

# CITY OF BITOLA – DESTINATION FOR CULTURAL TOURISM

Tanja Angelkova Petkova<sup>1</sup>, Nikola V. Dimitrov<sup>1</sup>, Dushko Josheski<sup>1</sup>

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**ABSTRACT:** *Bitola is a major city in the country with several millennium long history. It is a city in which occurred undreds of important historical events, like it was a town center of provinces, many important historical figures lived or resided within the city, he city and its cultural - historical heritage successfully managed. In Bitola, today, are the most important cultural - historical monuments, events and ambient parts. City Bitola successfully promote its cultural - historical heritage and cultural manifestations of more tourism fairs in Europe, becoming known tourist destination in the cultural tourism in the Balkans. The main aim of this paper is to identify and describe the cultural, historical and ethno - social values of Bitola, as a precondition for tourism development. The research was done using the precise scientific methodology, especially: analysis and synthesis, and the genetic - evolutionary, the historical and the comparative method. The research done led to the conclusion that Bitola is attractive touristic destination for cultural tourism*

**Keywords:** *cultural tourism, historical monuments, cultural events, ambient sections, lifestyle.*

## INTRODUCTION

Bitola is a city with a millennium long history (Dimitrov, 1998; Dimitrov et al., 2004). The vanguard of Bitola prehistoric settlement Gurgur Mound (Saneva & Sanev 1976), today a settlement consisting of the city. In Gurgur Mound is discovered archaeological material which consists of various ceramic products belonging to the early Neolithic period, about 3000 years old. The continuity of life is confirmed by the ancient period through Heraclea Linkestis (Mikulcik, 2007; Gjorgjievaska, 2007, 2012, 1998; Janakievski, Adzievski 1996), a city founded by Philip II in 349 g. BC Today Heraclea is a part of the city of Bitola. Heraclea evolved from a military base, first an important station on the Via Egnatia road, and later bishop's seat. Life in this city lasted for more than a millennium, a when it was interrupted with disastrous earthquake in 518. Remnants of rich

<sup>1</sup> University "Goce Delchev" Stip, Faculty of Tourism and Business Logistics, Gevgelia, Macedonia;  
e-mail: angel.tanja@gmail.com

life Heraclea had, can be seen through several mosaics, theater, thermal, portico, episcopal palace, fountain city, the main street and a variety of artifacts. From the ashes of the old city, it begins to shape a new, medieval Bitola (Todorovski, 2002). City that exists under that name more than a millennium. Next centuries in Bitola, were filled with many tumultuous events like military attacks, destructions, looting and downs. So the city throughout history often changed their rulers, the longest period was under the Ottoman Turks. Bitola registered growth when it become important trade and craft center, throughout the history it has been capital of Vilayet - Province, the city of rich and poor people, cosmopolitan city of many nations and religions. A significant period for Bitola was the 19th century when the city's population has increased significantly reaching over 50,000 people, and became (in Thessaloniki) second largest city in the European part of Turkey. At that time, the city of Bitola was inhabited by rich merchants and craftsmen, it had rich Bazaar with over 2000 shops and trade links with many cities and countries in Europe, Asia and Africa, Rumeli elacet city center, rich citizenry who copied Western fashion Western lifestyle, architecture and so on (Dimitrov, 1998; Group authors, 2004).

However, the events in the first two decades of the 20th century led Bitola to experience real cataclysm. The Ilinden Uprising in 1903, happened Young Turk Revolution (1908), then came the Balkan Wars (1912/13 d.), a the First World War (1914/18 d.) Previously mentioned Events led developed Bitola center to become not perspective (Tankovski & Minovski 2009). The state of Bitola, significantly changed after the Second World War, when many commercial facilities were built, and village - city relation was strengthen. Bitola occurred after 1991, especially when city started and developed new economic activities, tourism and general economic growth. All previously stated presents rich history and life in Bitola, which spanned over 6000 years in total. The rich history, in terms of promotion of cultural heritage, Bitola, so far, successfully presented its cultural - historical heritage to visitors to the city, and also to visitors to various tourism fairs in Europe and the world.

## CULTURAL - HISTORICAL MONUMENTS (SHORT OVERVIEW)

Authors proposed a brief overview and made a list of the important cultural - historical monuments in the city of Bitola, the time of occurrence, location - location and name of the monument.

In the urban area of the city of Bitola found several hundred objects of cultural heritage rich history and culture of the city. The greatest concentration of cultural - historical monuments found in the downtown area or along and adjacent to ambient walk street "Main Street" (formerly named "Marshal Tito", "Tsar Boris III", "King Peter", "Hamid" the course depending on the time that "ruled" by the city and Republic Macedonia as a whole). In fact, the most beautiful, most representative and unique street along with two squares, or the Museum of Bezisten south to north, a length of about 1 km, which brings together more than 50 important buildings and monuments of cultural heritage in Bitola. Main Street is one of the oldest city streets (whose contours are first men-

