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Прегледни научни рад

MANAGEMENT OF FORTRESSES AS TOURIST ATTRACTIONS ON THE EXAMPLE OF "GOLUBAC FORTRESS" PUBLIC ENTERPRISE

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Abstract: "Golubac fortress" is a unique and indivisible spatially functional entity, with natural and created resources and values of importance for tourism. As a cultural asset of exceptional importance, it belongs to the "Golubac fortress" Nature Reserve and the "Đerdap" National Park. In 2011 the Republic of Serbia declared "Golubac Fortress" Tourist Area, which is managed by the company with limited liability for the development of tourism "Golubac Fortress". The Tourist Area, which belongs to the territory of the Municipality of Golubac, is about 22 hectares. The main tourist attraction of the Tourist Area is an immovable cultural asset – the medieval fortress "Golubac fortress", which was restored through the project "Reconstruction of Golubac Fortress", financed from IPA funds and officially opened for visitors in 2019.

The aim of the paper is to point out the importance of managing attractions, with a special emphasis on medieval fortresses as complex products in tourism. "Golubac Fortress" is an example of good practice, how, through the application of the tourist attraction management model, it has turned from a neglected cultural-historical asset into an attractive tourist destination within the European cultural route "Fortresses on the Danube".

Key words: fortresses, tourist attractions, management model, Golubac Fortress

INTRODUCTION

Golubac fortress is believed to have been built in the 14th century. Although there are no reliable data, it is assumed that it was built by Serbs on the remains of an old fortification. It is located at the very entrance to the Đerdap gorge, on a cliff on the right bank of the Danube. It is located four kilometers downstream from the current settlement of Golubac. Thanks to its geographical position, it was an important strategic fortification for centuries (Terzić, 2014).

Today, the fortress, together with the Tumane monastery, is the most visited place in the Municipality of Golubac and the surrounding area. The restored fortress has clear touristic, economic and cultural-historical⁴ significance not only for its municipality, Donje Podunavlje, but also for Serbia as a tourist destination.

RESTORATION OF FORTRESSES AS A PREREQUISITE FOR THEIR TOURISM VALORIZATION

Fortresses, that is, the remains of former fortifications, have long since ceased to be the subject of interest only to the professional public – historians, archaeologists, art historians, ethnologists, military historians. Today, the fortresses represent significant tourist attractions. This especially applies to Serbia, where a number of restored fortresses record an increasing number of domestic and foreign tourists from year to year. Why do we emphasize that we are talking about only a limited number of fortresses and those that have been rebuilt? First, because there are still a lot of

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⁴ https://media.srbija.gov.rs/medsrp/dokumenti/Projekat_Revit_Golubacka_tvrdjava.pdf

"fortresses" in Serbia, which are the remains of once powerful fortifications of Serbian rulers⁵. As a rule, the degree of their preservation is far from the original appearance, the walls and ramparts are devastated, they are physically inaccessible to the average tourist, often without appropriate tourist signage. Second, only physically restored fortresses with appropriate additional facilities (material and immaterial) can attract tourists today.

Among the restored fortresses in Serbia, the most famous are Golubac fortress, Ram fortress and Fetislam fortress (Bosnić, 2022). What they all have in common is that they are located on the Danube (in the so-called Lower Danube Region), they belong to the European cultural route "Fortresses on the Danube", but they differ significantly in terms of the degree of tourist valorization. Golubac fortress stands out in particular, as the first renovated (in 2019) fortress on the Danube, in which the most funds were invested. Nine towers and palaces were reconstructed, then wooden elements and roofs, an amphitheater with 250 seats was built, as well as a bicycle and pedestrian path; a completely new visitor center was built to receive tourists, as well as a coastal fort, pier and parking area. Also, with the construction of the tunnel, the existing road (part of the so-called "Danube highway"), which passed through the fortress, was relocated, which enabled the smooth flow of road traffic outside the fortress area⁶. In the same year, the significantly smaller Ram fortress was also rebuilt. The Fetislam fortress is the largest in terms of surface area, but it was renovated in 2023, partially, which means that it still needs to be valorized for tourism.

In order for a fortress to be a tourist attraction and sustainably operate for a long period of time, it must be managed. The best example is the Golubac fortress. Considerable funds were invested in the reconstruction of the fortress⁷, which made it possible for the said fortress to become interesting for modern tourists. However, that was only the first step and a prerequisite to put her "on good feet". The next step is management as a permanent and professional activity.

