

# WORLD HERITAGE SITE OF BUTRINT, ALBANIA: TOURISTS' PERCEPTIONS AND MANAGEMENT

Edlira Menkshi<sup>1</sup>; Ermira Jashiku<sup>2</sup>

<sup>12</sup>Faculty of Education and Philology,

University "Fan S. Noli" of Korça,

[eda\\_ndreko@yahoo.com](mailto:eda_ndreko@yahoo.com)

[ejashiku@uniko.edu.al](mailto:ejashiku@uniko.edu.al)

## Abstract

*World Heritage Sites represent the most important tourist attraction in many countries. Butrint is an Albanian archeological site inscribed to the List of World Heritage in 1992, for its Outstanding Universal Value by the Criterion (iii). The archaeological site is already known worldwide and is Albania's most visited tourist attraction. This paper aims to identify the heritage values of the Butrint and the challenges of management related to tourism development and the protection of its outstanding values. The tourists who visit the world heritage site seek a value-added and authentic experience that is related to their perceptions of the information they provide about outstanding values, cultural heritage preservation, and promotion, site management, tourist facilities, as well as the protection of the natural environment. By analyzing the tourist group's perceptions results, the research can provide an initial reference to consider by the managers for the improvement of the tourist services system and the preservation of cultural and natural ecosystems of the world heritage property.*

**Keywords:** national park, outstanding values, archeological excavation, site management, tourist perceptions, management plan.

## SITI I TRASHËGIMISË BOTËRORE I BUTRINTIT: PERCEPTIMET E TURISTËVE DHE MENAXHIMI

### Abstrakt

*Sitet e Trashëgimisë Botërore përfaqësojnë atraksionet turistike më të rëndësishme në shumë vende. Butrinti është një sit arkeologjik shqiptar i regjistruar në Listën e Trashëgimisë Botërore në vitin 1992, për vlerën e*

*jashtëzakonshme universale sipas kriterit (iii). Siti arkeologjik është i njohur gjerësisht në nivel botëror dhe është atraksioni më i vizituar turistik në Shqipëri. Ky punim synon të identifikojë vlerat trashëgimore të Butrintit dhe sfidat e menaxhimit lidhur me zhvillimin e turizmit dhe mbrojtjen e vlerave të tij të jashtëzakonshme. Turistët që vizitojnë sitin e trashëgimisë botërore kërkojnë një përvojë të shtuar vlerë dhe autentike që lidhet me perceptimet e tyre mbi informacionin që ofrohet në lidhje me vlerat jashtëzakonshme, mbajtjen dhe promovimin e trashëgimisë kulturore, menaxhimin e sitit, objektet turistike, si dhe mbrojtjen e mjedisit natyror. Duke analizuar rezultatet e perceptimeve të grupit të turistëve, kërkimi mund të ofrojë një referencë fillestare për menaxhuesit për përmirësimin e sistemit të shërbimeve turistike dhe ruajtjen e ekosistemeve kulturore dhe natyrore të pronës së trashëgimisë botërore.*

**Fjalë kyçe:** *park kombëtar, vlera të jashtëzakonshme, shpërndarje arkeologjike, menaxhim i sitit, perceptimet e turistëve, plan menaxhimi.*

## **1. Introduction**

World Heritage properties are among the most popular and heavily promoted visitor and tourist attractions in many countries (UNWO, 2013). The government of Albania ratified the Convention of World Heritage (UNESCO 1972) in July 1989 and Albania has inscribed four properties on the World Heritage List. Butrint (known as Buthrot) was the first site inscribed to the list in 1992 (extended in 1999), followed by the Historic Centers of Berat and Gjirokastra in 2005 and 2008 respectively, which belong to the category of cultural heritage. The country is also part of the transnational natural property of Ancient and Primeval Beech Forests of the Carpathians and other Regions of Europe. Recently the Albanian part of Lake Ohrid was inscribed in 2019 and joined the Natural and Cultural Heritage of Ohrid Region, the category of mixed heritage property (UNESCO, 2022). In addition, the Albanian folk Iso-polyphony was inscribed on the Representative List of Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity in 2008. (UNESCO, 2008) and two of the “purple codices” (Codex Purpureus Beratinus) (2005) are registered as Memory of the World Register (UNESCO, 2005).

