

TOURISM POTENTIAL OF THE WESTERN SERBIAN LAKES

Jelena Basarić¹, Institute of Architecture and Urban & Spatial Planning of Serbia, Belgrade, Serbia
Olivera Radoičić, Institute of Architecture and Urban & Spatial Planning of Serbia, Belgrade, Serbia

Western Serbia boasts a hilly landscape and rich natural and cultural heritage, enriched by its hydrographic network of rivers and artificial lakes. While the lakes are mainly used as water management facilities, recently their coastal areas have been improved to promote tourism, turning the lakes into tourist attractions. Their tourist valorisation is therefore essential for water-based tourism development and its integration with other forms of tourism. This paper analyzes the current state, development opportunities, and preservation of the observed area through planning documents and legislation. Spatial Plans in Serbia have a key role as the mechanism for the improvement and protection of the lakes. They contribute to the preservation of natural resources while creating added value through tourism. The emphasis of this paper is on a detailed review of the spatial plans aimed at preserving and protecting the lakes' potential, identifying, and minimizing negative impacts on aquatic ecosystems, as well as encouraging the development of activities compatible with natural resources and goods. The biggest challenge is planning and developing tourism within protected areas. While stimulating the economy and benefiting the local communities, dense tourism could also harm ecosystems and the spatial balance. Improving the coastal areas of lakes and developing tourist infrastructure can significantly increase attractiveness, but it is vital to simultaneously preserve natural resources. Balancing economic development with the protection of natural values to ensure their long-term sustainability is both a challenge and a necessity. Planning tourism development and involving the local population in it can be important steps in that direction.

Key words: lakes, tourism potentials, development, improvement, preservation.

INTRODUCTION

In recent decades, tourism has become one of the main drivers of economic development in many countries, including Serbia. Its importance stems from several key aspects. From an economic perspective, tourism generates significant financial income, creating new jobs in various sectors (hospitality, transport, services, etc.). The growing interest in tourism stimulates investments in infrastructure, including hotels, restaurants, and transportation networks, thereby enhancing the living standards of the local population. When it comes to culture and identity, tourism helps preserve and promote local culture, traditions, and both natural and cultural heritage, thus strengthening the community identity. In terms of sustainable development, with proper management, tourism can be sustainable, allowing the use of natural resources without overexploitation, thus preserving

ecosystems and biodiversity. Tourism development can contribute to the growth of less-developed areas by stirring economic activity and attracting more visitors to rural and less urbanised regions. Nevertheless, tourism can also give rise to challenges, e.g. overcrowding, pollution and a decline in the authenticity of local communities. Therefore, it is crucial to develop strategies that will enable the sustainable development of tourism, balancing economic benefits with the preservation of local culture and the environment.

Western Serbia, the case study in this research, is a region with exceptional potential for tourism development thanks to its rich natural resources, cultural and historical heritage, and traditions. It is one of the four main tourism clusters in Serbia (Službeni glasnik RS, 98/2016). Parts of the case study area also belong to the destinations Drina-Tara-Zlatibor and Zlatibor-Pešter, which are a primary tourist destination with a significant share of the year-round offer (Službeni glasnik RS, 88/2010).

¹ Bulevar kralja Aleksandra 73/II, 11000 Belgrade, Serbia
jelenab@iaus.ac.rs

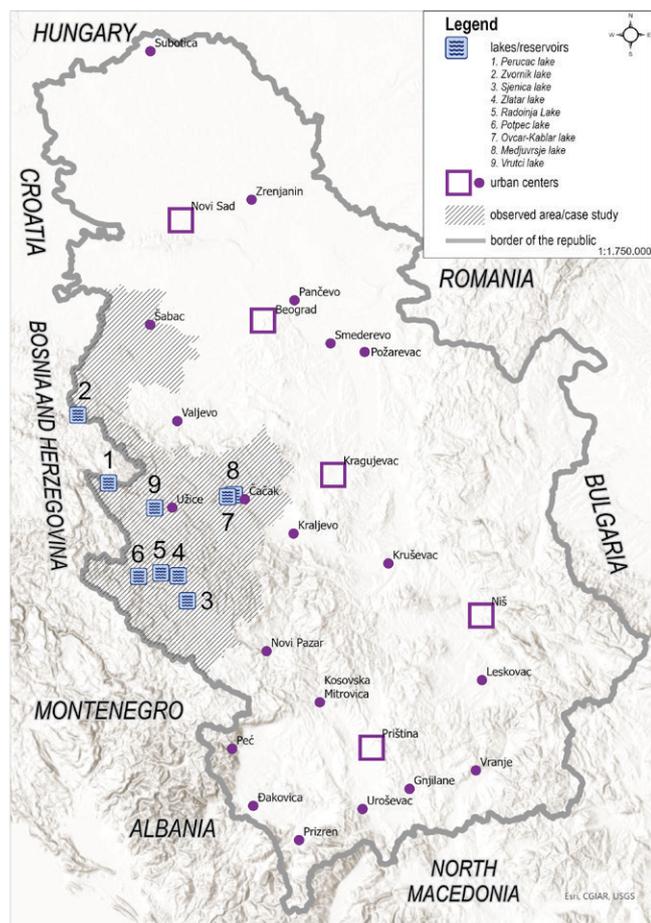


Figure 1. Position of the observed area (parts of the Mačvanska, Moravička and Zlatiborska oblast)
(Source: Authors, ESRI, CGIAR, USGS)