LEGAL BASIS AND LEGAL FORM OF MANAGEMENT OF THE FORTRESS "GOLUBAC FORTRESS"

The legal basis for the management of Golubac fortress is the Law on Tourism, on the basis of which in mid-2011, by the decision of the Government of the Republic of Serbia, it was declared as a "tourist area"⁸ under the name "Golubac Fortress". The key attraction of the mentioned tourist area is an immovable cultural asset – the medieval fortress Golubac fortress which is located on the right bank of the Danube, at the entrance to the National Park (NP) "Đerdap". The main reason for declaring a tourist area is to create appropriate conditions for planning, organizing, arranging and using it in accordance with the characteristics, values and purposes of the tourist area (Odluka o proglašenju Turističkog prostora "Tvrđava Golubački grad").

The next step related to the formation of a business entity, that is, the manager of the tourist area. In the same year (2011), a limited liability company for the development of tourism⁹ called "Golubac Fortress" was founded. The founders were the Government of the Republic of Serbia and the Municipality of Golubac¹⁰, based on the then valid Law on Tourism (Zakon o turizmu, 2009, 2010),

⁵ The best example for this statement is the Municipality of Priboj, where there are the remains of as many as four Serbian medieval fortresses (Jagat, Sjeverin, Gradina, Oštirik), none of which are in the function of a tourist offer (Program razvoja turizma opštine Priboj sa akcionim planom 2024-2026, str. 21-23). The same applies to the remains of the Prilepac fortress from the 14th century in the Municipality of Novo Brdo, as well as to many other lesser-known remains of fortresses throughout Serbia.

⁶ https://media.srbija.gov.rs/medsrp/dokumenti/Projekat_Revit_Golubacka_tvrdjava.pdf

⁷ About 10 million euros were invested in the essential renovation of the Golubac fortress (reconstruction and equipment), mainly from European Union funds. The restoration was carried out in the period from 2014 to 2019 under the leadership of the Austrian Development Agency under the supervision of the Republic Institute for the Protection of Cultural Monuments (<https://www.euzatebe.rs/rs/projekti/obnova-golubacke-tvrdave>).

⁸ A tourist area is defined as „a unique and indivisible geographical and functional entity of natural and created resources and values of importance for tourism“ (Zakon o turizmu, član 3.).

⁹ A limited liability company (d.o.o.) is the most common legal form for establishing companies in Serbia.

¹⁰ The founders are from two levels of government - the highest (state) and the lowest (local). Why there is no entity from the regional level among the founders is more than clear. The middle level of government in Serbia is almost non-existent, which is especially evident in tourism. While there are around 120 local tourist organizations in Serbia, there are only two regional ones at the same time, one with its headquarters in Novi Sad (TO Vojvodina, i.e. Northern Serbia) and the other with its headquarters in Užice – Regional Tourism Organization West Serbia (Stojanović & Stankov, 2022).

as well as the Law on Business Companies (Zakon o privrednim društvima, 2004). Golubac was designated as the headquarters of the company.

"Golubac Fortress" d.o.o. is one of over thirty public companies and capital companies that perform activities of general interest to which the Law on Public Companies applies. However, this does not mean that it is a budgetary institution (such as state hospitals, schools, faculties, museums...) because its operations are primarily based on its own income and not on permanent payments from the state and municipal budgets.

In addition to regulations in the field of tourism (Zakon o turizmu, 2019; Strategija razvoja turizma Republike Srbije za period od 2006 do 2015. godine, 2016), "Golubac Fortress" d.o.o., as a space manager, also applies domestic regulations in the fields of culture (Zakon o kulturi, 2023; Zakon o kulturnim dobrima, 2021), spatial planning and ecology (Zakon o prostornom planu Republike Srbije od 2010. do 2020. godine, 2010; Zakon o zaštiti prirode, 2021; Zakon o zaštiti životne sredine, 2018; Zakon o nacionalnim parkovima, 2018), as well as international conventions and agreements in the same fields.

It should be emphasized that Golubac fortress is not the only fortress in Serbia that is managed. The establishment of a public company specialized in the management of the fortress is a model applied by some other cities and municipalities in Serbia. For example, Since 2002, the City of Belgrade has managed the largest and most famous fortress in Serbia, through its Public Enterprise "Belgrade Fortress" in Serbia¹¹.

