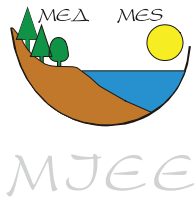


## Prespa as an ecosystem and a lived place: policy recommendations for the integration of the concept of place in ecosystem management of Prespa Lakes

Преспa како екосистем и место за живеење: препораки за вклучување на концептот за место во управувањето со екосистемите во сливното подрачје на Преспанските Езера

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In recent decades, scholars from both natural and social sciences have been preoccupied with the development of theoretical models and management tools that integrate the concept of place into the theory and practice of ecosystem management. Previous research suggests that the concepts of place and place-based identity can be used as powerful tools for a multi-scalar contextual analysis of person-environment interactions. The purpose of this exploratory study was to contribute to these endeavors by specifically focusing on the ways whereby ideas and concepts of the biophysical environment relate to the construction of place-based identity at the regional scale by using the Prespa watershed as a case study. This paper presents the results of this study following an iterative process of data gathering and analysis of interview transcripts and other ethnographic materials, such as publications, documents, and news reports and articles. The results show that the identity of Prespanners is related to places of various geographical scales (e.g., the home, a village, a sub-watershed, the whole watershed, and a nation), or (most likely) a mixture of all. Because place locates the perspective from which people assign meaning to their biophysical and the social environment, they may adopt different positions on an environmental issue or focus on different values, depending on the importance of a particular place-based identity. The implication for ecosystem management is that people's perceptions and evaluations of ecosystems and their services are not based solely on utility criteria, but also depend on meanings arising in everyday experience and interactions with places where the self is constantly negotiated, constructed, and reconstructed. By focusing on the context of meanings ascribed to the biophysical environment the concept of place helps understand and unravel the power relations and ideology shaping these meanings. This study highlights the need of research programs and procedures for ecosystem management planning that account for place-based meanings.

**Keywords:** Prespa, ecosystem management, concept of place, place-based identity, politics of place identity

Во последните неколку декади научници од природните и општествените науки се преокупирани со развој на теоретски модели и менаџмент алатки кои го интегрираат концептот на место во теоријата и праксата за управување со екосистем. Претходните истражувања сугерираат дека концептите на место и идентитет заснован на место може да се употребат како моќна алатка за контекстуална анализа на интеракцијата помеѓу човекот и животната средина при различни географски размери. Целта на оваа прелиминарна студија е преку студија-

та на случај од сливот на Преспа да се придонесе кон ваквите залагања особено со фокусирање на начините преку кои идеите и концептите за биофизичката средина се поврзуваат со конструкцијата на идентитет заснован на место на регионално ниво. Овој труд ги претставува резултатите од студијата врз основа на итеративен процес на собирање и анализа на податоци од интервјуа и друг етнографски материјал, како што се публикации, документи и новинарски репортажи и статии. Резултатите покажуваат дека идентитетот на преспанчани е поврзан со места од повеќе географски размери (пр., домот, село, слив, потслив, држава), односно најчесто со комбинација на неколку или сите од нив. Со оглед на тоа што местото ја лоцира перспективата од која луѓето ѝ придаваат значење на биофизичката и општествената средина, преспанчани може да имаат различни ставови по даден проблем од животната средина или да се фокусираат на различни вредности во зависност од значењето на определен идентитет заснован на место. Во поглед на управувањето со екосистем тоа имплицира дека луѓето ги перципираат и оценуваат екосистемите и нивните услуги не само врз основа на нивната употребна вредност, туку и според значењата кои произлегуваат од секојдневното искуство и интеракција со места во кои себството постојано се договара, конструира и реконструира. Со фокусирање на контекстот во кој на биофизичката средина ѝ се придаваат значења, концептот на место овозможува да се определат релациите на моќ и идеологијата кои ги обликуваат ваквите значења. Оваа студија ја истакнува потребата од истражувачки програми и процедури за планирање на управувањето со екосистем кои ги земаат предвид значењата поврзани со место.

**Клучни зборови:** Преспа, управување со екосистем, концепт на место, идентитет заснован на место, политика на идентитет на место

## Introduction

For more than two decades scholars from both natural and social sciences have been preoccupied with the development of theoretical models and management tools that integrate the environment and society. In systems ecology and human geography the ecosystem concept and notion of place, respectively, have been expanded to meet these demands. Scholars from various academic disciplines, such as human geography (Relph 1976; Tuan 1977), environmental sociology (Cheng et al. 2003; Manuel-Navarette and Redclift 2010), environmental psychology (Altman and Low 1992), anthropology (Low 1996; Low and Lawrence-Zuniga 2003), and architecture (Norberg-Schulz 1984), have long argued that the affective and symbolic meaning of the environment can be addressed by turning to the concept of place and related ideas. By combining the biophysical and the social environment, and including meaning as the constituents of the self, the concept of place has been productively employed to understand how the environment contributes to human well-being through affective and symbolic bonds to specific places (Kaltenborn and Williams 2002; Williams and Patterson 2008). This paper draws on contemporary scholarly work that is labeled here as an ‘ecosystem-as-place approach’ and which seeks to integrate the concept of place into the theory and practice of ecosystem management (Williams 1995; Williams and Patterson 1996; Williams and Stewart 1998; Cantrill 1998, Eisenhauer et al. 2000; Cantrill and Senecah 2001; Hurley et al. 2002; Kaltenborn and Williams 2002; Woolley et al. 2002; Cheng and Daniels 2003; Cheng et al. 2003; Stedman 2003a; 2003b; Clark and Stein 2003; Cheng and Daniels

2005). It can be broadly characterized as a “*socio-cultural approach*” to human-environment interactions which is concerned with “*how meaning both structures and is structured by the environment*” as well as how the “*macroscale sociocultural and economic factors*” are linked with “*more social- and individual-level environmental concerns*” (Williams and Patterson 1996).

Most of the previous research has been focused on the development of a sense of place at the local scale, such as community-level places (Cheng et al. 2003) or “*locales regarded as special places*” (Eisenhauer et al. 2000), even if the geographical scope of study was wider (e.g., a watershed). Although there is recognition of the need for policies that respect local circumstances, often there is a call for collective action across large geographic areas that may include not only different ecosystems, but also different cultures and different places. The observations about sense of place at other scales and how it is transformed across scales – for instance, moving from local to regional – have been scarce and not systematic (Cuba and Hummon 1993; Heath 1993; Cheng et al. 2003).

