

TOURISM POTENTIAL OF SKOPJE CITY¹

Üsküp Şehrinin Turizm Potansiyeli

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Alaattin KIZILÇAOĞLU*
Hakan ÖNAL**

ABSTRACT: Skopje, the capital of North Macedonia, is one of the important centers in the Balkans with its convenient location on the Vardar-Morava line, Thessaloniki-Belgrade highway and railway route. Skopje and its immediate surroundings is an area with high tourism potential with its natural, historical and cultural attractions. Skopje, which was under Turkish rule for 520 years, still carries Ottoman traces today and there are a large number of monuments from that time. Skopje attracts local and foreign tourists with the recreation area in Matka Canyon with its ancient settlement, Skupi ancient settlement, castle and churches, Ottoman-era stone bridge and the Old Town with mosques, inns, Turkish baths, mansions unique to Turkish architecture and shops of various artisans. Turkish citizens take the lead among the foreign tourists who visit Skopje where 9,000 of our compatriots reside. In the framework of this study, field studies were carried out in the city and its vicinity in order to promote Skopje's Ottoman heritage and other tourist attractions and to present the tourism potential of Skopje by providing print and visual documents from national and international sources.

Keywords: Skopje, North Macedonia, Tourism

ÖZ: Kuzey Makedonya'nın başkenti Üsküp; Vardar-Morava hattında, Selanik-Belgrad karayolu ve demiryolu güzergahında elverişli konumu ile Balkanların önemli merkezlerinden biridir. Üsküp ve yakın çevresi doğal, tarihi ve kültürel çekicilikleriyle turizm potansiyeli yüksek olan bir sahadır. 520 yıl Türk egemenliğinde kalan, Osmanlı izlerini günümüzde de güçlü bir şekilde taşıyan Üsküp'te ecdat yadigarı çok sayıda eser mevcuttur. Üsküp;

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* Prof. Dr. Balıkesir University, Necatibey Faculty of Education, Department of Social Sciences Education. alaattin@balikesir.edu.tr, <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2050-4244>

** Assoc. Prof. Dr. Balıkesir University, Necatibey Faculty of Education, Department of Social Sciences Education. onal@balikesir.edu.tr, <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8434-9880>

Matka Kanyonundaki rekreasyon alanı, Skupi antik yerleşmesi, kalesi ve kiliseleri, Osmanlı döneminden kalma taş köprüsü, camileri, hanları, hamamları, Türk mimarisine özgü konakları ve çeşitli zanaatkarlara ait dükkanların yer aldığı Eski Çarşısıyla yerli ve yabancı turistleri cezbetmektedir. 9.000 dolaylarında soydaşımızın yaşadığı Üsküp'ü en çok ziyaret eden yabancı turistler arasında Türkiye Cumhuriyeti vatandaşları gelir. Bu araştırmada, Üsküp'ün Osmanlı mirasını ve diğer turistik çekiciliklerini tanıtmak amacıyla şehir ve yakın çevresinde arazi çalışmaları gerçekleştirilmiş, konu kapsamında ulusal ve uluslararası kaynaklardan yazılı ve görsel dokümanlar temin edilerek, Üsküp'ün turizm potansiyeli ortaya koyulmaya çalışılmıştır.

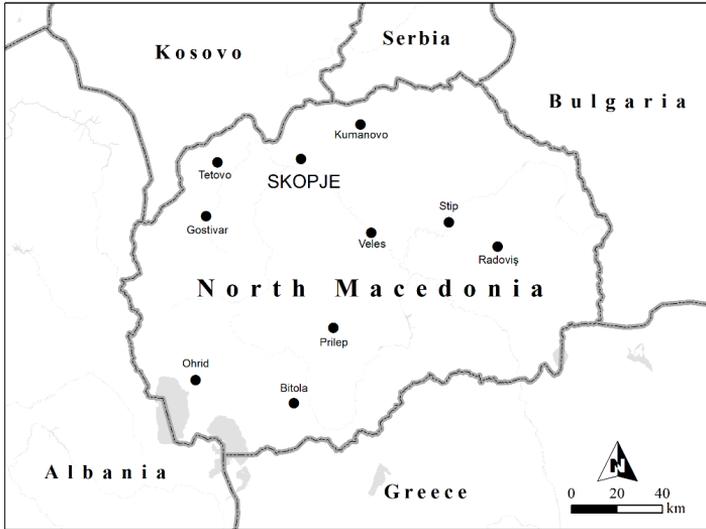
Anahtar Kelimeler: Üsküp, Kuzey Makedonya, Turizm

INTRODUCTION

The Republic of Northern Macedonia is a relatively small European country with a central location on the Balkan Peninsula with a surface area of 25,713 km² and a population of 2 million.