**Table 1.** Review of cultural - historical monuments in the city of Bitola period of occurrence

Period of occurrence	Place and the name of the monument
Prehistory (3000 year B.C.)	Gurgur locality - the northeastern outskirts of the city. Multi-layer settlement - Early Neolithic, the slightly elevated mound, 150 meters long and 3 meters high. Ceramic material containers and cylinders. This locality is now an integral part of Bitola.
Old age (from IV to VI century)	Heraclea Linkestis - today part of Bitola. Founded in 349 g. PR. AD by Philip II, father of Alexander III of Macedon. City with over 1000 years of history. City Centre Province and later episcopal seat. City of ancient theater capacity of 2000 seats, several basilicas, large and unique mosaics, sculptures, and various other artifacts.
Middle age (from VII to 14 <sup>th</sup> century )	Medieval churches and monasteries (St. were known. George, St. Demetrius, St. Elijah St. Nicholas St. Physicians - Cosmas and Damian, Sts. Petka, St. Saviour and others, and over there Heraclea former medieval fortress Fight and on nowadays city core in Bitola there were 70 churches and monasteries, while north of Bitola's highest hill, was a medieval fortress and a large church) that the occupation of Bitola by the Turks converted into mosques. There were places with holy water, more mills, and large trees - maple trees...
New age (from 15 to 17 <sup>th</sup> century )	Mosques (Isak Celebi 1506 Yeni Mosque in 1558, Ghazi Haydar Kadi Mosque in 1561, etc..), Clock Tower (17 <sup>th</sup> century), a covered bazaar - bazaar (15 <sup>th</sup> century), Old Bazaar (18-19 <sup>th</sup> century) with 2000 stores, warehouses - Magaza (19th century), caravan Saray, religious-schools seminaries, ten bath, several deboi, turbo, Zandan tower, several public fountains, cemeteries, more neighborhoods, large plane trees and the like.
(from 18 and 19 <sup>th</sup> century)	Churches (St. Demetrius 1830, St. Mary in 1870, St. Sunday 1863, St. Constantine and Helena, St. Nahum and others, 19 <sup>th</sup> century). Cathedral ("Sacred Heart of Jesus" 18 <sup>th</sup> /19 <sup>th</sup> century). Ambient units of urban architecture "Main Street" (19 <sup>th</sup> century). Mosques, synagogues, cemeteries, independent town houses, banks, insurance companies, caravan, inns, theater, over 2000 shops, photographic studios, movie theater, dozens of bridges, 9 consulates, more civil and religious schools - seminaries, two barracks, a military school several hospitals, pharmacies, printing companies, factories, libraries, Metropolis, more cemetery, park, fountain, public fountains, picnic areas, "Tumbe Coffee", "Almond Ballarat", "Budej Well", "Bimbil Stone", "Deveani "" Strchin "and others.
Newest century (from 20 <sup>th</sup> century till nowadays)	In Bitola 22 Orthodox churches, 10 mosques, 1 cathedral Catholic Church, evangelical 1, 1 Methodist, more civil cemetery military cemetery from the First and Second World War (Civil: Christian Orthodox, Vlach, Catholic, and Muslim and Jewish; and military: French Serbian, German, and partisan of the Second World war), reestablished "Russian Cross" Sedona built an army, two squares, a national institution and museum Bitola Institute, Cultural, National - National Theatre Bitola, several city parks, over 100 monuments and commemorative plaques, memorial houses the revolutionary "Goce Delchev" memorial house of the National Hero "Stevan Naumov - Steve" memorial museum room "Mustafa Kemal Ataturk" memorial Hall of Bitola Congress, Old City room, House of culture 12 consulates, 18 primary and secondary schools, two universities, one academy, six faculties, over 20 hotels, hostels, villas and apartments, over 100 restaurants, bars, cafes and pizzerias, 3 souvenir shop, 7 galleries, 16 travel agencies, etc. 3 crates.

tioned in the first half of the XV century) the main features of the modern streets of European capitals. Street in the rich history was economic, political, educational, cultural and social center, was and still is the center of events, the events center, promenade of fashion, youth, culture, which fully reflects the lifestyle of the city of Bitola. City with a glorious past, consuls city, capital of pianos, cosmopolitan and wealthy city, bohemian town where singing (praised in over 200 songs), eating and drinking, city of culture and a style of life.

## **INFRASTRUCTURE FOR THE PURPOSE OF TOURISM (SHORT REVIEW)**

In terms of promotion of cultural monuments in the city of Bitola things Institution National Museum and Gallery - Bitola Tourist Information Center (Petrovska, 2012) Department of Economic Development and Public Affairs, Department of Economic Development (Municipal newsletter, 2010, 2011, 2012) which has role of tourism bureaus, most hotels, travel agencies, restaurants, places of worship, banks, consulates, shops in the old bazaar, department stores, sports facilities and so on. So, just in the center of Bitola, i.e. along and in the vicinity of ambient street "Main Street" are numerous cultural - historical buildings from different historical periods, churches, mosques, cathedral, old town center core architecture with old houses over a century clock tower bazaar, museum, monuments, fountain, fountains, fountains, hotels, restaurants, bars, a number of shops in the old bazaar, etc.