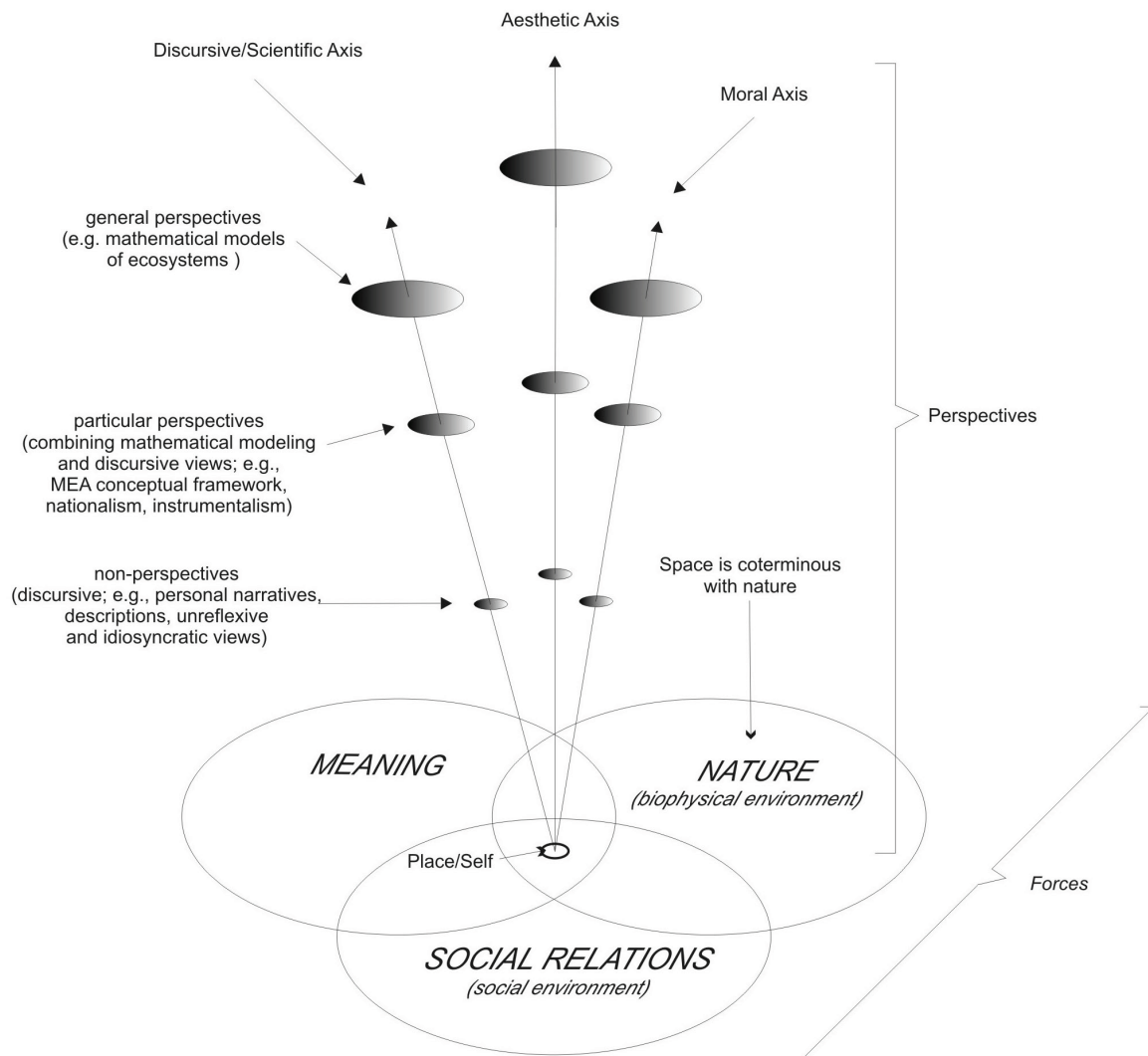
This study was part of a larger doctoral research project exploring how place-based identities relate to different geographical scales, how they are linked with each other and how these linkages influence the perception of environmental problems and the emergence of collective action for the protection of ecosystems. It initially established that place meanings may contribute significantly to the construction of the concept of self, that is, personal identity. It also demonstrated that the meanings of place are constructed and reconstructed in the everyday life of the interviewees through their intimate involvement

with the local biophysical and social environment. The idea that self-identity and place are constantly negotiated and renegotiated as individuals simultaneously engage with their biophysical and social environments of place is well established in the work of geographers who have developed the humanistic notions of place. For instance, in his General Relational Framework, Sack (1997) argues that place and self are constituted through human action which depends on the forces in the realms of nature, meaning, and social relations, as illustrated in Fig. 1 below.

The empirical data collected in the course of the larger doctoral research demonstrated that there is often conflation of the concept of place and that of *community*. As the economic geographer Massey (1994, p. 153) eloquently explains, “*communities can exist without being in the same place – from networks of friends with like interests, to major reli-*

*gious, ethnic or political communities*”. Places seldom accommodate single communities in the sense of coherent social groups. Or, if they do, it does not imply the existence of a single sense of place, for people occupy different positions within any community. This issue leads to the problem of the linkages between identity and place. Rose (2002) identified three ways in which place and identity are related into the notion of a sense of place: (i) by a feeling a sense of belonging; (ii) through identifying against a place; and (iii) place may be felt to be irrelevant to identity.

The early results of the larger doctoral research also suggested that the processes of place-making at the local and larger scales are mutually interdependent. Over larger geographic areas where different individuals are more likely to acquire different experiences with the biophysical and social environment,



**Fig. 1.** Different approaches to knowing/describing place following Sack’s relational framework (adapted from Sack 1997).

which also vary to a greater degree, this relationship is complicated. This exploratory study seeks to understand how the nested hierarchy<sup>1</sup> of ecosystems relates to places of different scales, and more specifically, how the biophysical environment relates to the construction of regional identities as well as what the implications are for ecosystem management. Watershed management – the most prevalent form of ecosystem management (Barham 2001) focuses on a geographic area within which all water drains toward a common point. As watersheds often encompass large geographic areas they may include ecosystems of various types and cross different political or administrative boundaries. In practice, although watershed management institutions operate at the regional level (a watershed, a landscape, a bioregion, etc.), commonly there are subsidiary institutional arrangements that promote, sub-watershed, micro-watershed, and community-level action. In summary, ecosystem management presumes a hierarchical nesting of ecosystems, from a catchment of few square kilometers in size to watersheds as a country (e.g., the watershed area of the Great Lakes is the size of France). This paper presents the results of an exploratory study concerning the ways whereby ideas and concepts of the biophysical environment relate to the development of a sense of place at the regional scale in the Prespa Lakes watershed, shared among Macedonia, Albania and Greece, selected as a case-study for the larger doctoral research project.

### Material and methods

Qualitative and quantitative methods have both been used in place research. A qualitative research design for this study has the advantage of making new insights in how the biophysical environment contributes to the construction of places of different scales without downgrading the ‘richness’ of the concept of place. This exploratory study is based on data collected using unstructured interviews, participant observation, critical reading of popular books on Prespa written by Prespanners, documents and newspaper reports on various events and issues concerning Prespa.

