

BETWEEN TRADITION AND TOURISM: THE ROLE OF BJELAŠNICA'S CULTURAL HERITAGE IN SHAPING THE TOURISM SUPPLY

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Abstract: Bosnian-Herzegovinian mountains are primarily recognized for winter mountain tourism, yet selective forms such as eco and rural tourism are becoming increasingly significant, especially during the summer season, with local communities playing a key role in their development. In addition to the natural advantages of the mountain area, creating a distinctive and competitive tourism product requires consideration of the anthropogenic segment of the tourism attraction base – the specific architectural and cultural heritage, as well as traditional manifestations that shape the identity of the area.

This paper focuses on Bjelašnica and Igman as a mountain area where cultural-historical heritage and traditional ways of life represent a significant but insufficiently valorized potential for sustainable tourism. Special attention is given to the elements of local culture and everyday life (traditional costumes, gastronomy, stories, legends, and customs of the local community), which are still rarely used for tourism promotion and development.

Within the area of Bjelašnica and Igman, six sites originating from different historical periods have been identified, among which the necropolis with stećci at Dolovi, inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List, stands out. Numerous local legends and traditional costumes, particularly in the Bjelašnica villages, form an important part of the region's identity. To enable their inclusion in the tourism supply, segments of the anthropogenic attraction base that are accessible and possess aesthetic and/or curiosity value have been analyzed and assessed for tourism valorization. The main obstacles to the more intensive development of rural and cultural tourism include weak promotion, lack of cooperation between households and destinations, insufficient knowledge of foreign languages, and limited investments.

Keywords: cultural heritage, Bjelašnica, rural tourism, tourism supply

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INTRODUCTION

Among economic activities, tourism stands out for its complex interconnection with natural and cultural heritage (Coccossis, 2016), with cultural heritage having long represented a key attraction factor (Conti, 2015) and one of the most widespread resources in global tourism (Timothy, 2014). Tourism and culture are closely linked due to the growing interest in culture as a bearer of local identity in the context of globalization, the intensive development of tourism, and the increased accessibility of cultural assets and experiences (World Tourism Organization, 2018).

Cultural tourism refers to tourism activities in which visitors consume various forms of culture. It includes acquiring knowledge and exploring cultural heritage through visits to monuments, sites, museums, theatres, cultural events, and performing arts, as well as experiencing everyday lifestyles, gastronomy, traditions, and customs (Richards, 2018; Panzera et al., 2021). Tangible elements, such as monuments, buildings, and archaeological sites, and intangible assets, including oral traditions, customs, social practices, rituals, and knowledge and skills transmitted from generation to generation (UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2009), are perceived in tourism as interconnected and mutually complementary (Esfehni, Albrecht, 2019). These heritage elements can stimulate the economy at the local, regional, and national levels and support the development of tourism and cities (Fatorić, Egberts, 2020; Lopes, Simões, 2020; Halkos et al., 2024).

Focusing on culture as an attraction of tourist interest enables the strengthening of the relationship between cultural heritage and tourism through processes of heritage conservation, the stimulation of economic growth, the improvement of tourism infrastructure, and the generation of social benefits for local communities (Cano et al., 2013; Álvarez-García et al., 2019). Tourist interest can contribute to the preservation of arts, crafts, dances, rituals, and legends that younger generations practice less frequently (World Tourism Organization, 2001). Given the great potential of cultural heritage and the fact that cultural tourism represents one of the fastest-growing segments of the tourism market (Zeppel, Hall, 1991), many destinations worldwide have launched initiatives to develop and support this field as an important component of their service economies (Timothy, 2014). Four out of ten tourists choose their travel destination based on its cultural offer (Panzera et al., 2021).

Tourist travel to mountain areas shows a continuous growth trend, as an increasing number of tourists are attracted by unspoiled natural environments, clean air, as well as authentic local traditions and culture. These travel motivations are increasingly recognized as key factors of tourism demand in contemporary mountain destinations.