The Republic of Northern Macedonia has land borders with Greece, Bulgaria, Serbia, Kosovo and Albania (Map 1). It is a landlocked country, with no coastal areas. In general, the country has mountainous areas. Most common climate type in the country is moderate continental climate and Mediterranean Transition and Mountain climate is also effective in some areas. Ohrid Lake and Sv. Naum and Biljana springs that feed Ohrid, Prespa Lake, Dojran Lake, Matka Lake, Mavrovo Lake and glacial lakes are often visited due to their natural attractions. Forest areas occupy a large place in Northern Macedonia which has attractive natural regions, especially Mavrovo National Park.

North Macedonia was ruled by the Kingdom of Macedonia, Rome and Byzantine respectively. Towards the end of 14th century, Macedonia came under the rule of the Ottoman Empire and 500 years of Ottoman rule started (Mitovska et al.; 2010). After the Balkan Wars, the Ottoman Empire lost its territory in Macedonia (Macedonia, 2011: 21). Macedonia was under the patronage of Bulgaria during the World War I (1915-1918) and under the patronage of the Serbian-Croatian-Slovenian Kingdom during the period of 1918-1941. In 1944, Macedonia became a Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (Doykov-Dimitrov, 2008). With the dissolution of Yugoslavia in 1991, the Macedonia Autonomous Republic declared its independence.

Map 1: Macedonia and Skopje Location Map

North Macedonia is a Balkan country with a relatively low-population, where various ethnic elements (Macedonian, Albanian, Turkish, Roman, Serbian, Bosnian, Pomak, Vlah, etc.) live. In the country, 64% of the population is Macedonian, 25% are Albanian and 4% are Turkish (Kızılcıoğlu, 2014: 19). The official languages of the country are Macedonian and Albanian. Apart from this, there are minorities speaking Turkish, Bosnian, Serbian and Romani. The official alphabet is the Cyrillic Alphabet. Roughly 2/3 of those living in the country are Christians and 1/3 are Muslims. Most Macedonians, Serbs and Vlachs are Christians while most of the Albanians, Turks, Bosnians and Romans are Muslims. In North Macedonia, the population is concentrated especially in Skopje and on flat areas in the west. Other important cities besides Skopje are Kumanovo, Bitola, Prilep, Tetovo, Veles, Stip, Ohrid and Gostivar.

North Macedonia is a country where we have strong kinship ties and relics from our ancestors (Kızılcıoğlu, 2014). The territory remained under Ottoman rule for more than 5 centuries, and the Turkish population from Anatolia was settled here. The ratio of the Turkish population in the country decreased considerably as Turkish people in the country migrated to Anatolia in different periods for various reasons. The total number of Turks is around 78,000. Turks settled in the country in a non-uniform manner. 3/4 of the Turks in North Macedonia live in the western half of the country. The areas densely populated by Turks are Skopje are Gostivar, Centar Zupa, Plasnitsa and Radoviš. Albanians, which make up a quarter of the total population, generally reside in the western part of the country.

North Macedonia is a European Union candidate country. The country is one of countries in Europe with the weakest socio-economic indicators and one of the countries with the lowest visitor expenditure in Europe and the Balkans. Due to economic difficulties, workers migrate from the country to the European countries.

MAIN TOURISTIC ATTRACTIONS OF NORTH MACEDONIA

Tourism is an important economic activity that contributes to Macedonia's national economy. The areas that attract the most tourists in the Republic of North Macedonia are the lakes region (Ohrid, Prespa and Dojran lakes) and the capital Skopje. Approximately half of the tourists visit the lake region and one fourth visit Skopje (Ljushi, 2011: 55). Republic of Macedonia has natural and historical attractions.