Ethnographic interviews were conducted with a purposive sample of individuals who clearly identify themselves with Prespa, that is, as being Prespanners. This sample is not random, and the goal of sampling in this exploratory study was not theoretical saturation. Rather, interviewees were selected based on their ability to represent a type in relation to the following criteria: (i) location in relation to the Prespa watershed; (ii) citizenship; and (iii)

participation in public policy-development, environmental management in particular. Under these constraints, the interviewees were chosen with an eye towards maximum variation within the sample. The six interviewees in the study (Tab. 1) were selected based primarily on opportunity. The researcher had easy access to these people because they were acquaintances and willing to talk about their experiences of Prespa. In order to protect the anonymity of the interviewees, the names used in this paper are pseudonyms with the exception of Kiril Jonovski, whose books on Prespa constituted an important source of data.

The interviewees were interviewed with the following assumptions in mind: (1) there is conjunction between self-identity and place; (2) the conjunction is salient at various spatial scales; and (3) the interviewees can convey their sense of self and meanings of place through narratives of personal, direct experience in their places. The interviews were guided by a protocol designed with the intention to encourage the interviewees to tell personal stories related to their place and/or to explain how they experience Prespa. Probes were utilized during the interviews to obtain details on particular topics and to explore issues as they arose. The researcher was careful not to offer clues or guide the interviewees during the interviews by employing or referring to such concepts as nature, environment, ecosystem, watershed, society, and community. The interviews lasted from 40 to 90 minutes and took place in the home of the interviewees or in public places.

The interviews were taped and transcribed verbatim. Interview data were organized and analyzed through a process of open coding with an emphasis on emerging and significant concepts and themes. The analysis of interview data was complemented by reading a number of popular books on Prespa, authored by people whose sense of belonging and attachment to Prespa was an important or the primary motivation for writing. Most of them clearly identify themselves with Prespa, that is, as being Prespanners. Among the sources cited or used in writing their publications these authors refer to scientific or technical literature written by other Prespanners; these materials were also consulted. Other written sources were also included in the analysis such as official documents, policy papers and reports, and also newspaper articles and reports published in national and local media. This written material, however, did not undergo the rigorous textual analysis of the interview transcripts. Rather it helped elucidate and explore the linkages between concepts and themes in a systematic and iterative process of evaluation and re-evaluation of interview data.

<sup>1</sup> “In a nested hierarchy, the higher levels are composed of and contain the lower levels” (O’Neil et al. 1986).

**Tab. 1.** Overview of the interviewees participating in the study

Interviewee pseudonym	Gender	Age	Occupation	Citizenship	Place of Residence	Interview Date
Kiril	male	80s	journalist	Macedonian	Prespa, Macedonia	Aug. 2006
Lidia	female	30s	environment expert	Macedonian	Prespa, Macedonia	Dec. 2008
Vladimir	male	20s	environment expert	Macedonian	Ohrid, Macedonia	Dec. 2008
Vangel	male	40s	economist	Albanian	Prespa, Albania	Aug. 2010
Dimitrios	male	30s	environment expert	Greek	Prespa, Greece	July 2010
Miroslav	male	40s	economist	Macedonian	Ohrid, Macedonia	July 2010

### Investigated area

The Prespa watershed was the study site of this research (see Fig. 2). The following description of Prespa is largely based on the structure and information presented in the Strategic Action Plan for the Sustainable Development of the Prespa Park: Executive Summary (SAP, SPP et al. 2005). Whenever additional information was used, the source is indicated.

The Prespa watershed covers some 136,000 ha (calculation based on personal data), including the area of the two Prespa Lakes: Greater Prespa Lake and Lesser Prespa Lake. Lesser Prespa Lake (4,740 ha) is shared between Greece (4,350 ha) and Albania (400 ha). Greater Prespa Lake (25,940 ha) is shared between Albania (4,550 ha), Greece (3,760 ha), and Macedonia (17,630 ha). The boundaries of the watershed are marked by high mountains, of which four are dominant: Baba (2420 m a.s.l.) to the east, Galichica (2288 m a.s.l.) to the west, Plakjenska (1998 m a.s.l.) to the north and Suva Gora (Mali i Thate, 1770 m a.s.l.) to the south. The Albanian part of the Prespa watershed is under the jurisdiction of the Korcha Prefecture. The Albanian part of the Greater Prespa Lake sub-watershed is under the jurisdiction of the Korcha District and the Liqenas Commune, comprising nine settlements; the Lesser Prespa Lake sub-watershed is under the jurisdiction of the Devoll District and the villages in this area are part of the Proger (Shuec, Rakicke) and Billisht (Zagradec) communes. The Greek part of the Prespa watershed and its 13 settlements falls under the jurisdiction of the Municipality of Prespa and the Prefecture of Florina. The Macedonian part of the watershed is under the jurisdiction of the Municipality of Resen, comprising an urban and administrative center (Resen) and 43 rural settlements.

There are many protected areas in the water-

shed. The area of Prespa National Park in Albania coincides with the Albanian share of the Prespa watershed; the area of Prespa National Park in Greece is equivalent to the Greek part of the Prespa watershed. In Macedonia, 37% of Galichica National Park and 37% of Pelister National Park fall within the Prespa watershed (calculation based on personal data); the Ezerani Nature Park is entirely within Prespa. In addition, the Macedonian share of Greater Prespa Lake has been declared a natural monument and a Ramsar Site. In the Greek part of the watershed a large part of Prespa National Park and a large section of Varnous Mountain are part of the NATURA 2000 network of protected areas; the Greek part of Lesser Prespa Lake has also been declared a Ramsar Site. There are also two international regimes providing the conservation capacity for larger-scale ecological management: the Agreement for the Protection and Sustainable Development of Lake Ohrid and its Watershed and the Agreement on the Protection and Sustainable Development of the Prespa Park Area.

The Prespa watershed has slightly over 23,000 permanent residents: about 16,800 in the Macedonian part (State Statistical Office 2003), around 1,300 in the Greek, and somewhat more than 5,000 in the Albanian part. There are three dominant ethnic groups in the Macedonian part of Prespa: ethnic Macedonians account for 76% of all citizens; some 10% of the residents are ethnic Turks, and ethnic Albanians comprise about 9% of the total population (State Statistical Office 2003). In the Albanian part of the watershed, the villages in the Liqenas commune are inhabited by ethnic Macedonians (Liqenas Commune 2007) and the residents of the Proger and Billisht communes are ethnic Albanians. The population within the Greek part of Prespa comprises three groups of people of Greek nationality: (1) "locals," (2) descendants of refugee families from the Black Sea (settled in 1924); and (3) nomadic



Vlachos pastoralists from Epirus who moved into the area in 1951 (Catsadorakis 1999). Over the last two decades the population in the Macedonian and Greek parts has decreased significantly. In the Macedonian part, the share of the young population is on a constant decline, whereas the proportion of elderly people is increasing (State Statistical Office 2003). Out-migration in the Albanian part of Prespa has intensified since the 1990s mainly due to a high unemployment rate.