The aim of this research is to identify and typologically inventory the social segment of the attraction base of the Bjelašnica and Igman mountain area, with particular emphasis on determining the most significant, that is, the most valuable cultural and

historical monuments, events, and elements of the culture of life and work. Furthermore, their role and importance in the formation and enhancement of the tourism offer of this mountain area are analyzed

STUDY AREA

The mountainous area of Bjelašnica and Igman is located in the zone of the central Dinarides, that is, in the western part of the Mediterranean zone of young fold mountains. From the lowlands of the Sarajevsko polje, the northeastern, “main” part of Bjelašnica stands out clearly, although this extensive mountain massif extends continuously toward the southwest as far as Prenj, from which it is separated by the Neretva River valley (Popović, 1935).

The study area comprises two morphological units – Igman (Crni Vrh, 1,504 m) and Bjelašnica (Zvezdarnica Peak, 2,066 m above sea level) – which are interconnected by the morphodepressions of Malo and Veliko Polje, situated at elevations between approximately 1,150 and 1,300 m. According to Lepirica (2013), Igman represents a foothill step of the high-mountain massif of Bjelašnica. The northern boundary of Bjelašnica and Igman is formed by the course of the Zujevina River. On the northwestern side, the area is connected via the Ivan Saddle to Mount Bitovnja, while to the south and southeast it continues toward Visočica and Treskavica. It is partially separated from Visočica and Treskavica by the canyon of the Rakitnica River, while the western and southwestern boundaries are defined by the Neretva River valley (Fig. 1).

The highest peak of the mountain is known by several names: Bjelašnica, Zvezdarnica, and Opservatorija, after the meteorological station located at this site. Igman extends parallel to the main ridge of Bjelašnica in a southeast–northwest direction, and its plateau lies at elevations between 1,100 and 1,300 m (Mihić, 1984).

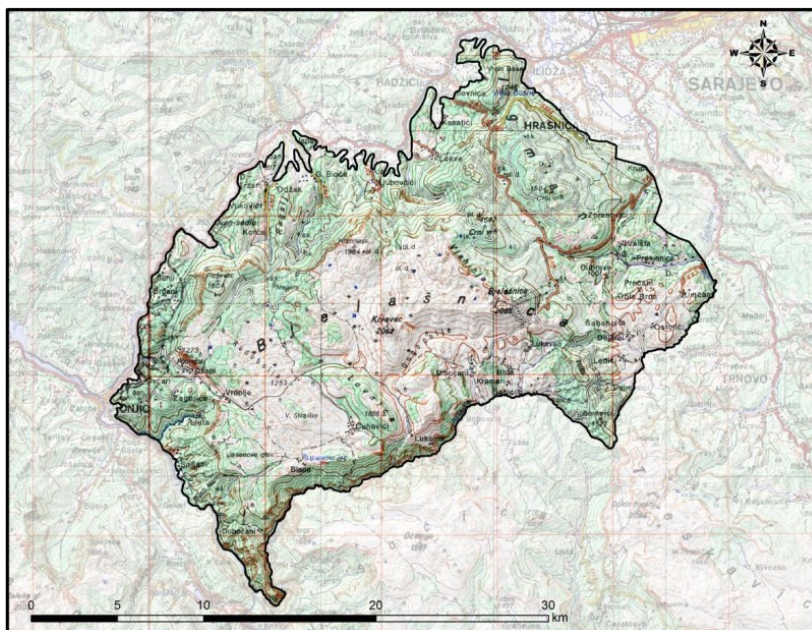


Fig. 1. Geographical position of the mountain area of Bjelašnica and Igman

CULTURAL-HISTORICAL HERITAGE OF BJELAŠNICA

In addition to the natural advantages of the mountain area, in order to support tourism development and create a distinctive and recognizable tourism product, it is necessary to analyze the valuable anthropogenic segment of the tourism attraction base, namely the specific architectural and cultural heritage, as well as events that shape the identity of the studied area. Particular attention should also be paid to the culture of everyday life and work of the local population (traditional costumes, gastronomy, stories, legends, and customs), which, unfortunately, is used to a very limited extent for the promotion and development of tourism in the analyzed mountain areas.

Anthropogenic elements of cultural heritage play a significant role in preserving local identity and represent an important potential for the development of selective forms of tourism, especially rural and cultural tourism. Intangible aspects of cultural heritage and traditional ways of life stand out in particular as resources with strong symbolic and interpretative value, but also as elements that remain insufficiently valorized within the contemporary tourism offer of mountain areas.