At first glance, the City of Smederevo also decided on the same management model, so in 2016 it founded the Public Enterprise "Smederevo Fortress". However, the situation is specific because the local tourism organization (TO) was abolished in the same year. Activities to improve tourism are entrusted to the newly established Tourist Information Center (TIC), as well as the Public Enterprise "Smederevo Fortress"¹², which took over the largest number of employees in the defunct city TO¹³.

MANAGEMENT OF THE GOLUBAC FORTRESS AS A TOURIST AREA

The tourist area Golubac fortress includes not only the fortress (nine towers connected by ramparts) but also a wharf for smaller vessels, a large parking area (for passenger vehicles and tourist buses) suitable for the disabled, a souvenir shop, a cafeteria, a visitor center, a nature reserve (with very rare and endemic plants) and an archaeological park (ancient period – the remains of a Roman house built at the end of the 2nd or the beginning of the 3rd century; the medieval period – the remains of a limestone; the period of Turkish occupation – the remains of a public bath).

The offer of the fortress is based on a rich cultural and historical heritage. The central figure is certainly Despot Stefan Lazarevic, who renovated and expanded the fortress and built the palace. In addition to tours of the fortress (with or without professional guides), visitors are offered exhibitions (permanent and temporary). Apart from the material heritage, the management of the fortress recognized the importance of the intangible offerings (primarily through storytelling and living history).

The organizational scheme of the fortress management has changed throughout the past 13 years of operation. In the first years, there were only a few employees (four in 2014 and 2015; five in 2016; six in 2017 and 2018).

¹¹ <https://www.beogradskatvrdjava.co.rs/>

¹² Without entering into a deeper analysis, the question arises of the justification of shutting down the city's tourist organization, because part of its activities was certainly taken over by the newly founded Public Enterprise "Smederevo Fortress".

¹³ <https://www.novosti.rs/c/srbija/vesti/1256018/biser-turizma-bez-kormila-sest-godina-turisticka-organizacija-smedereva>

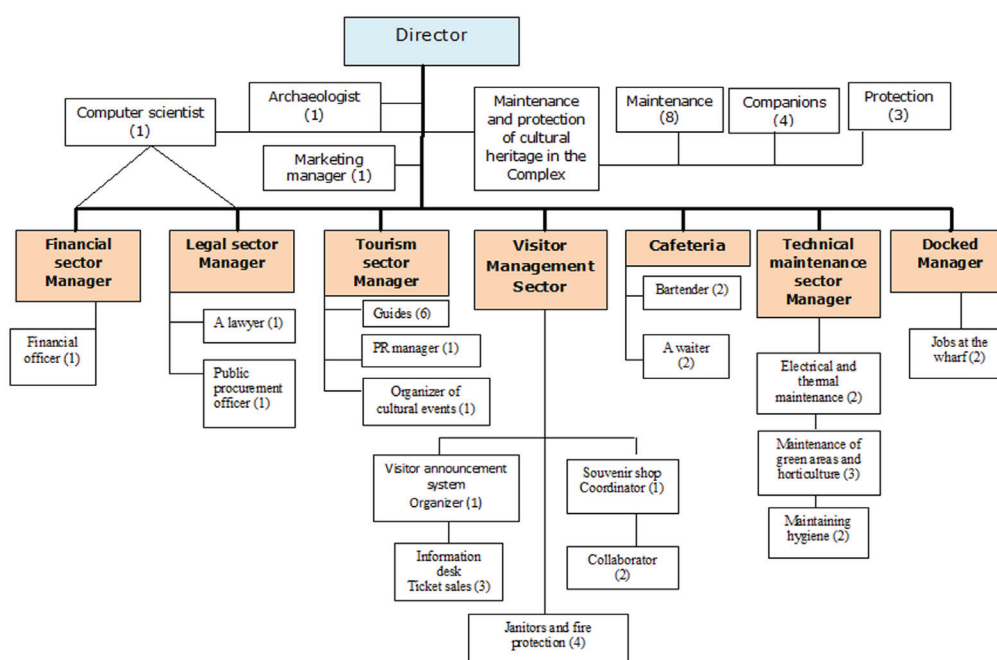


Figure 1. Organizational scheme in 2024
Source: "Golubac Fortress" d.o.o.