This paper will present the opportunities and challenges for enhancing tourism development in relation to artificial lakes, focusing on planning documents, strategies, and legislature that could contribute to attracting more visitors. By analysing the current state of geographic and socio-economic characteristics, key elements of tourism development at artificial lakes include: **natural assets** (artificial lakes are surrounded by mountains and greenery, and such landscapes are especially attractive and interesting to tourists); **water-based activities** (tourists can enjoy boating, sailing, fishing, swimming, and water sports, which increase the appeal of these locations); **hospitality and infrastructure** (the development of accommodation facilities, restaurants, and other tourist services is essential for attracting visitors, as are investments in infrastructure such as roads, parking areas, recreational facilities, etc.); **ecology and sustainability** (it is important to develop tourism in a way that does not harm natural resources, but preserves the environment and promotes eco-tourism, which attracts many visitors); **cultural and local content** (in addition to natural attractions, it is important to promote local culture, traditions, and gastronomy, which enrich the tourist experience); and **marketing and promotion** (effective marketing, including social media and travel agencies, which can help attract visitors).

In terms of utilisation, artificial lakes are currently underused compared to other forms of tourism in Serbia.

This is particularly significant given that some lakes are located near major urban areas, roads, and cultural and historical sites. Although they differ in size, climate and hydrographic features, location, and accessibility, artificial lakes can support transit, event-based, recreational, excursion, weekend, eco-, and ethno-tourism. In addition to their primary functions (such as power production, water supply, irrigation, etc.), artificial lakes enhance not only the coastal zones but also significantly larger areas in their hinterlands. As such, they can be considered to have priority tourism potential, especially given that Serbia has no access to the sea. Lake complexes, together with other natural and cultural values in their surroundings, are of importance in the development and improvement of tourism at both local and regional levels.

Tourism could significantly influence the local communities through economic development with new employment and a local economy boost (Đurašević, 2014), cultural heritage preservation, infrastructure development caused by increased interest in tourism, ecology and sustainability, education and awareness.

Several studies have shown that local communities are the main drivers and stakeholders of tourism development, and that local populations mostly have a positive attitude towards tourism development (Demirović *et al.*, 2019; Surla *et al.*, 2024; Surla *et al.*, 2025).

DESCRIPTION OF THE CASE STUDY

The Drina lakes

The dam of the Perućac Lake in Bajina Bašta, which is 461 m long and 93 m high, is located near the strong karst spring of Perućac. The artificial lake formed here is 50 km long, and a maximum of 70 m deep, with a width that ranges from 80 m to 500 m, and an area of 12.4 km². The lake accumulates 340x10⁶ m³ of water. Monthly water temperatures go up to 22°C, indicating that swimming is possible during the summer months. The lake has a greenish colour, with visibility that extends to a depth of up to 5 m (Stanković, 2005; RZS, 2025b).

Zvornik Lake was established in the mid-1950s. The dam is 166 m long and 42 m high. The lake can hold 89x10⁶ m³ of water. It is 25 km long, with a maximum width of 5.7 km, an area of 8.1 km² and a maximum water depth of 28 m. The average monthly water temperature in July and August exceeds 18°C, enabling water sports. Zvornik Lake has a dark green colour, with maximum water clarity reaching 4.5 m (Stanković, 2005; RZS, 2025b).

The Uvac and the Lim lakes

Sjenica Lake was formed on the river Uvac. It is 25 km long. The reservoir accumulates 212x10⁶ m³ of water, and the dam is 160 m long. The area of the lake is 5 km², with a maximum depth of 35 m. The lake's water is green in colour, with visibility reaching depths of up to 7 m (Stanković, 2005; RZS, 2025b).

Zlatar Lake is located about 50 km upstream from the confluence of the Uvac and Lim rivers. The dam is 83 m high and 1,264 m long with an area of 7.2 km² and a depth

of up to 75 m. The lake holds $250 \times 10^6 \text{ m}^3$ of water. During July and August, water temperatures (around 21°C) and air temperatures are the most suitable for swimming and water sports (Stanković, 2005; RZS, 2025b).

At the lowest point of the Uvac River, Radoinja Lake was formed. The dam of the lake is 40 m high and 150 m long. It is one of the smaller artificial lakes in Serbia, with an area of 1.8 km^2 , a capacity of $4 \times 10^6 \text{ m}^3$ of water, and a maximum depth of 30 m. Due to the inflow of large amounts of water from Zlatar Lake, which does not stay in its reservoir for long, the lower water temperature limits bathing tourism (Stanković, 2005; Rezervat Uvac d.o.o., 2025).

