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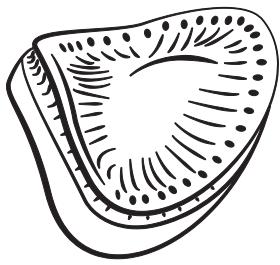
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Ohrid, North Macedonia



BOOK OF ABSTRACTS

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BOOK OF ABSTRACTS

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DIATOM DIVERSITY OF FIVE THERMAL SPRINGS IN SERBIA

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Due to their high water temperature and special water chemistry, thermal springs offer unique ecological conditions for microbial communities. They are considered to be very interesting and important habitats for the study of algal flora, including diatom biodiversity. However, their occurrence in Serbian thermal springs is scarcely investigated. The aim of this study was to assess the diversity of the diatom community in five thermal springs in central Serbia (Vrujci spa, Bukovička spa, Omoljica, Ovčanska spa and Poljane). Samples were collected from natural thermal springs except from Bukovička spa, where they were taken from the tap. In Vrujci spa, samples were collected both from the tap and from the natural spring. During the autumn and winter in 2023, a total of 11 biofilm samples were collected with a sterile scalpel. The samples were treated with HCl and KMnO₄ in the laboratory, afterwards permanent diatom slides were made. The Carl Zeiss AxioImager.M1 light microscope with DIC optics, AxioCam MRc5 and AxioVision4.9 software were used for microscopic analysis. During survey, in total 82 diatom taxa belonging to 33 genera were identified. The most taxon-rich genera were *Nitzschia* and *Navicula* with 13 and 10 taxa, respectively. Our preliminary results show that the samples from the Vrujci spa have the highest diatom diversity (62 taxa) and from Bukovička the lowest (5 taxa). In the Vrujci spa, 40 taxa were identified in the natural thermal spring, while 22 were recorded at the tap. The highest temperature (25.1°C) was measured at this site compared to the other thermal springs. The dominant taxa were *Staurosira venter* and *Achnanthidium straubianum*, which distinguishes this natural thermal spring from the others. At the tap in Vrujci, the dominance of *Navicula veneta*, *Nitzschia*

palea and *Achnanthidium microcephalum* showed that the communities at natural and artificial sites differ greatly. In Bukovička spa, the most abundant taxa included *N. palea* and *N. veneta*. In the Omoljica thermal spring, 19 taxa were identified with dominance of *N. palea*, followed by *Gomphonema parvulum* and *N. veneta* with slightly lower abundances. In Poljane, *N. palea* and *A. microcephalum* were dominant from 11 recorded taxa. In Ovčanska spa, *Nitzschia thermaloides* was found to be predominant. In addition, the other 18 taxa found at this thermal spring occur with very low abundances. Additional taxonomic insights are required to more precisely define the diatom communities and the ecology of the taxa inhabiting thermal springs. Besides, occurrence of rare species can be expected in this types of extreme habitats.

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