The primary natural attractions of Macedonia are lakes, mountains, national parks and thermal springs. The most outstanding natural tourist areas of the country are Ohrid, Dojran, Prespa lakes and their surroundings. Lake Ohrid and its vicinity, included in the UNESCO World Heritage list, is the pearl of Macedonia and its most important destination. The primary winter and mountain tourism centers of Macedonia are Popova is Sapka and Mavrovo on Mount Shar. Galicica, Pelister and Mavrova national parks are also well-known.

Macedonia's main historical attractions are castles, ancient settlements (Stobi, Skupi, Heraklea Linkestis, Bargala, Lihnidos), museums, monuments, traditional mansions, Orthodox monasteries and its churches and Ottoman artifacts.

Macedonia was influenced by Islamic architecture during the Ottoman period. Mosques and other historical structures from the Ottoman era (inns, baths, dervish lodges, bridges, towers, clock towers, grand bazaars, shrines, fountains, mansions) left Turkish and Islamic marks on most of Macedonia (Erinç, 1992). There are around 600 mosques in Macedonia and the most famous ones were built in the 15th and 16th centuries. Significant mosques of historical importance are located in the cities of Skopje, Tetovo, Gostivar and Bitola (Markoski et al., 2013: 35). The Military High School, where the great leader Mustafa Kemal Atatürk received his high school education in the city of Bitola, was converted into a museum. Atatürk's father, Ali Rıza Efendi's village, Kocacık, is located near Debar.

The most interesting places of Skopje city are historical places. European tourists who are fond of historical tourism generally show interest in the city. Citizens of the Republic of Turkey shows interest in the city historical artifacts remaining from the Ottoman period. According to the data of the North Macedonian Statistical Institute, the total number of tourists coming to

the city in 2015 is 220.212 people. This value is 27% of the tourists coming to the country. 41% of foreign tourists stay in Skopje. In Skopje accommodation, 54 hotels, pensions and apartments are used.

PURPOSE AND METHOD

This research aimed to introduce the natural, historical and cultural attractions including the ancestral relics in Skopje which remained under Ottoman rule for more than 5 centuries and is still a part of the Turkish world. In this context, the research was carried out in 3 phases: literature review, field work and narration. In the first phase, written and visual documents were obtained from national and international scientific works containing information about the tourism geography characteristics of Skopje and its surroundings. Then, touristic attractions were observed on the spot with the help of field studies and photos were taken. During the last phase, the text was narrated based on the collected data and field observations.

OVERVIEW OF SKOPJE

Skopje, the capital of North Macedonia, is located in the center of the Balkan Peninsula, in the north of the country (Map 1). Surrounded by mountainous areas, the city was built on both sides of the Vardar River Valley. The altitude on the banks of the Vardar River is around 250 m. Temperate continental climate prevails in Skopje (Markoski, 2013; Markoski et al.; 2013). Approximately 1/4 of the population (467,000 people) of North Macedonia resides in Skopje where different ethnicities live together. Approximately 2/3 of the people living in Skopje are Macedonian and 1/4 of them are Albanian. There are also Roma, Serbs and Bosnians in the city. The ratio of the Turkish population in Skopje is around 2% and around 9,000 Turkish compatriots live in the city. Muslim Turks and Albanians live in the left part of the Vardar River, namely in the north of the city and Christians live in the right part (Kızılcıaoğlu, 2014: 23). Skopje is the most important political, cultural, educational, industrial, commercial and health center of North Macedonia (Mitovska et al.; 2010). The most important airports of North Macedonia are Skopje Alexander the Great Airport and Ohrid Airport where foreign tourists usually enter the country by air. The city of Skopje is located on the Belgrade-Thessaloniki highway and railway route. Skopje, North Macedonia can be accessed via airway from Turkey and via highway from Bulgaria and Greece. Visas are not required for Turkish Republic citizens.

HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT OF SKOPJE

Roman era ancient settlement of Skupi near the village of Zlokukani (5 km from Skopje) close to Skopje, which dates back before common era, developed

rapidly due to its location at the intersection of important roads between the Aegean and the Danube (Vardar-Morava) and the Adriatic and the Black Sea and became an economic and cultural center. Skupi took on the appearance of a typical Roman city. After Skupi was destroyed by a major earthquake in 518, Skopje was established in its current location. The foundations of the new Skopje were laid by Justinian I (527-565) in the second half of the 6th century. In the next two-three centuries, the city was invaded and pillaged by the Kumans and Slavs. The city whose development slowed down this way became an important Byzantine settlement after the 9th century. The city was captured by the first Bulgarian Kingdom at a period at the end of the 9th century-in the first half of the 10th century. At the end of the 10th century, Skopje remained within the borders of Samuil's empire. In 1004, Byzantine emperor Basil II put Skopje back under Byzantine rule. The city made great progress during the rule of Emperor Dushan and became a center of culture and administration (Markoski, 2013: 27-29; Markoski et al., 2013: 78-80).