Potpeć Lake is located on the Lim. The Potpeć reservoir dam is 215 m long and 46 m high. The area of the artificial lake is 7 km^2 . It has an elongated shape due to the gorge-like structure of the Lim valley. The lake's maximum depth does not exceed 40 m, and the reservoir holds around $44 \times 10^6 \text{ m}^3$ of water (Stanković, 2005; RZS, 2025b).

The Zapadna Morava lakes

Ovčar–Kabljar Lake is located upstream from the railway bridge on the Čačak–Užice line. The dam is 45 m long and 12 m high. Nowadays the lake is 2 km long and 30–60 m wide, with an area of 0.72 km^2 while the reservoir has a capacity of approximately $3 \times 10^6 \text{ m}^3$ of water (usable $1.1 \times 10^6 \text{ m}^3$). The lake is subject to heavy sedimentation due to transported deposits, so the maximum depth is reduced to 2 m instead of 7 m. Because of these characteristics, Ovčar–Kabljar Lake is limited in terms of water-based tourism and sport fishing (Stanković, 2005; Službeni glasnik RS, br. 46/2019).

Međuvršje Lake is the largest reservoir on the Zapadna Morava River. The lake is 11 km long and 30–60 m wide, with an area of 1.7 km^2 , a capacity of $18.5 \times 10^6 \text{ m}^3$ of water (usable $11.1 \times 10^6 \text{ m}^3$) and a maximum depth reduced to 12–15 m instead of 23 m. The lake is located in the Ovčar–Kabljar gorge, whose shoreline is home to numerous protected monasteries, as well as Ovčar Spa, known for its thermal mineral water (Stanković, 2005).

Vrutci Lake, along with its dam, located on the Đetinja River, is a source branch of the Zapadna Morava, near the city of Užice. The dam is 77 m high and 241 m long, allowing the accumulation of $54 \times 10^6 \text{ m}^3$ of water. The lake extends along the Đetinja river valley for a length of about 7.3 km while the area of the reservoir at the normal backwater level is about 1.9 km^2 . Annual water level fluctuations range mainly up to 10 m, rarely 15 m or more, with a minimum water level during winter (Stanković, 2005; Službeni glasnik RS, br. 91/2018).

OVERVIEW OF TOURIST TRENDS

The reservoirs belong to the municipalities of Bajina Bašta, Mali Zvornik, Sjenica, Nova Varoš, and Priboj, and the cities of Čačak and Užice.

In 2022 and 2023, Bajina Bašta recorded the highest number of visitors among the listed municipalities, with about 2% of both domestic and foreign visitors' arrivals and an equivalent share of the total overnight stays in Serbia.

Table 1. Tourist visits and overnight stays in 2021–2024
(Source: RZS, 2023; 2024; 2025a)

Reservoir	City/municipality	Year: 2022					
		2021	2022	2023	2024	2025a	2026a
Bajina Bašta	Bajina Bašta	85,018	77,592	7,426	312,804	294,096	18,708
Zvornik	Mali Zvornik	2,059	1,702	357	6,075	5,216	859
Sjenica	Sjenica	2,927	1,627	1,300	7,490	4,184	3,306
Zlatar	Nova Varoš	22,176	20,694	1,482	89,431	86,762	2,669
Radoinja							
Potpeć	Priboj	7,886	6,344	1,542	46,857	40,892	5,965
Ovčar–Kabljar	Čačak	54,716	39,054	15,662	217,471	177,887	39,584
Međuvršje							
Vrutci	Užice	38,658	23,558	15,100	80,495	56,380	24,115
The Republic of Serbia		3,869,235	2,096,472	1,772,763	12,245,613	7,306,219	4,939,394
Reservoir	City/municipality	Year: 2023					
		2021	2022	2023	2024	2025a	2026a
Bajina Bašta	Bajina Bašta	76,217	67,881	8,336	281,362	261,823	19,539
Zvornik	Mali Zvornik	2,431	1,900	531	5,942	5,164	778
Sjenica	Sjenica	8,109	4,373	3,736	17,830	10,852	6,978
Zlatar	Nova Varoš	23,314	20,809	2,505	88,628	83,801	4,827
Radoinja							
Potpeć	Priboj	8,948	6,390	2,558	40,141	31,002	9,139
Ovčar–Kabljar	Čačak	53,298	34,482	18,816	185,344	139,393	45,951
Međuvršje							
Vrutci	Užice	47,259	29,190	18,069	101,374	73,041	28,333
The Republic of Serbia		4,192,797	2,058,492	2,134,305	12,440,935	6,858,331	5,582,604

Reservoir	City/municipality	Year: 2024					
Bajina Bašta	Bajina Bašta	55,321	49,157	6,164	200,406	182,639	17,767
Zvornik	Mali Zvornik	2,149	1,715	434	5,291	4,410	881
Sjenica	Sjenica	10,450	5,330	5,120	19,671	11,627	8,044
Zlatar	Nova Varoš	17,981	16,227	1,754	65,819	61,913	3,906
Radoinja							
Potpeć	Priboj	8,782	5,285	3,497	38,842	27,294	11,548
Ovčar–Kablar	Čačak	48,569	30,934	22,045	295,557	235,372	60,185
Međuvršje							
Vrutci	Užice	67,614	46,064	21,550	159,038	123,840	35,198
The Republic of Serbia		4,432,751	2,048,016	2,384,735	12,662,151	6,564,402	6,097,749