Butrint is inscribed as a World Heritage property for its Outstanding Universal Value by the Criterion (iii): “The evolution of the natural environment of Butrint led to the abandonment of the city at the end of the Middle Ages, with the result that this archaeological site

provides valuable evidence of ancient and medieval civilizations on the territory of modern Albania”. According to archaeologists, the ruins of Butrint date back from the late Bronze Age (12th BC) (Koutsouris, et al., 2004), in the Iron Age but that time Butrint settlement was not a large and fortified center (Lako, 1981), (Baçe &Kondi, 1987). The archaeological findings, have known Butrint as the Epirote city of the Illyrian tribes of Kaons (Baçe &Condi, 1987), (Pani, 1981). During the centuries Butrint had a lot of developments and influences from Helen, Roman (44 BC Buthrot took the status of Roman Colony), Byzantine, Venetian (XIV) as well as Osman and French invasions (Bace &Kondi, 1987). The cultural values of the Mediterranean site of Butrint, are related to the presence of numerous objects (the theater, the nymph, and the Paleo-Christian baptistery) resulting from archeological excavations.

Regarding the academic literature, numerous existing studies are related to archeological and historical values. The first archaeological excavations in Butrint were carried out by an Italian expedition led by Luigi Maria Ugolini in the spring of 1928 (Hodges, 2011) (Hodges, 2017) during which, extraordinary discoveries were made of the theater, the nymph, and the Paleo-Christian baptistery (De Maria, 2003-2004). The archival resources in Rome identify some documents survive written by Luigi Ugolini (Manuscript) including the text of Albania Antica IV, which covers the theatre excavation, a volume on medieval Butrint, and other relevant documents (Bowden, Hodges, &Lako, 1998).

Only after the 1970s, Albanian scholars undertook archaeological excavation at the site of Butrint (Mucaj, 1998), representing the recovered data for our understanding of late antique and later Butrint. Several Albanian researchers such as Dh. Çondi, Dh. Budina, K.Lako, A. Baci, N.Ceka, and others have contributed to increased academic interest in Butrint, providing precious evidence regarding the site’s historical, archaeological, and architectural values. Koutsouris et al. consider building support a very significant factor in the establishment and consolidation of the protected area of Butrint National Park and UNESCO site; protection of the archeology; ecology and diversity of the site; management of the increasing numbers of visitors; raising public awareness and sustainable development of the world heritage property. Bego et al. 2012

provided an assessment of the biological diversity in Butrint National Park identifying the high number of plants and animal species as a great opportunity for eco-tourism activities. In addition, the development of heritage tourism, eco-tourism, or other forms of tourism should comply with the conservation objectives of the National Park and a World Heritage property, preserving the ecological integrity as well as the archeological values.

However, there are still a few research studies related to tourism development, sustainable tourism, management of visitor attraction, assessment of tourist perceptions about the site's values, as well as the analysis of threats to the site from the increased number of visitors or other factors.

## **2. Methodology**

The research methodology is based on the qualitative and quantitative data selected from the literature review: including books, relevant journal articles, reports, and websites. The data were collected also from fieldwork and a preliminary survey that consisted of handing out a structured questionnaire to a random sample of international tourists visiting the site. A total of 48 international tourists of both genders (28 males and 20 females) were included in the survey (May 2022). The questionnaire includes three parts and 39 questions. The first part was about general information, the second part explored tourists' perceptions about some tourist facilities offered during their visit (informative materials, tourist guides, site environment, etc.) The third part showed their satisfaction with the visit to the UNESCO site. The answers to parts two and three were measured by the Likert scale, using statistical methods to analyze some results about tourist perceptions.

