of the local government in the development of tourism is very important	1.89	1.26	16.98	27.67	52.20
Q37	The local government promotes the touristic values	1.89	0.63	15.09	33.96	48.43
Q38	The local government has improved the infrastructure	1.89	3.77	23.90	33.33	37.11

Most respondents (79.88%) believe that Ohrid Lake positively contributes to the local community's image in terms of tourism development. A significant portion of respondents (62.89%) strongly agree that tourism development plays a crucial role in preserving local culture. Nearly half (47.17%) disagree that tourism development leads to significant issues such as prostitution, drugs, and crime.

Most respondents (68.55%) strongly believe that tourism fosters new business opportunities. A significant majority (92.45%) agree that tourism development positively impacts employment. Furthermore, 73.58% of respondents recognize that tourism development affects local product prices.

A majority (84.91%) either agree or strongly agree that tourism positively impacts residents' income. Additionally, 92.08% believe that tourism development provides opportunities for local entrepreneurs. While opinions are divided, 53.46% express concern about its impact on natural habitats, and 71.07% disagree that tourism significantly contributes to environmental pollution.

Opinions are mixed regarding aquatic ecosystems, with 75.50% of respondents not strongly agreeing with the impact of tourism. Most respondents (70.82%) do not associate tourism infrastructure with reduced life expectancy. A significant majority (72.33%) acknowledge the positive influence of tourism development, and 55.35% believe the community has adequate service facilities.

Most respondents (81.76%) agree that tourism impacts leisure time patterns. Opinions vary, but 55.35% acknowledge transportation challenges due to tourist flow. Most respondents (87.42%) perceive no contradictions between tourism development and religious beliefs. An overwhelming majority (96.86%) express satisfaction with their living conditions, while 79.87% recognize the significant role of the local government in tourism development. A majority (82.39%) believe the local government actively promotes tourism, and 70.44% acknowledge infrastructure improvements made by the local government.

Data collection procedure

The first step of the analysis process is to assess the reliability of the questionnaire. Cronbach's Alpha coefficient (Cronbach, 1951), was calculated for this section of the questionnaire and the value obtained showed that the survey is reliable, since the Alpha value is $0.732 > 0.7$, regardless of the type of study a criterion of 0.7 is universally employed (Lance, Butts, & Michels, 2006), test was highly significant $p=4.486406e-126 < 0.05$, thus, these data are likely suitable for Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA).

Below, a structural equation modeling (SEM) analysis is presented of data collected in an assessment of host community perceptions of the potential effects caused by tourism. The mvnornalTest package is used for univariate (Shapiro–Wilk's W) and multivariate normality (Mardia's Multivariate Skewness and Kurtosis tests) assessment. Results from both the univariate and multivariate tests are found to indicate that the measures do not originate from normally distributed univariate or multivariate distributions. Because the 5-point scale for each measured variable is considered continuous, and violations of the multivariate normality assumption required for SEM are detected, the MLM lavaan estimator is employed for the fitting function (Bean, 2021).

Model specification in R:

```

modell0<- '
BENEFITS =~ Q16+Q17+Q19+Q20+Q21+Q22+Q23+Q24+Q25+Q34
DAMAGE =~ Q18+Q26+Q27+Q28+Q29+Q33
GOVERNANCE =~ Q36+Q37+Q38
QOL =~ Q32+Q35

```

Sem function syntax in R:

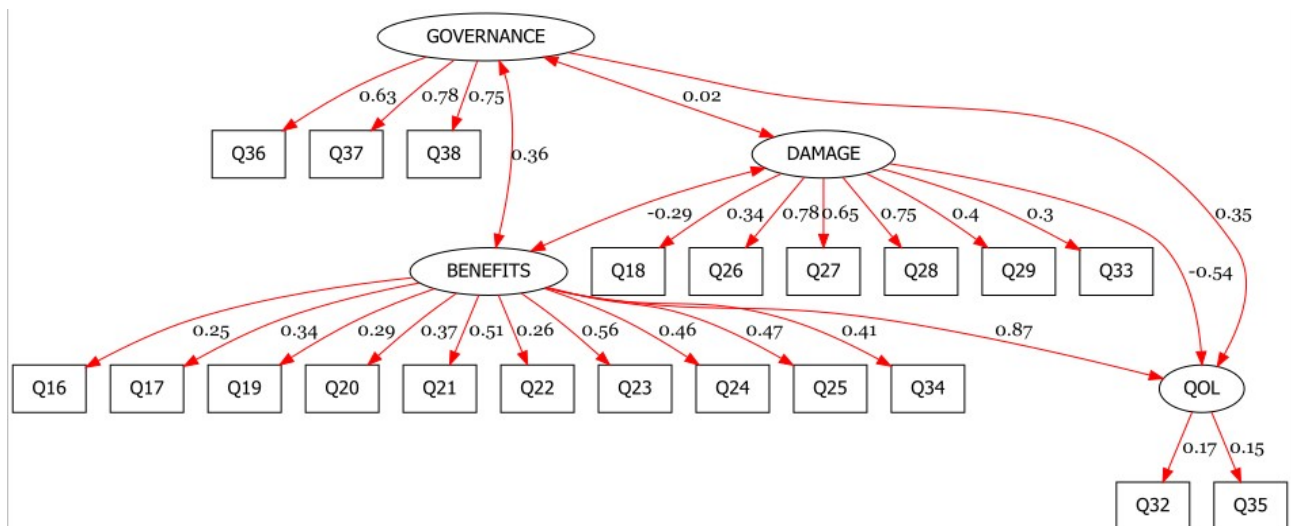
```
fit.mod <- sem(modell0, data=LOP, std.lv = TRUE, estimator = "MLM")
```

The assessment of model fit is started with a chi-square test.