Regarding the average length of stay per tourist in 2024, the highest result is recorded in Priboj, with 5.2 nights for domestic and 3.3 for foreign tourists, followed by Čačak and Nova Varoš, with an average of 3.9 and 3.8 nights for domestic and 2.5 and 2.2 overnight stays for foreign tourists, respectively. The lowest value is recorded in Sjenica, amounting to 2.2 nights for domestic and 1.6 nights for foreign visitors (RZS, 2025a) (Table 1). Based on the presented data, it can be concluded that these local self-governments show an exceptionally low level of visitation, although conditions exist to significantly increase the number of tourists and visits.

In the observed area in October 2025, according to tourism sector data, 23 tourist accommodation facilities are categorised, with a total of 2,016 beds (Ministarstvo turizma i omladine, Sektor za turizam, 2025):

- Bajina Bašta has five hotels (two rated 2* and 3*, and one rated 4*, with a total of 458 beds);
- Mali Zvornik has one 2* hotel and 52 beds;
- Nova Varoš has one motel (rated 1*) and one hotel (rated 3*), with a total of 70 beds);
- Priboj has one 4* hotel with 108 beds;
- Sjenica has two hotels (one rated 3* and one rated 4*, with a total of 319 beds);
- Užice has four hotels and one tourist settlement (one rated 2*, two rated 3*, and one rated 4*, with a total of 645 beds); and
- Čačak has seven hotels (three rated 3* and four rated 4*, with a total of 364 beds).

Tourism products are not sufficiently commercialised on the domestic, or especially on the international market. Adequate marketing, stimulated commercial tourism and recreational demand, as well as an increase in the competitiveness of different tourism types could influence tourism development. Domestic tourists are mostly oriented towards mountain, spa, excursion, cultural-event, and rural tourism. Foreign visitors are mostly individual guests whose primary motives for their arrival are events, specialised types of tourism, and business trips. They cannot be attracted only by promoting the potential of natural resources, mountains, rural surroundings, spa areas, rivers, and lakes, but rather primarily by improving the quality of the accommodation and year-round tourist and recreational offer in an area, combined with preserved nature, ethno- and cultural heritage, and organic food.

EXCERPTS FROM PLANNING DOCUMENTS

The spatial plan of the special purpose area (SPSPA) for the mentioned accumulations, aimed at the development, improvement, and protection of such areas was adopted. Each planning document analysed, elaborated, and prioritised further development and preservation from a particular aspect. The accumulation areas in the planning documents are recognised as tourism values with numerous contents and possibilities for the local and broader environment.

SPSPA Uvac Special Nature Reserve (Službeni glasnik RS, br. 83/2010)

The natural and anthropogenic resources analysed by this spatial plan are the basic development potentials for a specific tourist offer. Based on the valorisation of available tourism resources, the possibilities for the development of winter-ski tourism, transit, excursion, rural, and ecological tourism are recognised.

The development of tourism, as a significant economic branch in the future, should be based on the preservation of nature and respect for the local communities' interests. Ensuring the traffic accessibility and integration of the area's tourist offer with the offer of the surrounding areas (mountains Zlatibor, Tara, Golija and Kopaonik) is a necessity. With the aim of developing tourism in the area, the priority is to complete the public utility, tourist infrastructure, tourist offers and programs, to raise the service standards of tourist capacities, and to activate the local population in rural areas (Šećerov *et al.*, 2018).

The dominant tourist products and the mentioned types of tourism will be based on rich natural and anthropogenic resources and spatial values such as lakes and rivers. Accordingly, fishing, sports, recreational, and other types of water tourism will be improved on three lakes within the Special Nature Reserve, the planned accumulation on Ljudska River, the Uvac and Vapa rivers, and other hydrological features. The unique meanders of Uvac, Đalovića Gorge, and other gorges (of the River Mileševka etc.) contribute to the attractiveness of aquatic areas and the development of specific tourist activities (panoramic sightseeing, photography, observation of protected endangered species, study of geomorphological phenomena, etc.). The development of all tourist products will be adapted to the needs of tourists, enabling the combination

of multiple types of tourism. The integration of the area's tourist offer with those of neighbouring municipalities and tourist regions provides a basis for the development of diversified thematic itineraries.

SPSPA Bistrica reversible hydroelectric power plant and Potpeć hydroelectric power plant (HPP) system (Službeni glasnik RS, br. 86/2024)

According to the spatial plan, the tourism offer will be integrated, in particular regarding the development and equipping of villages, and the use of tourism amenities in connection with the immediate surroundings. Tourism will be an alternative activity and a form of compensation for the local population for various development restrictions imposed by the operating regimes of the Bistrica Reversible HPP and the Potpeć HPP system, as well as by nature protection measures. The areas around Potpeć and Radoinja reservoirs are planned as excursion and transit-oriented sports and recreational destinations, near the infrastructure corridors of main roads and the railway line.