## **3. Management of the World Heritage Site**

The archeological site is situated within the National Park of Butrint (declared in 2000) in a forested hill territory (natural/wetland ecosystem 8622.2 ha) (VKM, 2021), in the southern part of Albania, near the Greek border 19 km from the city of Saranda and 6 km from the town of Ksamil. It is surrounded by the lake of Butrint in the east (a tectonic lagoon), the Vivari channel in the south, and the Ionian Sea in the west, in front of Corfu Island (Qiriazhi, 2017). Regarding his

protection, Butrint's archaeological site was first designated by the socialist government as a "Cultural Monument" in 1948. After being listed as a World Heritage (1992) in 1997 Butrint was listed as a Heritage in Danger. To protect its values in 2000 Butrint and its ecosystem area were declared "National Park of Butrint". In 2003 the national park and surrounding wetland areas (13 500) were designated as the Ramsar site by the Wetland Ramsar Convention (Ramsar, 2003). The territory comprises a variety of relief forms (fields, hills, mountains, abrasive and accumulative coast) and a high proportion of biodiversity of national and international importance (Bego, Bino, Zotaj, Malltezi&Kola, 2012).



**Figure 1.** Baptistry



**Figure 2.** The Great Basilica (source: authors)

Inside the natural ecosystem, the buildings constructions of Butrint belong to different periods from ancient Greeks to Middle Ages. The archaeological excavations have discovered beautiful architectural monuments such as the Theater (3-rd century) (Fig.3), the around wall with its gates, the Baptistry (Fig.1), the Venetian tower, the Great Basilica (6th AD) (Fig.2), the Gymnasium, and so many sculptures, mosaics, jewelry, and other objects which identify the great development of social life.

Considering its geographical position, important archaeological values, the presence of historical monuments, and rich biodiversity (Bego et al.2012), the Butrint site has attracted numerous visitors from all around the world. In 2019 the number of visitors increased by 263 000 visitors, generating around 1 million € compared with 2010 when the site was visited by 65,000 visitors and the revenue generated was 220,000 € (Ministry of Tourism and Environment,

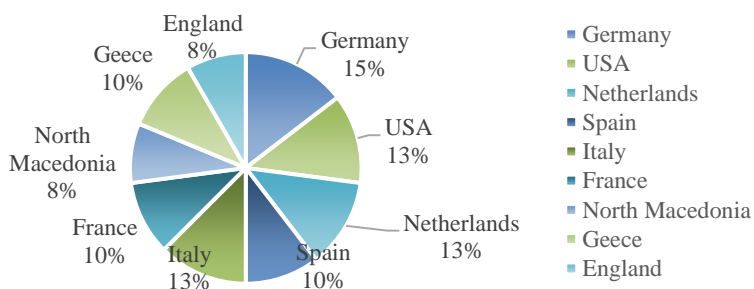
2019). The proximity to the island of Corfu has enabled Butrint to be visited by a large number of organized daily tourists. After the two decreasing years of the pandemic, the number of visitors in 2022 reached 80927 (October 2022), generating (48 422 900 lekë) 4.1 million € (Park Office, 2022). Most international tourists were from Europe, the USA, and other parts of the world.

Managing the World Heritage Site related to tourism development in developing countries has always been a challenging subject of study for many Cultural Heritage Management professionals and tourism developers. While UNESCO is responsible for inscribing the site in the World Heritage Site, responsibility for their management and protection lies with the nation-states of the participating countries (Belchel, 2016). After Butrint was listed on the World Heritage List, its management was done by the Butrint Foundation founded as a British charity (1993 in partnership with Albanian institutions (Institute of Archaeology Institute of Monuments, the Ministry of Tourism) that operated actively in research excavation, managing conservation programs, and generally assisting with the protection of the UNESCO site until 2012 (Paterlini & Hodges, 2013). The Anglo-Albanian collaboration project has demonstrated the enormous potential of the site as well as the advantages of a multi-faceted approach to the archaeology and history of the region. The establishment of the Butrint National Park and the Management Office secured the important archaeological site. Considering Butrint as a property with natural and cultural outstanding values, several projects were implemented to run beside and in line with environmental targets and small interventions addressing the improvements of the infrastructure of the park and the development of tourism (Koutsouris, Santi, & Tare, 2004). The administration of the Butrint site cultural property is given to “Butrint Management Foundation”, established by the Cooperation Agreement between the Ministry of Culture of Albania and Albanian American Development Foundation (AADF). The foundation is established to operate in the field of cultural heritage with the purpose of efficient administration, preserve and protect Cultural Property (SubZone A3 of the Butrint National Park, cultural property of universal value). (Ministry of Culture of Albania, 2021). The Management Integrated Plan of Butrint National Park 2020-2030 is designed by the Ministry of