Skopje came under Turkish rule 61 years before the conquest of Istanbul, in 1392. Later, there was significant cultural change in Skopje. Islamic structures became widespread and Skopje's appearance changed (Pavlovski-Pavlovski, 2005; Marinovski-Korunovski, 2008: 17). The opulence of Skopje continued in this vein during the Ottoman period. Turks migrated to Skopje from Anatolia. In the 17th century, the city was an economic and cultural center where craftsmanship, trade and leatherworking were highly developed. Skopje was completely destroyed and burned in 1689 because of the plague by the order of the Austrian General Piccolomi. It was difficult for the city to recover after this event. The city was revived after the construction of the Vardar railway in 1873. Before the Balkan Wars, 47.000 people lived in Skopje (Markoski et al., 2013: 80). Turkish administration in Skopje ended in 1912, after 520 years and Serbs occupied the city. In 1915, Bulgarians seized the city. In 1918, the allied armies surrendered the city back to the Serbs (Güney, 2006: 93). German forces invaded Skopje during World War II. On April 6, 1941, Skopje was bombed by the Germans and public buildings and residences suffered greatly. Then the city fell into the hands of the Bulgarians. In 1944, Skopje was liberated by Macedonian Partisan forces (Markoski, 2013: 36). In 1946, the city became the administrative center of the Republic of Macedonia which was included in the Federative Republic of Yugoslavia (Güney, 2006: 93). On November 16, 1962, there was a major flood in Skopje. On July 26, 1963, 1,070 people died and 3,500 were injured as a result of a severe earthquake in Skopje and 45% of the buildings in the city were damaged (Markoski, 2013: 36; Markoski et al., 2013: 78). Most Turkish structures were destroyed in the earthquake. The destroyed Turkish neighborhoods could not be restored and they were simply removed.

The Turkish identity of the city suffered greatly (Güney, 2006: 93). After World War II, Skopje became the largest and most modern city in the country, its population increased and its economy improved (Markoski et al., 2013: 81).

SKOPJE'S TOURISM ATTRACTIONS

With its natural, historical and cultural attractions Skopje has a significant tourism potential.

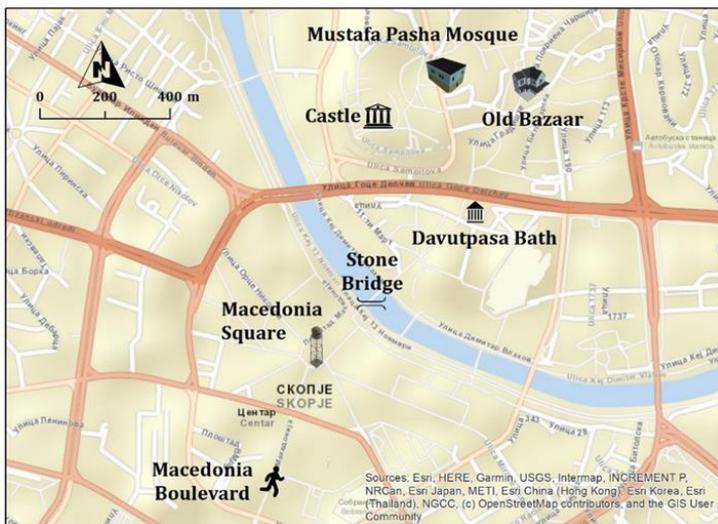
NATURAL ATTRACTIONS OF SKOPJE AND CLOSE VICINITY

15 km from Skopje and located in the Treska river valley with magnificent scenic view, Matka Artificial Lake and canyon (Photo 1) is the most important natural attraction area near the capital (Kızılçaoğlu, 2014). Skopje is the main recreation and favorite picnic area for residents. Rafting, line fishing and trekking activities are carried out in this region. There are endemic flora and fauna in the canyon. With its caves and extraordinary steep sloped canyon, Matka has colorful geo-morphological characteristics.

HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL ATTRACTIONS OF SKOPJE

The River Vardar divides the capital into two parts, the old city and the new city. Historical structures such as castle, old bazaar, mosques, inns and baths are located in the old city while the new city has a modern appearance and hosts boulevards, squares, sculptures, monuments, museums, memorials, shopping centers and cultural buildings (theater, opera, cinema, library) (Map 2).

Skopje, with a plethora of ancestral relics, still carries the traces of the Ottoman Empire. The Ottomans built roads, bridges, mosques, baths, inns and mansions in Skopje, houses unique to Turkish architecture were built, a bazaar with shops of various artisans was founded and mosques, lodges and masjids were built for worship. Inns were built for the accommodation of domestic and foreign merchants (Kızılçaoğlu, 2014: 23). The official emblem of Skopje includes the stone bridge, castle and Vodno Mountain, the symbols of the city.

Photo 1: Matka Lake and Matka Canyon**Map 2: Location of Skopje's Main Historical Attractions**

Ancient Town of Skupi

Skupi is an archaeological settlement located near Zlokukjani Village, 5 km northwest of Skopje (Markoski et al., 2013: 108). Skupi was the capital of the Dardania region in the late antiquity, from Nis to Veles. During the Roman period, Skupi became a strategic and commercial center, based on its geographical situation. Skupi was enriched with the most typical examples of Roman architecture and stonework, during the period in which it stayed under the rule of Roman Empire for more than 500 years. Skupi was destroyed

by a severe earthquake in 518. During the ancient excavations in Skupi, the foundations of a large basilica were uncovered. The floor the basilica was decorated with mosaics and its walls were decorated with frescoes. Almost nothing remains from the Roman theater (Pavlovski-Pavlovski, 2005: 110-111).

Skopje Castle

Skopje Castle (Photo 2) is located next to the River Vardar and the Old Bazaar. The castle was built by Emperor Justinian I by using the stones of the city of Skupi destroyed by a disastrous earthquake in 518. When the Skopje Castle was conquered by the Turks, it was extended and a city was built in it. In his travel book, Evliya Çelebi mentions that Skopje was a fortified city with a strong and powerful fortress with double walls made of stone shining as if it was polished (Markoski et al., 2013: 82; Pavlovski-Pavlovski, 2005: 115). A significant part of the castle was destroyed in the 1963 earthquake (Markoski, 2013: 46). With its location in the hilly area overlooking the city, the castle has the best view in the city.

Stone Bridge

The Stone Bridge (Photo 3), the symbol of Skopje, also known as the Fatih Sultan Mehmet Bridge, was built on the River Vardar in the second half of the 15th century by Fatih Sultan Mehmet (Markoski et al., 2013: 83). its history dates back to the 6th century in some scientific writings. It is stated that it was built by Justinian. The Stone Bridge was significantly damaged due to natural disasters and has been restored many times (Macedonia, 2011: 40). The bridge connects the historical segment where Muslims live and the new segment where Christians live.

Photo 2: Skopje Castle



Photo 3: Stone Bridge**Photo 4:** Vodno Mountain and Millenium Cross from Vardar River

Vodno Mountain and Millenium Cross

Vodno Mountain, located in the south of town (Photo 4), is the most popular attraction for the people of Skopje. There are viewing terraces on the side of the mountain facing Skopje. Skopje City and its surroundings can be seen with a clear panoramic view from Vodno. Thousands of people, both foreign and local, visit the Vodna Mountain every day. Millenium Cross, one of Skopje's newest symbols, was erected on the peak of Vodno Mountain (1061 m). Millenium Cross was constructed in the year 2002 to commemorate the 2000th year of Christianity in Macedonia and in the world. It is 66 m high and 46 m wide. The massive cross, visible from 40 km, is lighted with hundreds of light bulbs at night. Millenium Cross can be reached by cable car from the skirts of the Vodno Mountain (Photo 5) (Kızılcıoğlu, 2014:24).

Photo 5: Skopje from the Cable Cars**The Old Bazaar**

The Old Bazaar (Photos 6-7), is one of the biggest bazaars of Ottoman architecture with its historical and cultural artifacts. The most obvious remnants of the period of Ottoman Empire in Skopje can be found in and around the Bazaar. The Bazaar, with its labyrinthine narrow stone alleyways, mosques, inns, baths and adjacent 1-2 storey shops significantly resembles the bazaars in ancient Anatolian cities. The bazaar was restored many times after several earthquakes and fires.