The planned picnic area will cater to transit tourists, as well as local day-trippers from Priboj, Nova Varoš, Prijepolje, etc. In the wider mountain region, excursion and hiking trails for pedestrians and mountain bikers are planned, featuring viewpoints, rest areas, pavilions, and more.

The tourism development potential in the planning area will be based on a healthy environment, under the condition of more intensive and organised protection, presentation, and controlled use of natural values (mountain peaks, ridges and slopes with habitats in forests and pastures, river flows and canyons, etc.), providing the prerequisites for the development of eco, ethno, and hunting tourism, as well as organic food production, ethno-handicrafts, forest fruit gathering, and more.

There are opportunities to organise tourism content in rural zones aiming to enhance the overall quality of life in villages. The tourism offer will also be based on cultural and historical landmarks (cultural monuments, ethno-values of traditional villages, and numerous events supporting tourism), with more intensive and organised presentation and use, including the revival of neglected traditional crafts and more.

The characteristics of the Lim and Uvac rivers, in the most attractive parts of their courses, provide favourable conditions for the development of a wide range of tourism products and activities (rafting, hiking, extreme sports, and more).

SPSPA Ovčar-Kablar Gorge outstanding features landscape (Službeni glasnik RS, br. 46/2019)

The development of tourism and outdoor recreation will be based on organised tours and specialised tourist guides focused on biodiversity and geodiversity, as well as nature schools and the values of geo-heritage. A Nature and Geo-heritage Route will be established along existing marked hiking and cycling trails and viewpoints, which will need to be equipped with tourist signage, informational boards, and accompanying amenities. Tours of the protected area will be organised on foot, by bicycle, or by controlled off-road vehicles, with rest areas and accommodation provided in Ovčar Banja, mountain lodges, private family-run guesthouses, and rural lodgings in tourist villages.

Spa and wellness tourism will be developed in Ovčar Banja, with planned hotel and spa capacities, as well as recreational amenities. The kayak trail downstream from the Ovčar Banja HPP will be implemented exclusively in the so-called Old Riverbed, based on local planning documents. A prerequisite for its formation is the construction of a bridge in Ovčar Banja.

The aquatic zone will consist of lakes with all hydro-technical and hydro-energy structures, water sports and recreation areas, docks for boats supporting cultural and nature routes, birdwatching, and more. For local users, beaches and pontoons for mooring small boats are planned on Lake Međuvršje.

SPSPA Vrutci Reservoir catchment area (Službeni glasnik RS, br. 91/2018)

The tourism and recreational offer of the area is currently underdeveloped, disorganised, and not functionally connected with the surrounding areas. However, the area's diverse natural potential and favourable transportation and geographical position are development factors for tourism and recreation. It is part of a primary tourist destination where year-round tourism can be achieved.

The main tourist offer of the area will develop around Lake Vrutci and the Đetinja River, along with the tourism offer of the City of Užice. This will be connected to numerous tourism resources and natural and cultural assets within the basin and surrounding areas, including ethno-villages, Tara National Park, Mokra Gora Nature Park, the tourist attractions of Zlatibor, and others. The development of tourism will require the completion of tourist and recreational content and accommodation capacities, improved protection of the water source basin, better presentation and tourist interpretation of natural and cultural values, and improved transportation access to villages where rural tourism is emerging – combined with the recreational and tourism offer in the wider area.

The development of water-based, mountain, hunting, fishing, sports and recreational, ecological, and rural tourism is envisioned. The integrated tourism offer will be based on ethno-tradition, by means of authentic accommodation and the organisation of individual sports and recreational tourism activities, as well as the production and placement of traditional and ecologically high-quality food, traditional crafts, and more.

The Vrutci reservoir area is planned as an excursion and transit sports and recreational destination, located in immediate proximity to infrastructure corridors of main roads and railway lines. In the wider area excursion and hiking trails are planned for walkers, riders, and mountain bikers, featuring viewpoints, rest areas, and shelters.

Management plan for the Uvac Special Nature Reserve 2025-2034 (Rezervat Uvac d.o.o., 2025)

Within the protected natural area, there are a significant number of tourist sites that can attract a large number of visitors and keep them in the region or its individual parts. The accessibility of locations near the protected area is also important for planning the stay of tourists who wish to spend more time in the region.

Tourism, along with science and education, is considered one of the most important functions of the protected area and should be, from the perspective of economic objectives, a respectable or even primary activity for the local population. The need and opportunity for the construction of facilities, infrastructure and land arrangement, for the purposes of ecotourism and the presentation of speleological features for recreational and tourism purposes, is confirmed in the plan. Tourism in protected areas should be oriented toward sustainability in order to achieve the fundamental characteristics of ecotourism. Also, strengthening business connections between agriculture and complementary sectors aiming to enable the direct placement of agricultural products within the tourism offer (Bezbradica and Basarić, 2021), and encouraging the diversification of the rural economy through the development of supplementary activities, would improve both tourism development and the quality of life for the local population.