Culture with the assistance of AADF (Albanian-American Development Foundation) with the purpose to manage and protect the National Park territory, the landscape, and especially the site of World Heritage, identifying the needs of the local community (Ministry of Culture, 2020). At the same time, the management of the world's cultural property by a foreign foundation is considered with doubt by archeologists, academics, and heritage specialists in Albania regarding the effectiveness of management and the protection of property values.

#### 4. Perceptions of tourists for the World Property values

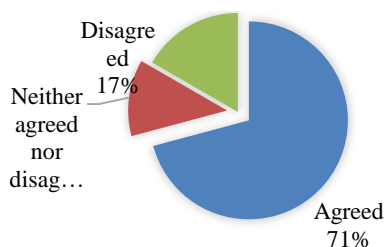
The place of origin of respondents was the USA, North Macedonia, Netherlands, Spain, Italy, Greece, England, France, and Germany (Fig.3). The participants in the survey were between 24-65 years.



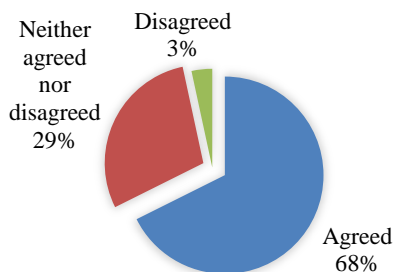
**Figure 3.** Place of origin of the visitors

Regarding the question of how many times they have visited the site, 75 % (n=36) had visited the site for the first time, and 25% (n=12) for the second time. Interestingly, 79% (n=38) knew about the site values before visiting. When asked about the source of information most of them emphasized books & guides 58% (n=28), media 26% (n=12), and (n=8) 16% friends and relatives. About the time spent visiting the site the majority of the respondents 58% (n=28), had spent more than 2 hours, 29% (n=14), less than 2 hours, and 13% (n=6), less than 1 hour. Regarding their *experience*, for most of them (74%) (n=35) it had been better than expected, and for 26% (n=13), the experience at the site was *neither worse nor better*. To get tourists' perceptions on facilities offered, related to heritage values communication we presented some key elements for which they expressed their opinion through Likert-scaled answers that ranged from 1 (strongly agree) to 6

(not applicable). About the statement *Tourist Information Center was informative*, most of the respondents (66%) (n=31), stated neither agree nor disagree, while 26% (n=13), agreed and (n=4) 8% disagreed. In addition, to give their opinion about *whether there were well-informed tourist guides available*, most of the tourists asked 42% (n=20) claimed that they were not applicable, while 21%, (n=10) of them agreed, 13% (n=6) disagreed, 8% (n=4) “neither agree nor disagree”. Individual visitors (or in small groups) are mostly not accompanied by guides or responsible persons. Furthermore, regarding the statement *audio guides were very informative and of high quality*, the majority 33% (n=16) were not applicable, while 29% (n=14), agreed, (n=12) 25% were “neither agree nor disagree” and (n=6) 13% disagreed. Meanwhile, related to *desk boards being well placed and easy to read*, most of the respondents 71% (n=34) agreed 17% (n=8) disagreed, and 12% (n=6) “neither agree nor disagree” (Fig. 4)



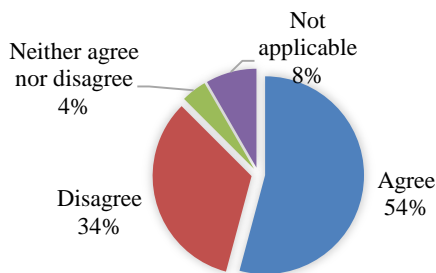
**Figure 4.** Desk boards were placed and easy to read