Based on the available literature, as well as decisions of the Commission to Preserve National Monuments of Bosnia and Herzegovina relating to the analyzed case studies, the monumental heritage of the Bjelašnica mountain area has been identified. Its classification was carried out in accordance with the documents of the aforementioned

state Commission, as well as relevant spatial planning documentation addressing the studied mountain areas (Tab. 1).

Table 1 clearly indicates that the studied mountain area is characterized by a rich cultural heritage originating from different historical periods. However, despite their cultural and historical value and the fact that they hold the status of legally protected national monuments, field research has revealed that some sites are neglected and damaged. As such, they are unable to fully meet the requirements of the contemporary tourism offer or to be adequately represented in the tourism promotion of this area.

Tab. 1. National monuments in mountain area of Bjelašnica and Igman

National monument	Municipality/City
Group of Monuments Dedicated to the Igman March	Trnovo, FBiH
Lukomir Village (Gornji Lukomir)	Konjic, FBiH
Umoljani Mosque	Trnovo, FBiH
Necropolis of Stećci (Medieval Tombstones) and Remains of a Medieval Structure at Dolovi, Umoljani Village	Trnovo, FBiH
Necropolis of Stećci at Han Site, Šabići	Trnovo, FBiH
Necropolis of Stećci at Kapova Selišta (Borija), Ledići Nekropola sa stećcima na lokalitetu Kapova selišta (Borija) u Ledićima	Trnovo, FBiH
Necropolis of Stećci at Ravnice, Dubočani	Konjic, FBiH
Necropolis of Stećci (Kaursko Cemetery), with Old Nišans and Remains of Walls, Prečani	Trnovo, FBiH
Necropolis of Stećci at Zlatarić, Ledići	Trnovo, FBiH
Necropolis with Stećci and Nišans, Blace Settlement	Konjic, FBiH

Events held in the Bjelašnica and Igman area are generally not sufficiently well known or popular among tourists. A large number of these events lack continuity in their organization, which further limits their tourism potential. Sports and cultural events are the most common types and attract the largest number of visitors.

One of the increasingly popular cultural events on Bjelašnica is the Javorwood Festival, which has been held since 2015 at the Javorov Dol site. This three-day festival takes place in August and plays a significant role in activating the summer tourism season in the mountain area. Its primary aim is to connect various forms of artistic expression, including painting, sculpture, theatre, pantomime, puppetry, and music, through the organization of exhibitions, performances, concerts, and outdoor events. The festival has gained growing popularity among artists and visitors from the region, as well as from the wider European area.

At the Veliko Polje site, a traditional gathering marking the commemoration of the Igman March is organized annually; in 2025, it was held for the 83rd time. As part of this event, a march is organized from Hadžići to Veliko Polje on Igman, followed by the laying of flowers at the memorial site.

Intangible cultural heritage includes stories and legends that need to be researched, documented, and thus preserved from oblivion. They are often conveyed to tourists in mountain villages, which is why they should be systematically incorporated into the tourism offer. In the mountainous area of Bjelašnica, a number of well-known legends are present, among which the legend about the origin of the names of the villages of Umoljani and Studeni Potok stands out in particular.

Traditional folk costume is an important element of identity for the inhabitants of the Bjelašnica villages, especially among the Bosniak population. Women's attire, in both winter and summer variants, was worn for daily life as well as special occasions, with festive costumes being more richly decorated and complemented with a greater number of jewelry items. In the mountain villages, particularly in Lukomir, the isolation of the area has allowed life to remain largely in accordance with tradition and old customs. Traditional attitudes, especially regarding the role of women in society, are still present. The older population remembers the time when folk costumes were worn daily and when the community functioned according to traditional beliefs and practices.

IDENTIFICATION AND TOURISM RELEVANCE OF KEY HERITAGE ELEMENTS

For the purpose of their inclusion in the tourism offer and presentation, particular attention was given to those segments of the anthropogenic tourism attraction base (cultural-historical heritage and elements of the culture of everyday life and work) that are accessible, possess aesthetic and/or curiosity value, and can be valorized for tourism purposes. The final selection of cultural-historical heritage to be included in the tourism offer was developed through an analysis of tourism promotional materials, as well as through discussions with tourists, excursionists, members of the local community, and tourism employees.