## **TOURIST ARRIVALS**

The attendance of Bitola speak the following data from the State Statistical Office (SSO June 2013), in 2012. Pelagonian region was visited by 72,054 tourists or 11.1% share in the total number of tourists who visited the country (total of RM 663,633 tourists visited), of which 52,422 were domestic and 19,632 foreign tourists. Overnight stays totaled 174,304 or share of 8.1 % (a total of RM 2,151,692 tourists realized nights) of which 126,306 nights were generated by domestic and 47,998 overnight stays by foreign tourists. On the other hand, the information obtained from the competent authorities of the Department of Economic Development and Public Affairs, Department of Economic Development of the Municipality of Bitola, in the course of 2012, the city was visited by about 35,000 tourists per day or approximately 100 tourists. The number of nights was over 100,000, or an average of 2.8 days per tourist. Most of the tourists, or about 65% were domestic (22,750), and 35% foreign (12.250). The foreign tourists were most numerous: Turkey (5000 visitors) and Greece (about 4000 tourists), and the rest were from Serbia, Bulgaria, the Netherlands, Australia, Albania, USA, UK, France, Spain, Canada, Croatia, Russian Federation Poland, Czech Republic, Slovenia, Montenegro, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Italy, Germany, the Netherlands, Romania, Israel, Japan, China and others.

## TOURISM PROMOTION AND MARKETING

Bitola, along with tourist info center, founded in 2006, actively engaged in the promotion of tourism in the city and the whole community. For continuity it s fair share of tourism, which presents a number of guides, flyers, maps, postcards, travel CD-a, and DVD-a, in four languages brochures, books, signal tics - with panels. Same info for tourism development strategy is developed for tourism development 2009 - 2014 y , realized more border projects in Greece and Albania, especially projects Neighborhood Program INTERREG IIIA/CARDS, between Greece - Macedonia and opened a number of cultural - historical exhibitions, promoted a new info portal Bitola: [www.bitolatourist.info](http://www.bitolatourist.info), during the year carried more international and domestic festivals, cultural realize longest summer in Macedonia in length from 60 days to over 200 cultural content etc. For their efforts towards developing cultural values, Bitola 2007 VA joined the European association of cities and regions with cultural - historical heritage, which is comprised of 11 associations of historic cities and 14 European countries. In this part of Europe this honor have only Bitola and Dubrovnik. Then in 2009 the World Tourism Fair in Lugan, Switzerland, Bitola is crowned with another award for outstanding most avant-garde tourist destination in the region. While, according to the Balkan Alliance of hotel associations Bitola became a leader in cultural tourism for 2001. However, Bitola, does not stop here, rather working on extension with new content and a new vision for development of tourism.

### RESULTS

<p><b>Strenghts</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>City with a long and various history</li> <li>Rich and diverse cultural - historical heritage</li> <li>Diverse tourism offer</li> <li>Contemporary design museum</li> <li>Tourist information office</li> <li>Diverse gastronomic offer</li> <li>Strategic approach to tourism development</li> </ul>	<p><b>Weaknesses</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Lack of accommodation facilities of high category</li> <li>Branding of the tourist markers</li> <li>Versatile non FB offer</li> <li>Insufficient number of specialist local tour guides</li> <li>Poor education of local people</li> <li>Gourmet menus in multiple languages</li> <li>Insufficient promotion of Bitola from local travel agencies</li> </ul>
<b>SWOT analysis</b>	
<p><b>Opportunities and threats</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Greater emphasis on cosmopolitanism</li> <li>Repositioning of several activities towards tourism</li> <li>Input internationally branded hotels</li> <li>Contacts and expanding tourism offer</li> <li>Build themed museums and memorial houses</li> <li>Multimedia editing main tourist markers</li> <li>Continuing professional education for professional managerial staff</li> </ul>	<p><b>RISKS and HAZARDS</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Lack of investment in tourism</li> <li>Failure to adjust to modern travel trends</li> <li>Devastation of cultural heritage</li> <li>Security and protection of cultural and historical heritage</li> </ul>

The result of the present study through the SWOT analysis that covers internal weaknesses of the tourism in Bitola, as well as external opportunities and development possibilities, i.e. limitations and threats, related to the process of the development of the tourism in Bitola.

## CONCLUSION

From the previous review it can be concluded that Bitola as a destination for cultural tourism from the previous years it does continuous growth. Attractiveness of Bitola as a historical and tourist destination it can be significantly increased if it is being invested in new contents. Namely, Bitola can offer to the tourist clientele, things such as: building of First World War museum, old Bazaar museum, Firefighting museum (with tradition since 1884), photography museum and movie (over 120 years tradition), renovation of the Milton Manaki cinema (first cameraman on the Balkans), building of the medicine museum (that dates from the antics onwards), renovation of the medieval Kale (fortress), adaptation of the Dzepaneto into museum or other contents, building of funicular and panorama view point on Tumbe Café, finishing of the biggest church dedicated to the all of Macedonian saints and lots of other contents. While, in the near future, named objects if they become reality, than Bitola as a cultural tourism destination has future.

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