The governing bodies are the Assembly of the company (representatives of the founders – the Republic of Serbia and the Municipality of Golubac) and the director. In 2018, there were four sectors:

- Sector for strategic development, planning and investments
- Sector for the protection and care of tourist areas and cultural and historical monuments
- Sector for economic, financial and legal affairs
- Sector for Marketing and Tourism Development.

Due to the increase in the volume of work and due to the opening of the fortress to visitors in 2019, there was a need for essential changes in the internal organization. This means a change (increase) in the number of employees, but also a change in the structure of employees on several grounds (vocational education, profession, status-permanent employment or temporary jobs). The new organizational scheme from 2024 includes seven sectors with a projected 60 jobs (Figure 1). Tourist guides (6), PR manager (1), marketing manager (1), organizer of cultural events (1), ticket sales (4); employees on maintenance and protection of cultural heritage (15), employees on the wharf (3), technical maintenance (8), supporting services (6) and others have an important place in mentioned scheme.

The manager defined his mission as the management of the observed area in accordance with the valid Serbian tourism development strategies, and especially as the protection of the cultural-historical heritage and the environment; strengthening the competitive position of the fortress through cooperation with the local community and relevant entities from the region; encouraging investment in public and communal infrastructure and tourist facilities; strengthening public awareness at the local and regional level about the importance of the tourist area for sustainable economic development.

Starting from the fact that the Lower Danube Region is recognized in the Tourism Development Strategy of Serbia from 2016 as one of the most important tourist zones and that the reconstruction of the Golubac fortress is one of the key investments in domestic tourism, the manager defined his vision: Golubac fortress (with designed programs and contents) as one of the most important tourist destinations of the Lower Danube (Program poslovanja „Tvrđava Golubački grad“ d.o.o. od 2018. do 2020. godine; Master plan turističke destinacije Donje Podunavlje, 2007).

A special challenge for the manager of a fortress is defining different levels of availability of the observed space. According to the degree of accessibility for visitors, the fortress itself is divided into five units. The first unit is the most accessible (green zone), medium difficulty (blue zone),

then difficult (red zone), extremely difficult (black zone) and inaccessible part (white zone)^{14, 15}. For each zone, the manager has defined and publicly announced the terms of use, possible risks and limitations (maximum number of visitors at the same time, age of visitors, adequate footwear and footwear, level of physical fitness, need for a trained companion).

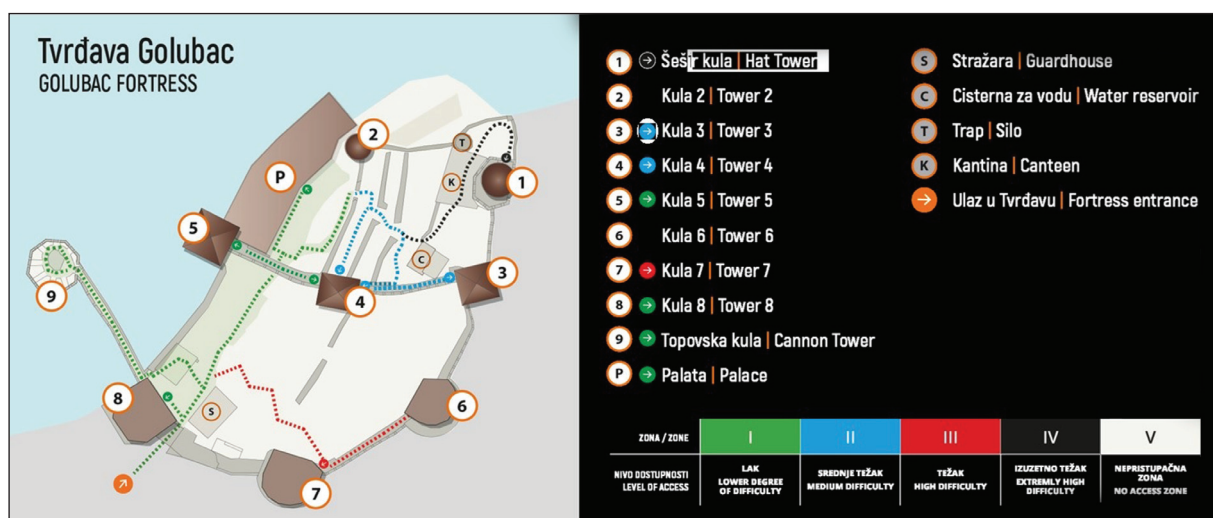


Figure 2. Defining the access zones for tourists within the fortress (level of access)