The water supply, road, power, and telecommunication infrastructure in the Greek and the Macedonian parts of Prespa are generally satisfactory. In the Albanian part the basic physical infrastructure needs extensive upgrading. There is no wastewater treatment plant and no organized waste management in Greek Prespa. The Albanian part lacks wastewater collection and treatment as well as solid waste disposal facilities. In the Macedonian Prespa there are separate landfills for household and industrial solid waste. The wastewater from households in Resen and nearby settlements is collected and partly treated (primary and secondary treatment only).

Prespa is rich in cultural and historical values, which include prehistoric settlements, monuments, and artwork from the Antique and Byzantine periods, as well as a wealth of local traditions, practices, architecture, and art forms.

The above description of the Prespa watershed, following the SAP, would remain fairly incomplete without a historical perspective. Unlike the description of the environment, however, currently there is no common narrative on Prespa's human history, least not one developed through a collaborative effort of academics and experts from the three countries. Arguably, it is because of history that the SAP lacks an important section in the analysis of the factors affecting ecosystem management – national politics. And the influence of national politics in Prespa has indeed been pervasive. Also, international official documents and media reports are often carefully balanced to avoid naming the three countries sharing Prespa due to what scholars have named the “*Macedonian Question*” and the related “*Macedonian naming controversy*” (Roudometof 2000, p. 1; Agnew 2009, p. 76). According to Roudometof (2000, p. 7) the Macedonian naming controversy concerns the manner in which Bulgarians, Greeks, and Macedonians view and interpret Macedonian identity.

## Results and Discussion

Three major themes were identified in the narrative construction of Prespa by the interviewees in this study: ‘Prespa as an ethnic place,’ ‘Prespa as an international tourist destination,’ and ‘Prespa as a place of man and nature.’ These themes can be used

as a heuristic device to analyze the empirical data gathered in this research. According to Agar and Hobs (1982, pp. 6-7) the themes in interviews can help the researcher reconstruct recurrent assumptions, beliefs, and goals of the interviewees – their “*cognitive world*.” Following Agar and Hobs (1982), Mishler (1986) concluded that “*a thematic analysis ... of the various episodes in the story and the ways they are connected suggested that the story expresses general cultural values and at the same time represents the respondent's claim for a particular personal identity*” (p. 104). The analysis of the empirical data gathered in this research repeatedly demonstrated that, regardless of the thematic organization of the response of the interviewees, the different narrative episodes in their response consistently reflected interviewees' self-concepts, expressed in terms of personal values, beliefs, obligations, intentions, and commitments. The following sub-sections discuss the three dominant themes that emerged from the empirical data and provide extracts from some of the interview transcripts, as well as excerpts from other texts in order to illustrate various points made during the analysis.

### From geographical space to an ethnic place

Under the theme labeled here as ‘Prespa as an ethnic place,’ the interviewees construct the Prespa watershed as an organic whole of geography and history that provides for perceptual and cognitive “*stability*” which then is used to reproduce sets of dominant meanings and representations of the region's identity. Some of the interviewees use semi-expert theories to associate nature with society and culture to construct group identity based on ethnic origin. The same place-making process is also observed in some of the books written by Prespanners. Other interviewees employ narratives on genealogical origin that anchor identity to both the history and geography of the Prespa watershed.

The interview of Miroslav provides a particularly good example to begin with the analysis of the first approach. When prompted to explain what it means to be a Prespanner, Miroslav identifies two principal reasons: “*genetic*” continuity and psychological similarity, that is, a shared “*mentality*.” He then explains how the regionally distinctive character of people in Prespa emerged organically from the unique character of the biophysical environment in the Prespa watershed. This phenomenon, he believes, is not exclusive to the Prespa region, but it also applies to any particular territory and to all biological entities. The following extract from the interview presents his arguments for the connection between the environment and people:



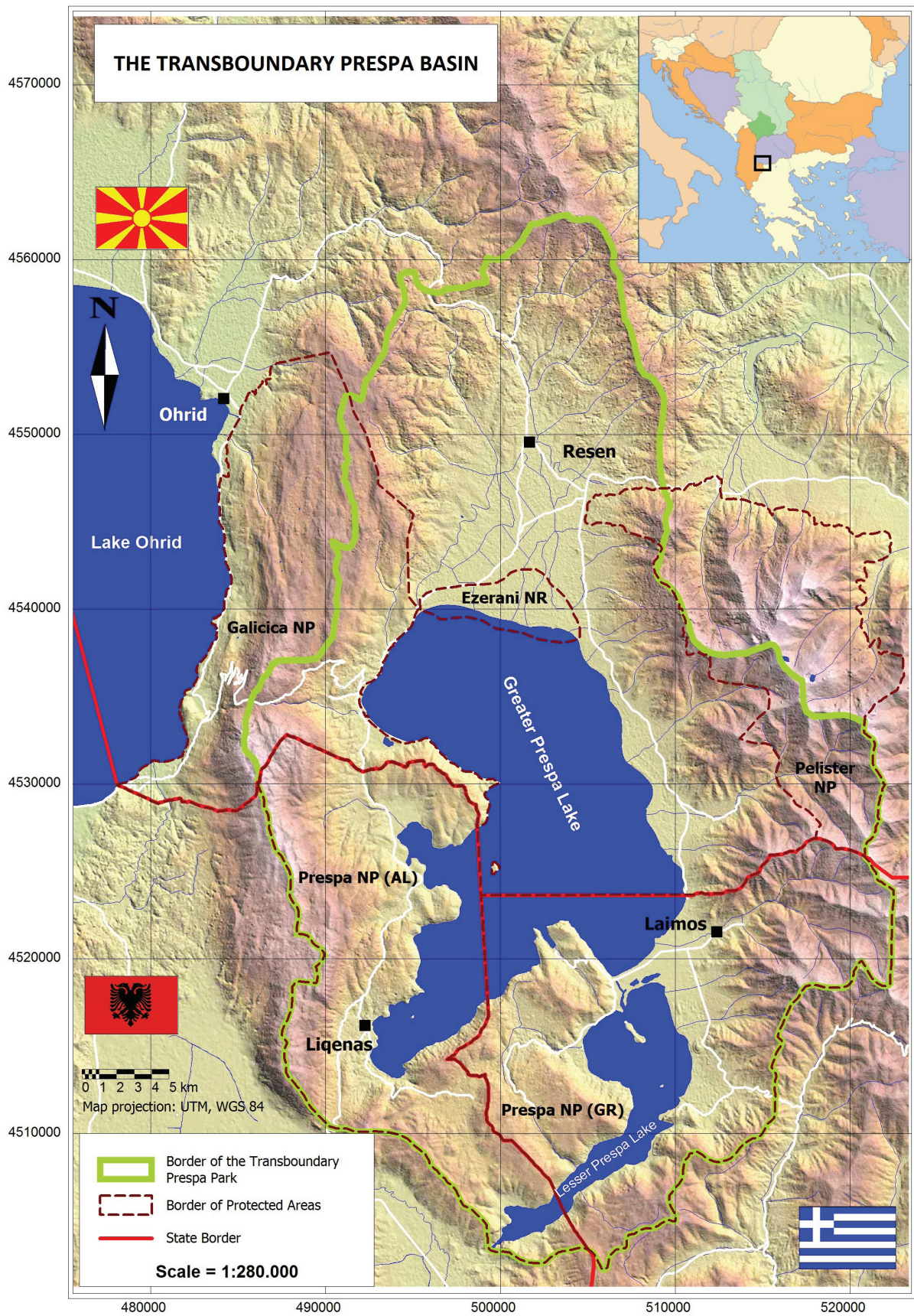


Fig. 2. The study area



*Extract 1*

*"I cannot escape that. Could be a Debranner<sup>2</sup>, but I am not; I am a Prespanner. There are differences there. Possibly the conditions made Debranners to be one or another way, but the conditions in Prespa are different; because of the living conditions. There is a mild climate, that is, a pleasant climate. There are fairly fertile fields. Which means the people didn't suffer from famine; it's a fact, there were unproductive years, etc., but mostly they had the basics for a living. They were not struggling for survival and this is how, probably, they paid more attention to the social issues, such as communication, social relations and art."*

Miroslav explains his place-based identity by relying on a popular version of the Darwinian theory of evolution. This theory provides him the means for reflection, understanding, evaluating, and constructing accounts of the identity of individuals and communities residing or originating in a particular geographical area. Borrowing the logic of this theory, he attributes place-based identity to natural laws and processes. What Miroslav is arguing for is that his identity as a Prespanner is grounded in the landscape, in the ambience created by the distinct biophysical environment of the region. In other words, the people in the region have adapted to the specific environment by the same evolutionary process that shapes all living things. In the case of humans, he believes, this process extends into the realm of culture. In consequence, Miroslav finds clues about Prespanners' identity in the geography of the watershed. This implies a view of the inseparability of nature, society, and ultimately, culture and that one's identity is natural, stable, and fixed in place. Perhaps he maintains that this is transmitted through heredity because, although he was born in an Eastern European country and grew up in the Ohrid region, he still considers him a Prespanner; he has never lived in Prespa. Miroslav's interview demonstrates how scientific reasoning and ideology are at play in interpreting the meanings of the biophysical environment connected to a specific place. What Miroslav omits explicating in his elaboration on the identity of Prespa is its (implied) ethnic Macedonian character. Perhaps he considered it all too obvious given the fact that this theme permeated his talk throughout and that he was talking to another ethnic Macedonian (the researcher) in the Macedonian language.

In a somewhat similar way in his book on Prespa Catsadorakis (1999) notes that up to the Civil War in Greece (1944–1949), the Greek part of Prespa was divided into Upper Prespa and Lower Pre-

spa. In his view, the eight villages in the Upper Prespa were "inhabited from way back by Albanians or by people closely related to them" (Catsadorakis 1999, p. 25). Catsadorakis (1999) further observes that this division "corresponds to historical and political fact" (p. 25) and adds the following:

*"Although it does not strike you at first glance, a careful observer comparing geological and political maps of the region suddenly realizes that this division coincides almost exactly with the boundaries of the two geological substrates in the region. Upper Prespa, with the exception of Mikrolimni and Oxia, is coextensive with the limits of the limestone, Lower Prespa with the igneous, granitic rock. Who knows how far back in time, either in legend or in history, the connection between this political and the physical environment goes?"*

The writings by other Prespanners provide additional examples of the ways in which history and identity can be constituted in geographical space – here the Prespa watershed – which in turn affects the identities of the persons and communities residing there. In reading these authors one is reminded that place-making has both spatial (territorial) and temporal (historical) dimensions. These constructions of Prespa are ideological, mobilized in the service of the dominant ethnic group. They imply hierarchically defined rights of symbolic appropriation of this territory, of spatial identity, which then serve to stratify social groups according to their perceived ethnic origin. As a consequence, these constructions of Prespa's identity further the ideals of ethnic homogeneity, marginalizing counter-narratives of social and cultural diversity.

Kiril Jonovski, both in his talk and books on Prespa provides particularly good examples of construction of personal identity through ancestry that also anchor his identity to both the history and geography of the Prespa watershed. Kiril's account of his "very ancient ancestry" during the interview is a particularly good example. Kiril traces his ancestors to one pivotal time and place in the history of the region and ethnic Macedonians: the Kingdom of Samuel. He locates his ancestor via a durable and venerable family surname ("Sudjovci") which means, in his interpretation, 'councilors.' This family surname is reckoned by descent from a legendary common ancestor – Simeon – a distinguished councilor of Tsar Samuel, from whom Kiril traces his descent, as explained in the extract below, taken from the transcript of his interview.

*Extract 2*

*"My great grandfather, whose surname we*

<sup>2</sup> A person originating from the city or the valley of Debar, a region in the western part of the Republic of Macedonia.



*bear, in fact his pseudonym, was sudjo [meaning 'judge']. The old surname of my lineage is Sudjovci although my surname is Jonov, after my great-grandfather. Simeon, the eldest great-grandfather, who made the origin of our lineage famous, was a nobleman and councilor of the tsar, because it was common that noblemen were councilors of the tsar. Simeon was taken from his parents by Tsar Samuel himself when he was a twelve-year-old boy."*

Kiril then goes on to tell a long story of how his great-grandfather Simeon was chosen to become Samuel's distinguished nobleman and how the genealogy of his family has been recorded over a period of one millennium. In analyzing the relationships that contribute to Kiril's sense of belonging to Prespa, two threads are prominent in his narratives. On the one hand, ancestral history provides for conscious integration of the construction and representations of Kiril's own social status and identity. His family history is a personalization of the history of the region and also of ethnic Macedonians. In identifying his family roots, Kiril constructs historical continuity with the past that endows him with an inheritance bestowed by generations of distinguished predecessors. On the other hand, his narrative of family history accounts for places and locations of major events in the lives of Samuel and Kiril's distinguished ancestors as well as material traces that can still be located in the landscape, such as the remains of churches, palaces or military facilities built by Samuel or his descendants. In this way, the geography of Prespa provides Kiril with a way of thinking about and constructing his sense of self. It is interesting to note that through his distinguished contribution to the recent modernization of Prespa by promoting tourism, and through his popular writings Kiril has in turn made a memorable contribution to the construction of region's identity.