Spatial plan of the Mali Zvornik municipality (Službeni list opštine Mali Zvornik, br. 8/2012)

In the above spatial plan, tourism is defined as a sector to be encouraged, which would ensure an improved tourist offer (accommodation, hospitality services, etc.) that aligns with the concept of the future development of the Mali Zvornik area as a modern, small business and administrative local centre, with primarily local influence. At the same time, watercourses, the reservoir, villages, and agriculture can serve as motifs for tourism development, including transit tourism in areas along the transportation corridor.

For the development of tourism in this area, natural and anthropogenic values are of great importance, and the planned activities must be original and attractive, without negative impacts on natural resources. In accordance with the principles of sustainable development, the plan outlines strategic priorities for the development of rural, excursion-based, recreational, and educational tourism with research programs, as well as hunting, fishing, cultural-event, nautical, and spa tourism. Future development plans must consider tourists with a high level of environmental awareness, as the preservation of the natural environment is the dominant factor guiding and shaping tourism demand. Sustainable tourism relies on the responsibility of all participants in the tourism industry toward the natural environment.

Water management strategy for the territory of the Republic of Serbia until 2034 (Službeni glasnik RS, br. 3/2017)

In the first half of the 20th century, dams were primarily constructed for energy purposes, and later also for water supply needs. In the second half of the 20th century, during the phase of accelerated electrification, high dams were built and the first large reservoirs were created, with volumes exceeding $10 \times 10^6 \text{ m}^3$ (such as those on Lake Međuvršje and Lake Zvornik) (Table 2). Currently, there are 28 reservoirs in Serbia, each with a volume exceeding $10 \times 10^6 \text{ m}^3$. In parallel to the development of large reservoirs, some smaller reservoirs have also been built, serving various functions.

The construction of dams and the formation of reservoirs aim to regulate the water regime in each area, ensuring an adequate water supply for users, as well as to protect them from the threat of high floods, serving at the same time for environmental protection.

The multipurpose nature of reservoirs includes meeting other needs as well (sport, recreation, other tourism offers, etc.). As previously stated, a particularly important function of reservoirs has to be active flood protection, provision of additional usable water quantities, etc. One such benefit is sediment retention which, although detrimental due to the loss of reservoir capacity, is beneficial for the protection of downstream areas.

During the 20th century, water-based tourism and recreation expanded significantly in Serbia, with 57 public bathing and recreational sites on lakes, rivers, and reservoirs. Spa tourism became particularly prominent due to favorable natural conditions and established tradition, reaching its peak development in the second half of the century. In 1960, spas were legally recognized as natural health resorts, stimulating the development of accommodation facilities and modern spa and rehabilitation centers.

Serbia is rich in rivers where numerous water sports are practiced: sailing, kayaking, rowing, water skiing, and more. On the Drina, Uvac, and Lim, rafting is also available, and the Drina hosts an annual regatta.

Table 2. High dams on reservoirs exceeding ten million cubic metres
(Source: Službeni glasnik RS, br. 3/2017)

	Reservoir	Water course	Year of building	Dam type	Dam height (m)	Length (m)	Dam body volume (10^3 m^3)	Total reservoir volume (10^6 m^3)	Purpose
1	Međuvršje	Zapadna Morava	1953	G	31	190	38	18	E
2	Zvornik	Drina	1955	G	42	269	316	89	E
3	Bajina Bašta	Drina	1966	SG	90	461	995	340	E
4	Potpeć	Lim	1967	G	46	212	116	44	E
5	Uvac	Uvac	1979	R	110	307	2.500	213	E
6	Vrutci	Đetinja	1984	A	77	241	83	54	W

Primary purpose of the dam: W – drinking water supply; E – energy production

Dam type: R – rockfill dam; G – gravity dam; SG – semi-gravity (lightened gravity) dam; A – arch dam

TOURISM SIGNIFICANCE OF LAKES

Coastal areas are the most popular among tourists (Gladstone *et al.*, 2013). In the tourism literature, different concepts have been discussed, such as river, marine, coastal and more recently lake tourism (Hall and Härkönen, 2006a; Rodrigues *et al.*, 2015). According to Ramazanova *et al.* (2019), lakes are the major attraction for many tourist destinations like Balaton in Hungary, the Great Lakes in the USA, Lombardy's lakes in Northern Italy, the Finnish Lakeland, and the Lake District in the UK.

Natural and artificial lakes represent a significant tourist value that encourages the development of various tourism offers: sports, recreation, excursions and events, nautical tourism, fishing and so on. They are more attractive during the summer, and their value stems from their recreational function, the beauty of the landscape, interesting phenomena on the water and in the surroundings, as well as their recognition in the tourist market and the arrangement of the tourist and catering infrastructure (Šmelcerović, 2021).

Water-based or nautical tourism, provides a variety of organised, boats as well as sports and recreational facilities on the coast (Martínez Vázquez *et al.*, 2021; Spinelli and Benevolo, 2022; Baldassarre *et al.*, 2017; Wheaton, 2000).