Source: <https://tvrđjagolubackigrad.rs/>

Defining zones of availability of zones for tourists shows:

- responsible attitude of the fortress management towards tourists. The existence of the last three zones clearly indicates that their use represents potential risks of injuring tourists and endangering their lives. It is not a rare coincidence that modern tourists overestimate their physical abilities and do not follow written safety rules, instructions of guides and security services. The unsafe behavior of tourists is particularly evident in attractive and at the same time potentially dangerous locations, such as Golubac fortress. There are tourists who even risk their lives to take "selfie photos" and post them on social media. How much risk such tourists represent for the manager of the Golubac fortress is best shown by the following data: in the world, every two weeks, one person dies because of selfies, while in the USA, in just six years (from 2011 to 2017), 259 people died because of selfies. in dangerous places (Stojanović, 2023) and
- responsible attitude of the management towards the property and the company entrusted to them. Any threat to the personal safety of tourists has negative consequences for the image of the destination (fortress) and for the financial result of the business (payment of compensation to tourists and court costs). That is why it is very important that the management has taken all preventive measures so that unwanted situations do not occur due to the fault of the company's employees.

The space manager has a very reasonable pricing policy. The price of the tickets depends on the zone visited, the number of visitors (individual visitors, groups), the age of the visitors (over 18 years, children from 12 to 18 years old, pensioners, special categories (students, school excursions). The entrance fee for adult visitors is from 750 dinars (green zone) to 1,200 dinars (other zones) or from 6.5 to 10.5 euros; for pensioners 450 dinars (almost 4 euros), for students 350 dinars (3 euros), group visits with a guide 800 dinars per person (7 euros). Children up to the age of 12 accompanied by a parent (guardian) do not pay the entrance fee. The prices of other services (professional photography, space rental) are also affordable.

Analyzing the sources of financing in 2023, it comes to the conclusion that own funds dominated, which is a very positive indicator. Own funds had a very high participation (almost 93%), state funds 7%, while local self-government participated with a negligible 0.06% (Table 1). The structure of own income (131 million dinars or 1.1 million euros) consists of income from the sale of tickets, guide services, parking services, souvenir sales, services for docking ships and using the pier, catering, space rental.

¹⁴ <https://tvrđjagolubackigrad.rs/o-tvrđjavi/>

¹⁵ <https://tvrđjagolubackigrad.rs/ulaznice/>

Table 1. Income structure for 2023 (in dinars)

Source of funds	Plan for 2023	Amendment of the plan for 2023	Realization	%
Budget of the Republic of Serbia	10.000.000,00	10.000.000,00	9.981.234,00	7,08
Golubac Municipality budget	100.000,00	100.000,00	82.000,00	0,06
Own income	113.900.000,00	140.000.000,00	130.919.994,00	92,86
In total:			140.983.228,00	100,00
+ 6.000.000 dinars for the project won at the Competition of the Ministry of Tourism and Youth				

Source: "Golubac Fortress" d.o.o.

It should be said that the space manager started to generate their own income only in 2016. Until that year, the company was financed from the budget of Serbia, the Municipality of Golubac, as well as funds received on the basis of public tenders¹⁶. Own revenues grew from year to year, both in absolute amount and in percentage share.

The number of visitors and the time distribution are shown in Table 2. In the first observed year, the fortress was visited by 120 thousand people, and already by 137 thousand in the next year (an increase of 15%). The reason for such a significant increase in the number of visits in 2020 is to be found in the fact that in that year tourist trips took place mainly within the national framework. In 2021, there is a slight decrease (-5%) compared to the previous year. This can be explained by the relaxation of the COVID-19 measures, so tourists started traveling outside the national borders again. Already in 2022, attendance will stabilize (+50% compared to 2019; +30% compared to 2020 and 2021). In 2023, a record result of almost 200,000 visits was recorded (+65% compared to 2019; +45% compared to 2021 and +15% compared to 2022).

The positive trend continued in the first five months of 2024 (+16% for the same period of the previous year). Observed by month, the fewest visits occur in the four winter months (November-February) and the most in the period May-September (especially August). Of the total number of visitors, domestic guests make up 60% and foreign guests 40%. Domestic guests are dominated by individuals and families with children (estimated by company management).