### **Branding Prespa**

In the view of the Prespanners, Prespa is endowed with a remarkably beautiful and distinctive landscape. For Kiril and Miroslav, "natural beauty" constitutes a significant object of their gaze. The aesthetic qualities of Prespa's landscape for these interviewees perform a crucial role in establishing ways of feeling about and perceiving the region. The construction of Prespa as an international tourist destination by these interviewees tends to read the biophysical environment as a landscape; its constituting elements, such as the lake, sandy beaches and the mountains – but not the wetlands and agricultural fields – in some ways stand out or speak to them. The objectification of the Prespa watershed, made of landscape elements thought of as objects, opens

the way for its commodification. As Urry (1995) and Cosgrove (2003) argued elsewhere, through the process of commodification, these elements and features of the landscape enter into exchange relationship with the purchaser (tourist) who accords to them a market value regardless of their use value. As a result, these interviewees tend to select those elements in the landscape which make Prespa seem different from others competing for the same market share.

Therefore, to understand how the identity of Prespa is constructed by these speakers it is necessary to set the region in its wider geographical context. Indeed, in Kiril's and Miroslav's interviews the identity of Prespa is constructed out of interaction on a larger scale than the watershed itself. The neighboring region of Ohrid, involved in both competition and mutual articulation, is the best immediate comparison. The construction of Prespa's identity as a tourist destination derives partly from the distinctive features of the region such as its sandy beaches, but also from its modest development relative to that in the Ohrid region, as well as from the proximity of large urban areas (Bitola and Prilep in Macedonia), which, when juxtaposed produce effects that would not have happened otherwise and in other times. In other words, the construction of the identity of Prespa as a distinctive place, of natural beauty and hospitality, a place worthy of attention from travelers from around the world, is achieved through both counterposition to the outside, such as the Ohrid region, and, in part, in cooperation with that outside, the international tourism and capital markets, which therefore become part of what constitutes Prespa.

Kiril had had throughout his life a prominent role in promoting and developing tourism in the Macedonian part of the Prespa region. As the note on the author in his book *Prespa: A Historical Enigma* (Jonovski 2002) states, "since 1952 he has developed all of the tourism brochures and other marketing materials about Prespa. He is the designer of the emblem of the municipality of Resen." Article 7 of the Municipality of Resen Charter provides the following interpretation of the emblem (MoR 2010):

*"The municipality has an emblem representing the Prespa watershed with an inscription 'Prespa' on a ribbon above, with mountains above which the sun raises, the lake with the island of Golem Grad and a sailing boat in it and an apple fruit with two diverging branches. The emblem of the municipality is a symbol of a historical, tourist, and fruit-growing area."*

The construction of the identity of Prespa as a "fruit growing area" probably predates that of Prespa as a tourism destination, but also resembles that of Prespa as an important tourist destination in many

respects. The commodification of the region in the former instance is straightforward and broadly accepted, as the following newspaper article clearly indicates:

*“The Prespa apple needs to be a protected brand, because the water, the air make it unique in its distinctiveness.*

*Resenners send packages of apples to celebrate the New Year to more than 45 addresses such as embassies, media and tourist agencies. The aim of this practice before the holiday is to promote the best of Prespa – apples which make their way to market under the motto ‘Yes, we are Balkanners but our apples are European.’ With these packages the local government in cooperation with the ‘Pelican’ Tourist Agency and the ‘Fishing Village’ intend to promote the Prespa area as a tourist destination and fruit growing area” (Stevkowska 2006).*

The market value of this brand – of Prespa as a fruit growing area – is indeed significant. In his popular article on Prespa as a fruit growing area in Macedonia, the academic geographer Gramatnikovski (1975) – another Prespanner – concludes: *“Although the fruit-growing area in the landscape of the Prespa watershed occupies only 12.63% of the arable land, its importance for the economy is primary”*. Moreover, he seems to relate this fact to identity when writing that *“the population is not rural in the old meaning of the word, because through the fruit growing and some other industrial crops intended for market they satisfy all their remaining living needs”* (Gramatnikovski 1975). The idea of progress through industrial/capitalist production is therefore related to the identity of the region.

Empirical data gathered during this study reveal an additional construct of Prespa’s identity which may be reliably introduced under the heading of this section. In the following paragraph taken from his book on Prespa, Catsadorakis (1999, p. 9) points to another brand of Prespa – a wetland of international importance:

*“In the course of its long but relatively insignificant history, Prespa has twice emerged from remoteness and isolation into the limelight. The first time was a thousand years ago when Samuel, tsar of the Bulgars, established his palace and the centre of his kingdom here. The second is the period we are going through today, when Prespa with its rich wetland habitat full of rare birds and animals, with its idyllic beauty and biodiversity, its historic monuments and its people, has secured a place in the consciousness of thousands*

*of our fellow citizens as one of the principle sites in Europe for the protection of birds and as one of the significant areas for our common European natural heritage.”*

Perhaps it is possible to argue that constructing Prespa as a site of *“European natural heritage”* may be credibly related to the above discussion of the commodification of the landscape, this time intended primarily for a somewhat narrower category of tourists and the nature-based tourism market niche. The following section takes a closer look at the relationship between the biophysical environment and construction of regional identity through an analysis of narratives and discourses on the third theme: ‘Prespa as a place of man and nature.’

### A place for man and nature

The construction of Prespa as ‘a place of man and nature’ provides another convincing case for the analysis of the profound interconnection of the biophysical and social environment in the construction of place. The ecosystem of Lesser Prespa Lake and its unique features, in particular the presence of the largest nesting colony of the Dalmatian Pelican in the World, is central to this case. Nature conservationists have been the main proponents of this relatively recent construct of Prespa as a ‘place for man and nature,’ as the following extract from Dimitrios’ talk illustrates:

#### Extract 3

*“The researcher: How would you define the character (of Prespa), how would you describe it?”*

*Dimitrios: I would say that, I will use something which has been a logo of SPP for many years – because I really respect it and I agree with it – it said: Prespa is a typical, a very characteristic place, it’s a place for man and nature. Men have always lived there. They have shaped the environment to a great extent, but with many, many, many positive examples. For example, wet meadows were there because fishermen used to cut the vegetation in the shallow water; or stock breeders would cut and collect the vegetation to feed their stock in the winter; or there was a lot of grazing. So a lot of grazing in the wetland contributed to having to maintain wet meadows. In those times, until 1985, this was traditional management and nobody called it management – it was traditional practice. Then it was abandoned because people switched to bean monoculture. And we came 15 years later to say that we should bring back some management practices like those, like water buffalo*