Regardless of their size, lakes play a significant role in human activities, for example, as a water-supply, or for energy production, aquaculture, transportation or irrigation. The majority of human activities on lakes are directed towards development. Also, Brillo (2025) highlights 'lake tourism' as the key term in his work, mentioning its occasional appearance in the literature from the early 2000s onwards, but without proper definition of the concept itself. As an exception, Brillo (2025) cites the reference "Lake Tourism Systems", which refers not only to tourism on the lake but also in the surrounding area (Hall and Härkönen 2006a). Integrated territorial development of the larger lake regions in Europe can offer an attractive living environment, diverse leisure opportunities for tourism, agriculture, fisheries, etc., and closer contact with nature (Ratković and Vulević, 2025). Milovanović Pešić *et al.* (2023) and other authors emphasize the importance of aquatic ecosystems, biodiversity protection and lake tourism, with regard to socio-economic and cultural factors and sustainable water resource management, since the deterioration of water quality may negatively influence water-related tourism and recreation.

Lakes offer various opportunities that can be utilised, regardless of their location, formation, or ecosystem diversity (Newsome *et al.*, 2002). In a number of cases, lake surfaces should be carefully analysed both as habitats and as exploitable resources and assets. For example, water sports can negatively impact the aquatic ecosystem, which could reduce a lake's tourism attractiveness (Jennings, 2007). Until recently, lakes were considered as recreational areas associated primarily with rural settings. However, today many countries have natural or artificial lakes that offer recreation in or near cities (Hall and Härkönen, 2006a).

Climatic factors also influence the tourism significance of lakes (Lin and Matzarakis, 2008). The climate affects lake biodiversity and water temperature – a key factor for

swimming suitability. Climate also impacts the seasonality of tourist visits, with lakes in warmer climates being the most visited. Examples of such lakes in Central Europe are Lake Constance and Lake Maggiore, which are also popular recreation spots (Dávid and Baros, 2007; Dávid *et al.*, 2012). Areas around lakes often serve as cultural destinations as well. In some countries (such as Hungary, Turkey and Switzerland), lakes host music festivals. The physical and economic environment of lakes also influences the development of tourist infrastructure and superstructure on their coasts (Dredge, 2001).

Depending on tourist demand and preferences, lake destinations – if they make use of their available potential – can be marketed with abundant tourist content and can be ideal choices for fans of water sports (swimming, water skiing, etc.), birdwatchers, and those seeking special interest activities (kayaking, sailing, scuba diving, etc.).

In many parts of the world, lakes are central to sports, recreation, and tourism as sites for leisure activities. Lakes are also extensively used in tourism promotional campaigns, either to promote a destination or as attractive additions to other leisure activities (Hall and Härkönen, 2006a).

The economic and tourism value of lakes is difficult to define, as lake tourism encompasses both the lake itself and its surroundings. This type of tourism includes lakeshores and related facilities, infrastructure, and content within the local and wider environment that support the lake's role as a tourist destination. The ecological system that supports lake tourism is usually much larger and encompasses the entire lake basin (Lerner and Haber, 2001).

Lake tourism affects specific natural environments, which – due to their unique ecological characteristics – can be distinctive locations where the environment itself attracts certain activities and promotes the ecological values of the destination (Hall and Härkönen, 2006b).

Tourism based on natural resources is one of the pillars of the tourism industry and has significant economic value. Many countries consider lakes to be primary resources for developing tourism based on natural values. Any resource used for tourism purposes must possess either natural or constructed quality content, as well as public access (Middleton and Hawkins, 1998). To make lake destinations more appealing to a broader range of tourists, such sites must have adequate infrastructure (roads, trails, viewpoints, etc.). Proper infrastructure greatly improves tourist and hospitality services and supports the development of local businesses. As such, infrastructure is a key factor in destination development and in the growth of small tourism enterprises (Goeldner *et al.*, 2000; Lerner and Haber, 2001).

In Serbia, lakes and reservoirs are given less attention as tourist assets compared to mountain, rural, spa, and urban tourism. Their significance and potential have not been seriously assessed, nor has the benefit of developing and improving this type of tourism been thoroughly explored. Additionally, legislation barely addresses recreational activities such as boating on reservoirs, underwater fishing, and activities in protected areas.

The Lithuanian region of Eastern Aukštaitija is well known for its numerous lakes with aesthetic significance, offering unique experiences for visitors (Lithuania Travel, 2025).

This region is considered to be one of the most promising areas in Lithuania for tourism development (Gražulis and Narkūnienė, 2017). The tourism development in this region is based on natural resources, unique culture, protected areas, tourist attractions, recreational activities, etc., and it “depends on tourism planning and management, skills of human resources, public-private sector cooperation, legal base, project development and implementation, tourism development strategy, tourism research” (Gražulis and Narkūnienė, 2017, p. 24). Important factors for the development of lake tourism are the lake’s area, landscape structure and accessibility by roads (Daubarienė, 2018). Some good examples of a developed lake-based tourist destination with a compact cluster of tourism activities which includes several interconnected lakes offering the opportunity to discover all of them in a kayak, as well as a different kind of activities like swimming, glamping, examining local natural and cultural landmarks or cuisine, fishing etc., are located in this region. The area around the lakes is set aside for public recreation and is accessible for all forms of exploration and leisure (Lithuanian State Department of Tourism under the Ministry of Economy: European Commission, 2010).