Mosques

There are many mosques left from The Ottoman Empire in the section of town where Muslims reside in. Mustafa Pasha Mosque, Yahya Pasha Mosque, İshak Bey Mosque, Sultan Murat Mosque, Isa Bey Mosque, Murat Pasha Mosque (Photo 8) and the Arasta Mosque can be found in Skopje's historic bazaar. Mustafa Pasha Mosque, one of the distinguished examples of Islamic architecture constructed in 1492 by Vizier Mustafa Pasha, can be found at the east of the castle's main entrance. The garden of the Mosque houses the tomb of Mustafa Pasha. After 1912, the mosque was used as a military warehouse. The mosque was recently restored by the Turkish government. Yahya Pasha Mosque, constructed by Yahya Pasha, is one of Skopje's oldest mosques with its unique architecture and surrounding tombs and graves. Ishak Bey Mosque, constructed by Ishak Bey in 1438-1439, was restored after the earthquakes of 1519 and 1963. Sultan Murat Mosque, constructed by Sultan Murat II in

1436, is also known as the Sultan Mosque. There is a 40m tall clock tower from the 16th century in the mosque's garden (Photo 9). Near Sultan Murat Mosque is the one of most important works of Islamic architecture; Gazi Isa Bey Mosque, constructed in 1475. Murat Pasha Mosque can be found near the Skopje Bazaar (Markoski, 2013: 70, 71; Macedonia Guide). It is believed that many saints lived in and have their tombs in Skopje. The tombs of Yiğit Pasha Bey, who conquered Skopje and Gazi Baba can be found in Skopje. One of the municipalities in Skopje is called Gazi Baba.

Inns

Throughout history, Skopje has been a city of inns, visited by local and foreign merchants. In the historic marketplace you can find the Kurşunlu Inn (Photo 7), the Kapan Inn and the Sulu Inn, all constructed by the Ottomans. The top of the Kurşunlu Inn, constructed in the 16th century, is covered in many small lead domes. The Inn used to be a place where wares were stored and merchants were housed. Today it has been turned into a museum where archeological, ethnological, historical and artistic works are displayed. The Sulu Inn was built in the 15th century by Ishak Bey and the Kapan Inn was built in the 15th century by Isa Bey, the son of Ishak Bey (Markoski, 2013:52, 53). The two-storey Sulu Inn was reconstructed after its collapse in the 1963 earthquake. Today the Sulu Inn houses the Skopje Old Bazaar Museum, where artifacts relating to archeology, history, ethnology and art are put on display.

Photo 6: The Old Bazaar



Photo 7: Kurşunlu Inn (right) at The Old Bazaar and the Murat Pasha Mosque



Photo 8: Mustafa Pasha Mosque



Photo 9: View from the Skopje Castle, Murat Pasha Mosque in the front; Sultan Murat Mosque and the Clock Tower in the Background



Baths/Hammams

In the Old Bazaar, you can find the historic Davutpaşa Bath (Photo 10) and the Çifte Bath. Constructed in the second half of the 15th century by Rumelia Vizier Davutpaşa, the Davutpaşa Bath is located at the entrance to the Old Bazaar next to the Stone Bridge and it is one of the most impressive works of Islamic architecture. The bath has been used as a gallery since its restoration in 1948. The Çifte Bath, constructed in the middle of the 15th century by Isa Bey had been used as a warehouse after the Ottoman era ended. In 2002 it was converted into a national gallery (Markoski, 2013:54).

Churches

You can find a spectacular mosque in almost every district in Skopje. St. Spas Church, constructed in the 17th century and located in the historic marketplace by the Skopje Castle, is one the most important religious buildings in the city (Markoski et. al., 2013:97). The church is famous for its iconography (Pavlovski-Pavlovski, 2005:41). St. Dimitrija Church, constructed in the 13th century, can be found near the Stone Bridge on the left side of the River Vardar (Macedonia, 2011:54). St. Pantelejmon Monastery, located on the Vodno Mountain near the Gorno Nerezi village, was constructed around 1164 and holds some of the most famous frescoes in the country and Europe (Markoski et. al., 2013:103). St. Kliment Ohridski Church, constructed in 1990, is visited by an influx of tourists, both local and foreign (Photo 11).