Table 5. Goodness of-fit measures

Chi-square	Df	Pvalue	RMSEA	CFI	SRMR
284.48	203	0.010	0.04	0.938	0.075

All measures support a good model fit (Table 5). The Satorra-Bentler scaled chi-square for model is 284.48 (203) which was statistically significant at the $p < .05$ level (pvalue-scaled = 0.01). The root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) is a measure of the discrepancy between the model-based and observed correlation matrices (Steiger & Lind, 1980). Root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA=0.04) is smaller than 0.05 which is the limit for good fit (Hu & Bentler, 1999). The Standardized root mean of residuals (SRMR) is less than 0.8. The Comparative fit index (CFI) is 0.938. Based on this set of fit measures, it was concluded that the model as specified was plausible.

**Figure 1. SEM results in a path diagram**

Given the acceptable model, we proceed to an examination of various parameter estimates. Table 6 presents standardized coefficients (est) for items on latent variables (lhs), standard errors (se), z-values (Wald test), and pvalues testing the null hypothesis that a coefficient = 0.

Table 6. Parameter estimates of model with latent variables

Latent Variables	Estimate	Std.Err	z-value	P(> z)
BENEFITS =~				
Q16	0.251	0.053	4.719	0.000
Q17	0.339	0.049	6.966	0.000
Q19	0.286	0.070	4.102	0.000
Q20	0.374	0.041	9.166	0.000
Q21	0.514	0.050	10.314	0.000
Q22	0.257	0.080	3.219	0.001
Q23	0.561	0.061	9.255	0.000
Q24	0.458	0.060	7.642	0.000

Q25	0.470	0.057	5.786	0.000
Q34	0.406	0.070	5.786	0.000
DAMAGE =~				
Q18	0.345	0.070	4.890	0.000
Q26	0.778	0.071	10.949	0.000
Q27	0.647	0.073	8.872	0.000
Q28	0.748	0.075	9.980	0.000
Q29	0.404	0.086	4.681	0.000
Q33	0.302	0.102	2.957	0.003
GOVERNANCE =~				
Q36	0.631	0.104	6.092	0.000
Q37	0.783	0.088	8.937	0.000
Q38	0.749	0.078	9.629	0.000
QOL =~				
Q32	0.168	0.099	1.696	0.090
Q35	0.153	0.088	1.738	0.082
Regressions				
QOL ~				
BENEFITS	0.870	0.647	1.344	0.179
DAMAGE	-0.542	0.397	-1.365	0.172
GOVERNANCE	0.351	0.217	1.617	0.106

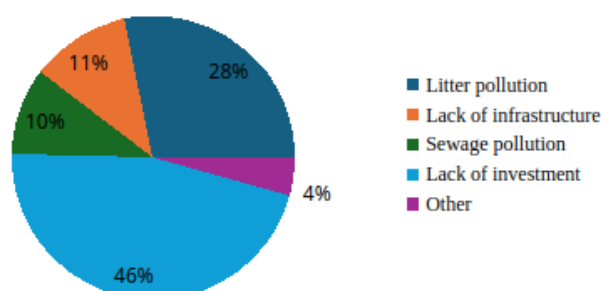


Figure 2. Percentages according to answers for Q39

According to the question, “What is the biggest problem of Ohrid Lake and the surrounding area?” most respondents (46%) have identified the lack of investment as the main problem. Additionally: 28% of respondents consider consider pollution from waste as the biggest problem; 11 % of respondents highlight the lack of infrastructure as a major concern; 10 % mention sewage pollution as a problem. Only 5 % of respondents have indicated other problems surrounding Ohrid Lake in the Albanian part.

Conclusion

The main findings of the study on the effects of tourism in the city of Pogradec and the tourist area around Lake Ohrid in the Albanian part are as follows: Residents expressed varying levels of interest in the development of tourism near Lake Ohrid. Some considered it important, while others did not prioritize it.

Residents perceived positive and negative impacts in terms of socio-economic, cultural and environmental dimensions. Positive aspects included economic growth, employment opportunities and cultural exchange. Negative aspects included environmental degradation, overpopulation and changes in local traditions.

The study identified several challenges facing Lake Ohrid: Pollution from waste which affects the ecosystem and aesthetics of the lake. Lack of infrastructure: Insufficient facilities hinder

tourism development. Pollution from sewage: Proper waste management is essential. Other challenges include economic inequalities and inadequate services.

Overall, the study highlights the need for responsible tourism practices that enhance the quality of life, while preserving the natural and cultural heritage of Lake Ohrid. Addressing the challenges identified in the study requires a comprehensive approach.

Some recommendations for policymakers:

- Develop and implement sustainable tourism strategies that balance economic growth with environmental and cultural preservation. Involve local communities, experts and stakeholders in the planning process.

- Invest in infrastructure: Improve transport, accommodation and public facilities. Waste management: Establish efficient waste collection and disposal systems to combat waste pollution and wastewater problems.

Raise awareness about responsible tourism practices. Involve local people:

- Engage communities in decision-making and empower them to participate in tourism development.

- Promoting cultural heritage: Preserving local traditions, crafts and customs. Heritage sites: Protecting historical and cultural monuments around Lake Ohrid. Environmental conservation: Protecting biodiversity: Implementing measures to protect the lake's ecosystem. Environmentally friendly practices: Encouraging eco-tourism and minimizing the ecological footprint.

- Continuously monitoring the impact of tourism and adapting policies accordingly. Feedback mechanisms: Collecting data from residents, tourists and experts. Sustainable tourism benefits both residents and visitors.

- By proactively addressing challenges, policymakers can create a harmonious balance between tourism development and the well-being of communities.

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