*grazing, cattle grazing, and summer cutting to restore wet meadows. So, if you want to have wet meadows you want to have human activities there. There are, of course, many, many other examples. ... So it's really that the character of Prespa is really that. It's not only nature, it's not only man. It's man and nature. And I think this is more or less the case on all three sides of Prespa."*

The beginning of the discourse of Prespa as a 'place of man and nature' can be traced back to the late 1960s, when French ornithologists "*discovered its unparalleled beauty and biodiversity as well as an ornithological paradise*" (Catsadorakis 1999, p. 47). This discovery was soon publicized among the officials at the national and international levels and even more among conservationists in Greece and beyond. As a result, the Greek government first declared the region a nature reserve, aiming at the conservation of the waterfowl, and later, in 1974, a "Ramsar" site and a "National Forest" were established, encompassing the whole of Greek Prespa (Catsadorakis 1999, p. 78). In the years that followed many scientists became interested in the ecology and culture of Greek Prespa, contributing to its image as an area of European, if not global, importance.

The establishment of the Society for the Protection of Prespa (SPP) was the major turning point in the efforts of conservationists. The SPP was founded following an initiative of World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) and the Friends of Prespa association. In addition to these organizations, a number of other non-governmental organizations from Greece, UK, France and Denmark also contributed to the establishment of the SPP. The mission of the SPP is "*to maintain and strengthen the relationship between people and nature and to preserve the natural and cultural heritage of Prespa for the benefit of its inhabitants and of all those interested and concerned, today and in the future*" (SPP 2007). Those behind the SPP believe that previous development projects in the region demonstrated how the "*old-fashioned model of intensive development*" may be deleterious to the environment. In addition, as Papayannis (1999, p. viii) argues, the "*classical system of protected sites*" is also deemed inappropriate; it is inflexible, favoring environmental protection or nature conservation, regardless of the costs, and even at the cost of "*reduction or even complete removal of human activity.*" What is needed instead is the understanding that the distinctiveness of the Greek Prespa is a result not only of the "*area's natural assets,*" but also because they are "*inextricably bound up with the presence of man and his cultural and practical activities.*" According to Catsadorakis, "*the influences of men and nature are so intimately interwoven as to be almost inseparable*" in Greek

Prespa (1999, p. xviii).

Intimately interwoven with the area are also the lives of the leading activists of the SPP, which is exclusively active in the Prespa region. Coming to the area from the outside, usually urban centers in Greece, first as field researchers, they tend to settle in the Greek Prespa region, becoming one of the locals. Through their devotion to their professional careers, with the concomitant intensive field work, by establishing a family life, and through repeated interactions with the local communities these people gradually develop a sense of belonging and also a sense of acceptance by the others.

The 'place of man and nature' is where real life takes place. The SPP certainly plays a pivotal role in the area becoming a 'place for man and nature' and some of its activists have devoted their professional and family lives to maintaining this place according to this image, becoming deeply rooted in it, and engendering it through their personal identities. This is being done through conducting or supporting scientific research, and also implementing and supporting actions that shape the landscape according to an image of "*the old days,*" as Catsadorakis puts it (1999). With help from scientists and conservationists from Greece and abroad and also from different institutions and organizations, both in Greece and the EU, SPP's employees are committed to restoring or resembling some of the practices which shaped the landscape in the past. For instance, currently it is mainly the responsibility of the SPP to organize and support financially the regular cutting of reed, and maintain the wet meadows through keeping a herd of water buffalos owned by this organization. It is because of SPP's networking with scientists, conservationists, and officials in Greece and beyond that those actions are possible financially.

The conceptualization of Prespa as a 'place for man and nature' is predicated on, though not limited to, an understanding of the close connections between the ecosystem and society in the watershed. It has a strong foundation in the natural sciences, but is also sensitive to history and the specific character and working of human societies. Being rooted in the natural sciences and operating through such concepts as integrated ecosystem or watershed management is not, however, the sufficient condition for constructing Prespa as a unity and providing for a shared regional identity. Conservationists from across the border may share the ecological concepts, but they can still disagree about the identity of Prespa. The significance of power relations in constructing and deconstructing identity at both the personal and collective levels can be observed in all three constructs of Prespa's identity discussed in this chapter: Prespa as an ethnic place, as a tourist center, and a place of man and nature. In the latter, for instance, there is an attempt to strike a balance be-



tween the interests of various stakeholders, including biodiversity, and through the omission of significant issues related to ethnic identity. This deficiency surfaces when the construction of Prespa as a place of man and nature is scaled up from the Greek part of Prespa to the whole Prespa watershed. The following extract taken from Vladimir's interview is a good case illustration:

*Extract 4*

*"Through the project we promote integrated management of the system. Then the communities are going to contribute in some way, all of them. Our contact persons in the project are people from Athens and Thessalonica so that we do not come into contact with the Macedonian population there. We made several initiatives to bring agricultural associations from there, our people, so to speak. No, the conditions are not mature. We know the importance of bringing the producers of beans to sit together with our producers of apples, to have a chat about water, irrigation or similar things, what needs to be done. It is interesting. I think it is politics. That was something that made me wonder. How could it be, at the same time so close and so unknown? And it is the same ethnic group, the same people."*

## Conclusions and Policy Implications

The results of this study suggest that the construction of both individual and collective identity rest on place-based meanings. The concepts of place held by individuals and collectives help them organize reality in a meaningful manner and, more specifically, orient themselves in the social world, including geographically and historically. Places are made meaningful for various reasons, such as an expression of personal distinctiveness, qualities and achievements, but also because they connect individuals and communities to their past and shape hopes for the future. Meanings ascribed to the biophysical environment are part and parcel of the construction of place-based identities across geographical scales.

The implication for ecosystem management is that people's perceptions and evaluations of natural resources are not based solely on utility criteria, but also depend on meanings arising in everyday experience and interactions with places where the self is constantly negotiated, constructed, and reconstructed. In other words, the perception of the biophysical environment depends on how Prespanners construct their individual and collective identity. This is in accordance with previous research in environmental

psychology that has repeatedly shown how place-based identity provides frameworks for the perception of the environment which in turn influences people's behavior (Williams and Patterson 1996; Davenport and Anderson 2005).