Photo 10: Davutpaşa Bath

Macedonia Square, Macedonia Boulevard, Museums and City Park

Macedonia Square (Photo 12), the most famous square of Skopje, is located next to the Stone Bridge. The square is decorated with sculptures and monuments. There are very important administrative, cultural, commercial and financial buildings around the square. The central bank, post office, various public buildings, shopping malls, hotels, restaurants, cafes and places of entertainment can be found here (Markoski et al., 2013: 85, Macedonia, 2011: 31). In the square, next to the Stone Bridge, there are the statues of Alexander the Great, the Cyrillic and Methodist brothers who invented the Cyrillic alphabet and their students, St. Kliment and St. Naum Ohridski.

Skopje's best-known street (Photo 13) is the Macedonia Boulevard, which lies between the City Museum and City Square. Along the boulevard, there are modern sculptures and monuments, as well as cafes and restaurants. At the end of the boulevard, you can pass to Old Bazaar to Macedonia Square via the Stone Bridge (Macedonia, 2011: 33).

The clock on the exterior of the historic railway station building, where the city museum exhibits the artistic, historical, ethnographic and archaeological artifacts, had stopped at 5.17 at the time of the earthquake (Photo 13). The Macedonia Archeology and Ethnography Museum, built in 1924 can be found near the castle in the Old Bazaar. The museum offers several collections related to Macedonia's cultural and historical heritage from the prehistoric age to the present. The city also has the Jewish Holocaust Museum, the Museum of Modern Art, and the National Struggle Museum of Macedonia.

The City Park is located on the right side of the River Vardar in the center of Skopje. The foundations were laid by the Skopje Governor Hafez Mehmet

Pasha in the early 19th century. The park has a botanical garden, zoo and an amusement park, hiking trails, tennis courts and city stadium (Macedonia, 2011: 32).

Photo 11: St. Kliment Ohridski Church



Photo 12: View of Macedonia Square from the Castle



Photo 13: Skopje City Museum and Earthquake Clock



Mother Teresa Memorial House and Monument

Skopje is the birthplace of Mother Teresa, who received the Nobel Peace Prize in 1979, Mother Teresa (1910-1997) Memorial House and Monument (Photo 14) is located on Macedonia Street in Skopje city center. Mother Teresa Memorial House was opened to visitors in 2009. There is a small Catholic chapel inside.

Photo 14: Mother Teresa Memorial House



CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

Skopje, the capital of North Macedonia, has enriched its historical and cultural heritage under the influence of various civilizations. The city of Skopje, which has ethnic diversity and blended with different beliefs and cultures, remained under Ottoman rule for 5 centuries. Turkish people from Anatolia were moved to the city, but the ratio of Turks in the total population decreased to 2% with the return of Turks to Anatolia over time. Skopje was decorated with outstanding works in Turkish-Islamic architecture during the period of Turkish domination.

After the lakes region, Skopje is the capital of North Macedonia attracts the highest number of tourists. Skopje has natural, historical and cultural touristic attractions. The most important natural attraction is the Matka Canyon. The River Vardar separates the modern and historical part of Skopje from each other, while the historical Fatih Sultan Mehmed stone bridge connects these two sections that possess cultural differences. Roads, bridges, mosques, baths, inns and mansions were built in and around the Old Bazaar of Skopje during the Ottoman period. Skopje Castle, built 15 centuries ago, and Vodno Mountain, which overlooks the city view with the Millennium Cross, are among the important places to visit. The Old Bazaar is one of the areas where the Ottoman traces are the strongest in the Balkans along with the Historical Bazaar of Sarajevo. The most popular historical places in The Old Bazaar are Mustafa Pasha Mosque, Kurşunlu Inn and Davutpasa Bath. There are many historical churches and monasteries in the city and its immediate vicinity. Equipped with sculptures of important figures of Macedonian history, Macedonia Square and Macedonia Boulevard are the primary touristic routes of the city.

The main suggestions for the development of tourism potential in Skopje, which has a strong tourism potential with its natural, historical and cultural attractions is to promote the touristic resources of the city, to take necessary precautions to ensure the protection of the relics of the most important buildings in Skopje located in the first degree seismic zone and to protect ancient relics.

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