**Figure 5.** The signboard and directions available on the site were useful

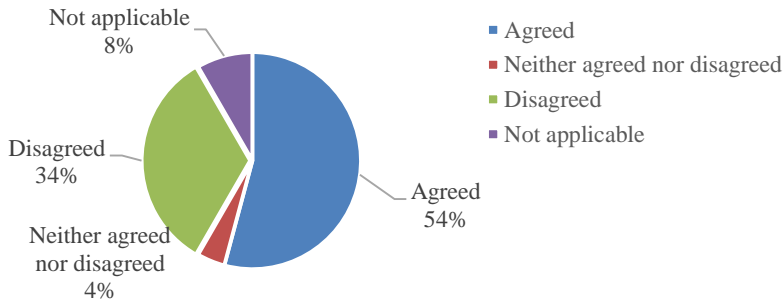
Asked about whether the statement *sign boards and directions available on the site were useful* most of the respondents 68% (n=33)

agreed, while 29% (n=14) neither agree nor disagree, and 3% (n=1) disagreed (Fig.5). This is related to the statement *the site had good security and safety measures* when half of them 50 % (n=24) stated neither agree nor disagree, while 33% (n=16) agreed, 8% (n=4) disagreed, and 8% (n=4) stated not applicable (remember that the archaeological site is extended into the forest area of the park, so the accompanying guides are necessary even for their security). At the end of part one, regarding the statement, *I got information about the Outstanding Universal Values (OUV) of the Butrint site*, the majority of the respondents 54% (n=26) agree, while 34% (n=16) disagree, 8% (n=4) not applicable, and 4% (n=2) neither agree nor disagree (Fig.6).



**Figure 6.** I got the information about Outstanding Universal Values

Identifying their opinion, about whether *they were satisfied with the site management for tourist use*; we can mention that only 54% (n=26) among all respondents agreed, while 34% (n=16) claimed “neither agree nor disagree”, 8 % disagreed (n=4) and 4% (n=2) was not applicable (Fig.7). Meanwhile, it is interesting to observe the respondent’s reactions to the statement “*I would pay more to visit this site*”, when half of them 50% (n=24) disagreed, (n=18) 38%, agreed, and (n=6), 13% “neither agree nor disagree” (the ticket for visiting the park cost 1000 lekë).



**Figure 7.** I was satisfied with site management for tourist use

In general, when asked about their satisfaction with the visit most of them 74% (n=35) agreed to be satisfied, while 18% (n=9), neither agree nor disagree and, (n=4) 8% did not agree (Fig.7). Finally, to know, whether *they would recommend the site to other people*; 75% (n=36) of the respondents agreed, and only 25% (n=8), stated neither agree nor disagree.

## 5. Discussion and Conclusion

Based on the research on the perceptions of tourists about the World Heritage of Butrint it is shown that tourists are satisfied with heritage values, even though in their visit they identify the lack of some tourist facilities. On one hand, most of them knew about the site's values before visiting it, and on the other hand, many of them didn't get information about the OUV during their visit. It is identified by them the lack of some facilities available such as guides and audio guides that would help in better communication of heritage values. At the same time, the Tourist Information Center was not considered very informative. Despite these, for many tourists, the sign boards and directions available on the site were not useful to orientate tourists inside the forest area. Furthermore, half of them doubted good security and safety measures applied on the site. Although the majority of tourists were satisfied with the visit and the heritage values of the site the number of them who were not satisfied with the facilities offered should be considered. Analyzing and understanding the tourists' perceptions is important for the well- management of the site. The results show the need to make an assessment of the actual management situation and how the facilities and site services serve

the tourist use. An action plan for tourist management would be also necessary.

The study is an initial attempt by the authors to identify tourist perceptions of the Butrint World Heritage Site. The limited data of the research has to do with the limited time and the low number of tourists surveyed. Advanced research will be undertaken soon.

### **Acknowledgment.**

This study was undertaken at the initiative of the Geography Lecturers of Fan S. Noli University. We would like to thank the students of History and Geography who participated in carrying out the tourist survey.