A total of six sites from different historical periods have been identified in the Bjelašnica and Igman area, all of which hold potential for tourism development. In addition to four designated national monuments, the war-time mosque and the ski jumping hills on Igman are also considered significant tourism assets.

Necropolis of Stećci (Medieval Tombstones) and Remains of a Medieval Structure at Dolovi, Umoljani Village

Near Umoljani village lies the necropolis at the Dolovi site, which was declared a national monument in 2009. Since 2016, this necropolis has been inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List. The necropolis comprises 53 stećci (medieval tombstones), 11 old tombstones (nišani), and the remains of a building's foundations, spread across several locations. The stećci are shaped as slabs, chests, and sljemenjaci (gabled tombstones). Decorations are found on 12 monuments, with the most common motifs being stylized and Latin crosses, shields, swords, circles, and similar designs.⁴ Most stećci are oriented north–south. Patsch (1902) noted that there was a church at the Crkvina site near Umoljani. Later research by Bešlagić (2004) identified the foundations of an uninvestigated building which, in his view, could have been a church. This necropolis is known to tourists and visitors due to its location, being less than two kilometers from the entrance to Umoljani village. However, there is no tourist signage, so most visitors stop out of curiosity when they see the stećci on the hill above the road or after first obtaining information about the site (Fig. 2 and Fig. 3). Unfortunately, there is no designated area for stopping vehicles along the road, and apart from an informational board installed by the Commission, no additional information is provided (Banda, 2020).

⁴ <https://e-trnovo.com/spomenici/> (accessed: 10 December 2025)



Fig. 2, 3. Dolovi Necropolis and Its Position in Relation to the Road Network
(Source: Photograph by Amra Banda, May 2016)

Group of Monuments Dedicated to the Igman March

The area of Mount Igman played a significant role during the Wars of national liberation, as evidenced by a number of memorials located in this area. Among the most prominent are the memorial pyramid at Veliko Polje in the Municipality of Trnovo, the monument at Veliko Polje in the Municipality of Hadžići, the memorial ossuary and memorial obelisk at Brezovača in the Municipality of Hadžići, as well as the memorial obelisk at Veliko Polje within the Municipality of Hadžići. The architectural ensemble – the group of monuments dedicated to the Igman March – was proclaimed a national monument in 2014 (Commission to Preserve National Monuments of Bosnia and Herzegovina, 2014).

The most renowned memorial at Veliko Polje was erected in 1984 on the right side of the Igman–Hadžići road, at the site where, on 28 January 1942, following the Igman March, the First Proletarian Brigade broke through. The monument is designed as a retaining wall, with six stone panels embedded in its central section, the largest of which bears a commemorative inscription. The panels are rectangular in shape and made of massive, finely crafted blocks of Jablanica granite, while the central panel features a Latin-script inscription dedicated to the Igman partisans (Banda, 2020).

Lukomir Village

Lukomir village, situated at an elevation of 1,495 m above sea level, is the highest permanently inhabited settlement in Bosnia and Herzegovina (Hadrovic, 2022). It is also the most isolated village in the country, remaining without permanent residents for up to six months each year due to heavy snowfalls that prevent access.

Administratively, it belongs to the City of Konjic in the Herzegovina-Neretva Canton and is located approximately 50 km from Sarajevo.

The village lies between the mountain peaks of Lovnica (1,856 m) and Obalj (1,896 m), on the cliff above the canyon of the Rakitnica River (Azinović, 2023). Lukomir is one of the most recognizable tourist symbols of Bjelašnica, and what makes it distinctive and unique is its vernacular architecture.

Vernacular architecture, a form of regional building shaped by geography, available materials, climate, tradition, and culture, developed through knowledge transmitted and refined over generations of non-professional builders (Pardo, 2023).



Fig. 4. Lukomir Village
(Source: Photograph by Amra Banda, May 2016)

Owing to abundant natural resources, such as water, arable land, and extensive pastures, as well as its considerable distance from larger settlements and main transport routes, the village has retained its distinctive and authentic characteristics, which have largely been preserved to this day (Hadrovic, 2022). The cultural landscape of Lukomir, declared a national monument in July 2009, consists of 96 structures (46 residential buildings, 49 livestock barns, a mosque, and a former school building), as well as two necropolises of stećci located at the sites of Vlaško Groblje and Jezerine (Municipality of Trnovo, 2018). These medieval tombstones testify to the continuity of life in this area.