Previous empirical studies have shown that environmental conflicts are essentially intergroup conflicts arising over natural resources, but also political influence, and concern values, beliefs, and fairness (Opatow and Brook 2003). As Opatow and Brook (2003) have argued, *"real interests' of parties in conflict is to protect their dignity in the face of perceived disrespect, derogation, and moral exclusion as much as to maintain control of a resource they see as crucial to their well-being."* The constructions of Prespa's identity regularly involve exclusion and stereotyping, although in different ways and to a different extent, and can therefore exacerbate conflicts over environmental resources in the Prespa watershed. These identity-based conflicts in natural resource management can be alleviated through the creation of an overarching, inclusive place-based (e.g. ecosystem-wide) identity (Opatow and Brook 2003). Therefore, supporters of integrated ecosystem management in the Prespa watershed need to recognize the ways in which environmental issues reflect individual and group identities of Prespanners. The implication of this argument is that they need to design a planning process that provides wide-ranging and alternative opportunities and mechanisms for continued and authentic participation of stakeholders in order to recognize and appreciate stakeholders' place meanings. The goal of this participation process would be to identify management options that can foster the construction of an overarching, watershed-based identity. In light of this argument, the construction of Prespa's identity as a 'place of man and nature' is a promising candidate because of its inclusiveness and the balance it strikes between the interests of various stakeholders. With the strong underpinning in the concept of sustainable development, this construction is also sensitive to the region's history, social values, and cultural diversity. While creating an overarching identity is a necessary step, Opatow and Brook (2003) have argued, it is also important to preserve pre-existing (subgroup) identities.

The proponents of watershed management – the most prevalent form of ecosystem management (Barham 2001) argue that watersheds provide practical, tangible, management units to integrate human influence and physical, chemical, and biological processes (Davenport 2003; Brierley et al. 2006; Schlager and Blomquist 2008). While the idea of watersheds as ecologically meaningful management units is straightforward, in practice watershed boundary identification is not merely a scientific activity; indeed, it is always both a scientific and political ac-

tivity (Wooley et al. 2002; Schlager and Blomquist 2008). Politics enters each watershed management initiative when decisions are being made about the appropriate scale at which to organize ecosystem planning efforts or, for instance, whether to include watersheds connected through human intervention (Schlager and Blomquist 2008). The management of the transboundary Prespa watershed has been no exception and over the last two decades the region has been included in environmental regimes established at a number of geographical scales. The emerging polycentric environmental governance reflects the complex ecological, social and political issues in Prespa and the wider region of western Balkans (Antypas and Avramoski 2004).

This research has demonstrated that there is agreement among Prespanners that the Prespa watershed is the most appropriate ecologically meaningful scale for addressing the “*fundamental management issues*” that concern all three lake-bordering countries (SPP et al. 2005). Arguably, the congruence between the biophysical reality and the identity Prespanners seem to share, can significantly enhance the prospects for creating local ownership and a consensus for action. Yet, the managers of the Prespa watershed need to understand the context of meanings ascribed to the biophysical environment and unravel the power relations and ideology shaping these meanings – the politics of place identity. Following Williams and Paterson (1996), the politics of place identity can be defined as “*the deliberate effort by individuals and groups to control the meaning of places.*” Following this logic, Hague (2005) recently argued that the key purpose of planning is to “*create, reproduce or mold the identities of places through manipulation of the activities, feelings, meanings and fabric that combine into place identity.*” Indeed, place-making and place identity are implied in the initiatives leading to the establishment of Prespa as a transboundary protected area. The background paragraph taken from the Agreement on the Protection and Sustainable Development of the Prespa Park Area (EC 2010) is a good example. Yet, as this research has demonstrated, the emerging constructs of Prespa’s identity are competing with other preexisting or contemporary constructs. It is important to note that the components of the biophysical environment in the watershed are involved in the tensions between the varied constructs of Prespa’s identity. What the differing constructs of Prespa’s identity share is the landscape way of seeing – a view from a particular perspective, such as nationalism, instrumentalism or environmentalism.

This research showed how Prespanners strategically construct alternative place-based identities at various scales to advance their political goals. Policy-makers, managers, and Prespanners need to understand the politics of place to unravel power rela-

tions that divide and marginalize and comprehend what it takes to develop a shared sense of place that facilitates more inclusive and democratic environmental governance in Prespa. They also need to understand the scales at which a sense of place is most salient in people’s daily lives so that management planning can cultivate positive ones and help reconcile or harmonize the contrasting place-based meanings.

Finally, the results of this exploratory study show that the person-place relationship includes both instrumental and affective aspects and that qualitative social science investigation of person-place bonds is particularly well suited to understanding the symbolic and emotional aspects of the human–environment relationship. Proponents of ecosystem-based management in the region need to expand analysis beyond mere technical problems and scientific concerns about ecosystem services’ provisioning and develop research programs and procedures for ecosystem management planning that account for place-based meanings. For, as this study demonstrates, some of the affective meanings Prespanners assign to Prespa translate into strong emotional bonds to the region. However, there have been concerns that place-based meanings and the associated values concerning the environment, particularly conflicting values, are more difficult to incorporate into the management planning process than data about ecological and socio-economic systems (Brierley et al. 2006). Currently there is little direction as to how natural resource managers can incorporate the idea of place into ecosystem-based management. For instance, Williams and Stewart (1998) have developed recommendations about how the concept of sense of place can be systematically applied in day-to-day ecosystem management. These authors suggested that natural resource managers should: (1) “*know and use the variety of local place-names;*” (2) “*communicate management plans in locally recognized, place-specific terms;*” (3) “*understand the politics of place;*” and (4) “*pay close attention to places that have special but different meanings to different groups.*”

Recognizing the difficulty of the task of identifying the options for sustainable living in a place, Norton (2005) advocates for “*a deep examination of the community’s values, aspirations, and sense of meaningfulness, along with a great deal of deliberation and social learning.*” Nonetheless, as Cantrill (2004) has argued, when discussing policy options the “*focus on the interaction between humans and the biosphere may trigger attitudinal backlash grounded in their preference of social factors over those of nature.*” In addition, as Brandenbrug and Carroll (In: Davenport and Anderson 2005) noted, what stakeholder share in interviews may not be expressed in the context of a public participation process or quan-

titative surveys. It is for these reasons that Cantrill (2004) recommended that natural resource managers use written records of people living in an area concerning special places or interviews with stakeholders to tap into stakeholders' place-based meanings. These and similar qualitative methods, although rather time consuming, allow for the exploration of nuances in meanings which people attach to places and understanding why people think and feel about them the way they do.

In conclusion, this exploratory study indicates that the concept of place is useful for understanding how individuals organize and present their personal values, beliefs, obligations, intentions, and commitments. By tapping into Prespanners' sense of place this research outlines a procedural approach to taking note of stakeholders' place-based values and uncovering potential conflicts in managing the ecosystem of Prespa. Natural resource managers can use this approach in combination with the extended and authentic participation of stakeholders in order to develop policies that address their concerns and meet their aspirations while maintaining the ecological integrity of Prespa's ecosystem.

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