### **References**

- Bace, A., & Condi, D. (1987). *Buthroti*. Tiranë: 8 Nëntori. pp.
- Bego, F., Bino, T., Zotaj, A., Malltezi, J., & Kola, R. (2012). Biodiversity of Butrint National Park, UNESCO, and Ramsar: its status, Threats, and Priority for Conservation., (pp. 1-13).
- Belcher, G. (2016). Values in World Heritage Sites. In C. Sandis, *Culture Heritage Ethics* (p. 208). Cambridge: Open Book Publishers.
- Bowden, W., Hodges, R., & Lako, K. (1998). The Anglo-Albanian Project at Butrint. *Iliria Nr.1-2*, pp. 275-302.
- De Maria, S. (2003-2004). Leon Rei, Luigi Ugolini dhe Origjinat e Arkeologjise Shqiptare. *Iliria Nr.1-2*, pp. 95-104.
- Hodges, R. (2011). Inscriptions from Albania (S.) Anamali, et al. Deniaux Courpus des inscriptions latines d'Albanie, Rome: Ecole francaise de Rome, *Classical Review 61(01)*, 242-243.
- Hodges, R. (2017). Butrint Before Butrint Foundation *Archeostorie Journal of Public Archaeology*, 1-9
- Koutsouris, A., Santi, E., & Tare, A. (2004). Building Support For Protected Areas: The case of the Butrint National Park. *Communicating Protected Areas*, 92-100.
- Lako, K. (1981). Disa Konkluzione Paraprake mbi Gërmimet Arkeologjike ne Butrint (1975-1976). In S. e. Sarandës, *Saranda, Almanak* (p. 77). Tiranë: 8 Nëntori.
- Ministry of Culture. (2020). *National Park of Butrint, Integrated Management Plan (2020-2030)*. UK: Prince+Pearce.
- Ministry of Culture of Albania. (2021). The agreement between the Ministry and Albanian American Fund. Tirana, Albania.
- Ministry of Tourism and Environment. (2019). *Bulletin of Tourism*. Tirane: Ministry of Tourism and Environment.

- Muçaj, S. (1998). Southern Illyrian During the IV-VII Centuries A.D. *Iliria Nr.1-2*, pp. 173-183.
- Pani, G. (1981). Probleme Restaurimi në Fortifikimet Antike të Butrintit. In S. e. Sarandës, *Saranda, Almanak 1* (pp. 21-28). Tiranë: 8 Nëntori.
- Paterlini, A., & Hodges, R. (2013). A Short History of the Butrint Foundation's Conservation Programme at Butrint, Albania: 1994-2012. *Conservation and MGMT of ARCH, Sites, Vol.15 Nos 3-4*, 254-80.
- Qiriazi, P. (2017). *Trashëgimia Natyrore dhe Kulturore e Shqipërisë, (Vlerat, Rreziqet dhe Menaxhimi)*. Tirane: Akademia e Shkencave
- Ramsar Sites Information Sevice. (2003). Retrieved from <https://rsis Ramsar.org/ris/1290>
- Salazar, N. B., & Zhu, Y. (2015). Heritage and Tourism. In L. Meskeel, *Global Heritage: A Reader, First Edition* (p. 258). John Wiley & Sons.
- Remoaldo, P., Vareiro, L. M., Rebeiro, J. C. & Santos, J. F. (2014). Tourists' perceptions of world heritage destination: The case of Guimaraes (Portugal). *Tourism and Hospitality Research*, 206-2018.
- The Office of Administration and Coordination of the Butrint, Statistical Report 2022
- UNESCO (2005). *The memory of the World*. Retrieved from Codex Purpureus Beratinus: <https://en.unesco.org/memoryoftheworld/registry>
- UNESCO. (2008). *Intangible Heritage List*. Retrieved from Iso-polyphony: <https://ich.unesco.org/en/RL/albanian-folk-iso-polyphony->
- UNESCO. (2022). *World Heritage List*. Retrieved from World Heritage Convention: <https://whc.unesco.org/en/list>.
- VKM/2021, Për miratimin e ndryshimit në sipërfaqe të ekosistemit Natyror/Ligatinor "Butrint" shpallur Park Kombëtar, 16.07.2021
- Ye, S., Song, X., & Wu, K. (2022). Tourists' perception of the outstanding universal value of world natural heritage. *Research Square*, 1-28.