In the Bjelašnica region, rural architecture has specific features and is characterized by a distinctive type of village house known as the “house with a *čardak*.” The tourism value of these buildings lies in the fact that this form of rural residential architecture

has almost completely disappeared and represents the traditional architecture of the sub-Bjelašnica villages, preserved exclusively in Lukomir.

The houses are specific to this area, and their appearance and construction methods primarily reflect the characteristics of the terrain as well as the needs of the local community (Fig. 4) (Banda, 2020).

In the southwestern part of the village, on a hill known as Vlaško Groblje, there is a necropolis consisting of 18 *stećci*, including 17 chest-shaped tombstones and one gabled tombstone. Six monuments are decorated with relief motifs such as a stylized cross, swords, a shield, and a swastika. The necropolis is divided into two parts by a fence belonging to the active Muslim cemetery. Approximately 100 meters northwest of this site lies the Jezerine locality, which contains nine chest-shaped *stećci*. The origin of these necropolises dates to the late Middle Ages, specifically to the second half of the 14th century and the first half of the 15th century.⁵

Umoljani Mosque

There are no preserved written records concerning the construction of the mosque in Umoljani, nor have any documents related to its endowment (*vakufnama*) or other sources survived that would allow the precise determination of the time of its establishment. It is believed that the first wooden mosque on this site was built approximately 200 years ago, while the present structure most likely dates from the early 20th century.⁶ The mosque is constructed of stone and, following restoration, is in good condition (Fig. 5). A traditional event held in Umoljani during the summer months, in July and August, is the recitation of the *mevlud*. On these occasions, several thousand people visit the village to attend this religious ceremony. This and similar events significantly contribute to the preservation of tradition and the promotion of the ethnic and cultural values of the area (Banda, 2020).

According to one legend, during the Second World War the Sarajevo Haggadah, a Jewish illuminated manuscript from medieval Spain, was hidden in the Umoljani mosque. During the most recent war, in August 1993, almost all villages in the Bjelašnica area were completely destroyed, while the mosque in Umoljani remained intact (Babić, 2021). In 2008, the Commission to Preserve National Monuments declared the Umoljani Mosque and its *harem* with the cemetery a national monument of Bosnia and Herzegovina (Commission to Preserve National Monuments of Bosnia and Herzegovina, 2008).

⁵ <https://www.konjic.ba/ba/opcina-konjic/nacionalni-spomenici/62-kulturni-krajolik-selo-lukomir.html> (accessed: 4 December 2025)

⁶ <https://dzamije.ba/info.php?id=dzamiya-u-umoljanima-19> (accessed: 10 December 2025)



Fig. 5. The Mosque in Umoljani
(Source: Photograph by Amra Banda, May 2016)

The War-time Mosque

The war-time mosque is located on Mount Igman, at the crossroads of the Kabalovo–Hrasnički Stan roads, and administratively belongs to the Municipality of Ilidža. It was built because members of the Army of the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina needed a place to perform their religious duties during the war. Construction took place between November 1993 and February 1994, based on a design by Osman Smječanin (*Historijski vodič opkoljenog Sarajeva 1992–1995*, 2023). The Memorial Fund has been entrusted with the use, protection, and maintenance of the War Mosque on Mount Igman, which has been proclaimed a heritage asset (Official Gazette of Sarajevo Canton, 2018).

Ski Jumping Hills on Igman

The complex at Malo Polje, built for the XIV Winter Olympic Games, consists of a large ski jumping hill with a critical point of 112 m (K-112) and a smaller hill with a critical point of 90 m (K-90) (Fig. 6). In addition to these structures, a landing slope, cable car, judges' tower, ski center, and facilities for rest and accommodation were constructed. The chief designer of this complex was the Slovenian civil engineer, architect, and structural designer Janez Gorišek (Nadilo, 2013). Due to damage sustained during the 1992–1995 war, the ski jumping hills are no longer in use. Administratively, they belong to the Municipality of Hadžići.