In order to develop and improve this kind of tourism, at the same time relying on the resources and potentials of the lakes, rivers, forests, mountains, cultural heritage, kind people, etc., the municipalities in Western Serbia should focus on the development of: diverse services, all-season tourism, infra and superstructure, trained staff, the local population’s awareness on sustainability, public-private partnerships, and the adoption of relevant strategic documents that should be based on detailed research in the field of tourism (Gražulis and Narkūnienė, 2017; Pantić and Milijić, 2021).

In the context of the so-called lake regions, ESPON developed a framework concept that enables more integrated development in such regions. The program aims to raise the awareness and visibility of regions with lakes and to facilitate cooperation between local and regional stakeholders. It includes several development policy options related to the following indicators: regional integration; integration of land and lakes; cross-sectoral cooperation; vertical integration (the role of lakes in overarching policies); and the European integration of multiple lake-rich regions. The contribution of lakes to regional development is determined by the totality of their benefits, as well as by residents’ perceptions of lakes as valuable resources. The areas around large lakes are functional, with numerous resources such as preserved ecosystems, landscapes, cultural and historical heritage, and local identity, which have contributed to the development and promotion of tourism (ESPON, 2022).

CONCLUSIONS

The significance and attractiveness of tourism on lakes and reservoirs in Serbia would be at a higher level if these destinations were, in addition to spatial plans, also included in action plans. The development of an action plan would be implemented by local self-governments and relevant tourism development agencies. Necessary support in the preparation of the action plan could be provided, for

example, by regional development agencies and local tourism organisations.

Lake-based tourism in Serbia, as well as the existing structure and quality of accompanying services, still lags behind similar tourism products offered by more developed destinations on domestic and international markets. The main qualitative characteristics of lake tourism products should be based on ecotourism, with a structurally diverse, flexible, dynamic, complementary, and functionally integrated role. Such an approach would enable a sustainability concept, making the area economically more competitive and functionally more capable of fulfilling various tourist needs.

In a competitive tourism market, it is desirable to develop economic and social opportunities through the promotion of tourism content and products. This would be achieved through adequate stimulation of tourism development and sustained efforts in preserving and improving the natural and social environment. When defining the conditions for the development of tourism, it is necessary to align the possibilities of attracting domestic and foreign tourists with the diverse and rich potential offered by lake and reservoir environments. A tourist destination must be carefully analysed with all of its advantages and limitations so that within it, the selection and curation of tourism content for utilisation can be carried out. The development of tourism also requires the definition of tourism activities and the proper arrangement of tourist spaces. The most important considerations include: setting criteria for long-term tourism development; analysing and evaluating the condition of the potentials and limitations of the tourism supply (natural and man-made conditions); analysing and evaluating the state and trends of the tourism demand; understanding the geopolitical and socio-economic development context; addressing issues of tourism infrastructure and superstructure; the dependence of tourism development on complementary activities and services; and sustainable tourism development in accordance with environmental protection requirements and the preservation of natural and cultural values.

An increased level of tourism development and the exchange of tourism offers is possible through coordination and regional, inter-municipal, or cross-border cooperation. From a tourism perspective, development should focus on improving the potential for various forms of tourism; establishing a tourist information centre; building accommodation facilities and improving the quality of accommodation; promoting and branding lake tourism; creating tourism products; drafting strategic plans for the most prevalent types of tourism; networking of all tourism stakeholders; and continuous efforts in the education and training of personnel from various fields of tourism.

The mentioned reservoirs, with their favourable geographic locations, and natural and man-made values, provide opportunities for water, mountain, hunting, fishing, sports and recreational, ecological, rural, and other forms of tourism. Furthermore, their natural features and a healthy environment create preconditions for year-round tourism development. The operational objectives for the development and enhancement of tourism should be based

on the development of an integrated tourism offer in the area, aligned with protection regimes and measures for water quality, natural and cultural values, and the creation of conditions to meet year-round, primarily day-trip demand from the urban populations of nearby major cities and municipal centres, with specialised sports and recreational activities and content offerings.

In order to define the real market and the needs of potential tourists, the following research should be conducted in the future in the case study area:

- demand for tourist products such as preserved nature, cultural and historical monuments, etc.;
- categories of tourists who consider lake tourism attractive (age, educational, economic, social, etc.);
- awareness of the local population on tourism relevance for the economic development of the area;
- potential and limitations of the tourist offer on the lakes;
- traffic accessibility to the lakes; and
- equipment with superstructure in the surroundings of the lakes.

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ORCID

Jelena Basarić  <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4809-2138>

Olivera Radoičić  <https://orcid.org/0009-0002-5091-580X>

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