The question arises as to what is the optimal number of visitors, taking into account the spatial limitation and the configuration of the field. The number of visitors is growing year by year and at a high growth rate. Crowds are already forming in the peak season. Determining the optimal number of visitors will be a big challenge for the manager in the coming period. However, an even bigger challenge will be how to limit the number of visitors while at the same time allowing tourists to visit this area.

Table 2. Number and structure of visitors to Golubac Fortress from 2019 to 2024

Month/Year	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
January		1121	1906	1975	4073	2561
February		2412	2182	4592	3051	5578
March		1843	3077	7394	7630	11801
April		0	7698	17142	21669	21729
May		9274	21201	26086	27458	32414
Jun		19346	14852	20520	21718	
July		26644	20534	22912	24651	
August		43920	29607	29667	34082	
September		18330	15882	13759	23198	
October		10313	8676	18678	19117	
November		3331	4138	6446	7397	
December		1086	1113	2430	4819	
Total		137620	130866	171601	198863	

Source: "Golubac Fortress" d.o.o.

Note: The data for 2024 refer to the period from 01.01. until 29.05.

¹⁶ Public tenders for the allocation of funds should be understood as a significant source of funding. This means that the company, in our case "Golubac Fortress" d.o.o. follows public calls, that it has professional employees who know the application procedure (each donor has its own rules and procedures) and that they have quality ideas that are recognized by domestic and international donors.

In the previous six years, the company recorded over 600 cruise ship arrivals that brought a total of 57 thousand passengers - an average of 91 passengers per cruise ship (Table 3).

Table 3. Cruise ship dockings for the period 2018-2024

season	docking number	the number of guests from the cruise ship
2018	45	4800
2019	95	9750
2020	1	50
2021	63	6400
2022	210	13614
2023	175	18570
2024	38	3802
	627	56986

Source: "Golubac Fortress" d.o.o.

Note: The data for 2024 refer to the period from 01.01. until 29.05.

The area manager is also in charge of promotional activities, with the aim of increasing the number of visitors and creating a positive image of the fortress as a tourist attraction. The official website <https://tvrjavagolubackigrad.rs/> is up-to-date, reviewed and informative with two language versions (Serbian and English). The company is also active on Facebook, Instagram, YouTube. He regularly performs at tourism fairs in Serbia and the wider environment, and organizes media conferences as needed. In order to promote and sell, the company has constant cooperation with the local TO, travel organizers, as well as with other attractions (archeological site Lepenski vir, Ram fortress, Fetislam fortress).

APPLICATION OF THE GOLUBAC CITY MANAGEMENT MODEL TO OTHER FORTRESSES IN SERBIA

The existing management model can be very interesting for many other fortresses in Serbia. Especially for the reason that many of them have to go through the same path as the Golubac fortress: serious reconstruction, formation of a company for the management of the tourist area, tourism valorization of the fortress. Very specific cooperation was achieved with the representatives of the City of Užice, where the medieval fortress "Old Town" is located, which has been reconstructed in recent years and which has yet to be valorized for tourism. Despite all the differences between the fortresses in Golubac and Užice (size, accessibility, geographical location, degree of preservation, number of visitors, position on the tourist market), the Golubac fortress management model can be very useful for the City of Užice, Užice Tourist Organization and Tourist organization of the region of Western Serbia.

CONCLUSION

Based on the above, the following can be concluded:

- today fortresses are significant tourist attractions and must be managed
- the restoration (reconstruction) of the fortress is the first step and a prerequisite for a fortress to "enter" the tourist market
- after the reconstruction of the fortress, the key step is the choice of management model
- in order to manage the Golubac fortress, the state and the municipality founded a company called "Golubac Fortress" as a limited liability company (d.o.o.)
- the company that manages the fortress must create an offer (material and immaterial) that will satisfy the needs and expectations of modern tourists, but also make a profit at the same time
- the company "Golubac Fortress" d.o.o. is economically sustainable because 93% of the total income is made up of own funds (the other 7% is made up of funds from the state budget)
- the number of visitors grows from year to year (120 thousand in 2018 and almost 200 thousand in 2023). The basis of the tourist offer is the rich cultural and historical heritage of the fortress and its surroundings.

The Golubac fortress management model can be an example of good practice for many other fortresses in Serbia, i.e. the remains of medieval Serbian fortresses, when the process of their tourism valorization begins.

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