Fig. 6. Ski Jumping Hills
(Source: Photograph by Belma Durmišević, May 2025)

Intangible Cultural Heritage

Two folk traditions are associated with the name Umoljani. According to one, the village name derives from the Humljani, shepherds from Herzegovina who permanently settled this area during their summer pastures. The other legend, better known to tourists, tells of an aždaha (a dragon or monster) that emerged from the Rakitnica Canyon and passed through Studeni Potok with the intention of destroying the village. The villagers, noticing the danger, retreated to Pošijak Hill and prayed to God for salvation. Their prayers were answered (they “pleaded” Him), the aždaha was turned to stone, and a formation resembling a “petrified monster” is visible in the rock of Pošijak Hill (Fig. 7). A legend of wedding guests is also associated with the stećak necropolis at Dolovi near Umoljani, according to which the stećci represent the tombstones of wedding guests who clashed at that site and met a tragic fate.



Fig. 7. “The Petrified Dragon”
 in the Rock on Pošijak Hill near Gradina,
(Source: Photograph by Amra Banda, April 2018)

This deeply rooted tradition also influences their approach to tourism. For example, in Umoljani and Lukomir, older generations perceive tourists as guests and interact with them according to their customs, striving to be good hosts without expecting financial gain. In Bjelašnica, the local population conveys to tourists what daily life on the mountain used to be like, including customs related to communal meals and traditional livestock farming. Local gastronomic products and handicrafts are particularly highlighted (Banda, 2020; USAID, 2024).

Livestock farming, especially sheep breeding, is a traditional activity. Sheep are milked twice a day, and the milk is used to prepare butter, buttermilk, cheese, and kajmak (a type of clotted cream). Uštipci (fried dough pastries) were considered a “good dish” and were most often prepared for guests. Today, dairy products, uštipci, and pies are the most popular components of the gastronomic tourism offer. Vegetables were rarely eaten, except for crops such as cabbage, while meat was historically a rarity, usually reserved for guests, which was considered a great honor. From the traditions of the mountain villages, numerous indigenous products have emerged that can be branded within the tourism offer as protected local souvenirs, representing significant economic potential for the benefit of the local population. Particularly important are wool products, made within households by female members, both for domestic use and for the tourist market. In the Bjelašnica villages today, visitors can find hand-knitted socks, pape (slippers), sweaters, and pullovers, sold at relatively affordable prices for such handcrafted items (Fig. 8) (Banda, 2020).



Fig. 8. Woven Handicrafts by the Women of the Lukomir Village
(Source: Photograph by Amra Banda, May 2016)

CURRENT STATE OF CULTURAL HERITAGE AND HERITAGE-BASED TOURISM PRODUCTS

After a brief overview of the basic characteristics of the selected cultural and historical heritage sites, it is necessary to analyze their current condition in order to assess their potential for tourism development.

The ambient ensemble of Blatačko Lake with its stećci necropolises represents a valuable example of monumental heritage; however, it is very rarely promoted within the tourism offer of this area. One possible reason lies in the fact that the lake is not included in the tourism offer of the Bjelašnica villages. Access to Blatačko Lake and the stećci is easiest from the direction of Konjic, namely from the village of Džepi, which is also a popular hiking route. Continuing the route further toward Lukomir and other Bjelašnica villages represents a significant physical challenge, despite the trail not being technically demanding.

The village of Ledići, where the Zlatarić necropolis is located, is today almost abandoned and was the site of suffering of both Orthodox and Muslim populations during the most recent war. To this day, the infrastructure has not been fully restored, as a large part of the population (mostly Orthodox) never returned. Ledići represents a distinct ambient ensemble, and there was an idea to develop an ethno-village at this location. In addition to cultural and historical heritage, the area also features the Ledički Waterfall and the Senabot springs. The mosque in Umoljani is part of the local jamaat serving the Muslim population of the Bjelašnica villages. As an active place of worship, it is regularly maintained and in good condition. The area of the War Mosque on Igman is also regularly maintained and, like the Umoljani mosque, is frequently visited by excursionists and tourists due to its favorable location. The War Mosque is an important element of the culture of remembrance related to the events of the 1992–1995 war. The ski jumps on Igman are an important part of the Olympic heritage; however, despite an initiative launched in 2006 by the Municipality of Hadžići for their reconstruction, this has not yet been realized. Tourists, particularly foreign visitors, frequently visit the site, but there are no organized tours by responsible institutions, nor is regular maintenance ensured.

There is significant potential for the development and creation of cultural tourism products in the mountain area of Bjelašnica. In addition to economic benefits for the local community, this form of tourism could contribute to the preservation and revitalization of cultural and historical heritage, particularly livestock herders' huts (katuns), which represent a specific segment of traditional architecture. Rural holiday tourism is becoming increasingly popular in Western European countries, especially among residents of large urban centers who have limited contact with everyday rural life.

In this context, tourists would likely be attracted by the opportunity to stay in mountain areas and participate in food production activities and other daily tasks within rural households. Visitors could also taste and purchase traditional products such as milk, cheese, and various handicrafts. In addition, outdoor activities such as walking, cycling, hiking, and mountaineering should form an integral part of these tourism arrangements. Excursions, as well as various educational programs and interpretative content aimed at presenting specific mountain areas, should also be included in the tourism offer. All of these activities would contribute to the incorporation of traditional ways of life into an authentic tourism product.

These concepts have already been partially implemented through several initiatives in the Bjelašnica area, which represent examples of good practice in linking cultural heritage, the local community, and sustainable tourism.

Several recent initiatives on Bjelašnica illustrate how cultural heritage and local traditions can be integrated into sustainable tourism products. These examples demonstrate a growing synergy between local communities, authentic experiences, and the natural environment.

Socks of Umoljani

A thematic hiking tour combining cultural heritage, traditional crafts, and gastronomy. Visitors explore the village of Umoljani, learn about the legend of the Dragon of Umoljani, and observe the traditional wool-knitting process preserved by local women. The experience concludes with a homemade meal in a rural household, providing insight into everyday mountain life.

“Bjelašnica Jewels” / Rural Avantourism

This initiative highlights the cultural and architectural heritage of Umoljani and Šabići through guided tours that connect *stećci* necropolises, the mosque in Umoljani, old mills, and traditional cuisine. It promotes the revitalization of rural settlements and the interpretation of everyday culture as part of the tourism experience.

Rural Route Bjelašnica (2023–2024)

Developed with local and donor support, this project mapped 23 local facilities, including restaurants, family farms, accommodation units, cultural landmarks, and natural sites such as the Rakitnica Canyon and Blatačko Lake. Through digital maps, QR codes, and marked trails, it creates an integrated eco-cultural tourism route that strengthens local entrepreneurship and enhances the visibility of rural and cultural assets.

CONCLUSION

In the mountain area of Bjelašnica and Igman, natural tourism potentials continue to dominate the overall tourism offer, while cultural and historical heritage, despite its value, has not been sufficiently recognized by the responsible institutions. Although national monuments testify to the rich history and tradition of the areas in which they are located, a large proportion of them are neglected and poorly maintained, and thus insufficiently integrated into contemporary tourism development processes. Frequently, even members of the wider local community are not aware of the existence of certain sites, which is why they are neither presented to tourists nor used as part of the tourism offer.

By integrating cultural and historical monuments—particularly those inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List—the tourism offer would be significantly enriched, creating conditions for attracting new segments of tourism demand and extending the tourist season. In this context, Bjelašnica and Igman stand out as mountain areas of exceptional cultural and historical value, where traces of traditional architecture, sacred sites, oral traditions, legends, and rural ways of life further enrich the natural landscape.

Positive steps toward integrating cultural heritage into sustainable tourism development are evident through certain initiatives that represent examples of good practice in linking the local community, tradition, and the tourism offer. Nevertheless, despite these initiatives, there remains considerable room for improvement, particularly in the interpretation of cultural heritage, its promotion, and the strengthening of cooperation among local households, tourism stakeholders, and destination management.

The main obstacles to the more intensive development of rural and cultural tourism in the Bjelašnica area include insufficient promotion, weak cooperation among tourism actors, a lack of foreign language skills, and limited financial investment. Overcoming these challenges represents a key prerequisite for cultural identity to become a central element of Bjelašnica's tourism development and the foundation of the long-term sustainability of this mountain destination.

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