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Protection of Biodiversity of the Sava River Basin Floodplains

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This document has been made possible in part by funding from the European Commission.



Protection of Biodiversity of the Sava River Basin Floodplains

**A framework for the development of an eco-tourism
strategy along the Sava River**

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The following report was prepared by the Land Use Working Group

ABSTRACT

Author(s): Vanya Simeonova, Henk Zingstra. A framework for development of eco-tourism strategy along Sava River.

Photos: Eduard Bogović, Lonjsko Polje Nature Park, Krapje, Croatia

Keywords: Tourism opportunities, Sava River, eco-tourism, nature conservation



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1. Introduction

This document aims to provide a base for a coordinated and coherent development of sustainable tourism along the Sava River based on the rich landscape and biodiversity and the valuable cultural historic features along Sava River. The recommendations presented here are a reflection of the growing rate of tourism initiatives along the Sava river in Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia and Slovenia. The document was elaborated in the frame of the Life 3rd countries Project “Protection of Biodiversity of the Sava River Basin Floodplains” as part of the activities of the Land Use Groups.

Taking into account the natural assets and rich biodiversity of the Sava river, developing a common eco-tourism strategy and an action plan for the implementation of the strategy is a suitable approach for addressing the current concerns about protection of the biodiversity and the cultural heritage along Sava River. Combining and integrating the biodiversity conservation, cultural heritage and ecotourism objectives within such strategy would create a cumulative potential to achieve the goal of sustainable regional development. Implementing such a strategy would as well allow integrating the Sava tourism activities in the national tourism development agenda and nature conservation policies of the four countries and for linking tourism with the land use planning policies at national, regional and local levels.

Overall, sustainable tourism such as eco-tourism has the potential to provide value to local practices and traditions. It embraces economies of scale and sustainable local entrepreneurship growth. With this regard, the cornerstones of the Sava’s river pride is reflected by each of the Sava countries’ natural environment, traditions and customs, history, and rural way of life and are valuable not just to these countries, but as well at international scale. Capitalizing on these cornerstones can be a competitive advantage for the Sava river tourism development as qualities that in transitional economies and changing political environment can be rapidly lost.

During the last decades internationally ecotourism has been marketed as a form of nature-based tourism. However, since 1990 non-governmental organizations (NGOs), development experts, and academics have adopted it as a sustainable development tool. The term ecotourism refers on the one hand to a concept based on a set of principles, and on the other hand to a specific market segment. In 1991, the International Ecotourism Society produced one of the earliest definitions:

“Ecotourism is responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment and sustains the well being of local people.”

In 1996, IUCN (formerly the World Conservation Union) said that ecotourism:

“...is environmentally responsible travel and visitation to relatively undisturbed natural areas in order to enjoy and appreciate nature (and any accompanying cultural features – both past and present) that promotes conservation, has low negative visitor impact, and provides for beneficially active socioeconomic involvement of local populations.”



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“Ecotourism can be understood as travel to relatively under managed natural areas, aimed at providing the visitors with opportunities to view and enjoy nature and all accompanying cultural attractions, while at the same time encouraging their preservation and allowing the lowest possible impact. Ecotourism is also a form of small and medium enterprise development opportunity for developing businesses related to all affiliated services, mainly through small local enterprises, which ensures the social and economic vitality of the local population, and the just allocation of responsibilities and benefits. Ecotourism comprises important elements of nature protection, conservation education, interpretation of the natural and cultural heritage, and it complies with all forms of sustainable tourism.”

In all cases, ecotourism strives to achieve sustainable development results. All tourism activities, be they geared to holidays, business, conferences, congresses, fairs, health, adventure or ecotourism, should endeavour to be sustainable. This means that the planning and development of the tourism infrastructure, and its subsequent operation should focus on environmental, social, cultural and economic sustainability criteria. The strong orientation of ecotourism toward the principles, guidelines, and accreditation based on sustainability gives it an unusual position in the tourism field. In the years since the concept was first defined, a consensus has formed among tourism experts on the basic elements of ecotourism:

- It contributes to biodiversity conservation;
- It sustains the well being of local residents;
- It promotes responsible actions on the part of tourists and the tourism industry;
- It requires the lowest possible consumption of non-renewable resources;
- It is delivered primarily to small groups by small-scale businesses;
- It stresses local participation, ownership and business opportunities, particularly for the rural population; and
- It includes an interpretative/learning experience.

Over the past decade the countries along Sava River have been in a period of difficult transition. The socio-economic changes have led to the significant impoverishment of many people residing in small, rural sites—most in close proximity to natural areas, cultural and historic monuments. Ecotourism provides an important opportunity for these regions to recover economically. Natural and cultural resources are available for development, with little significant investment. As ecotourism is usually developed by small or family businesses, it can provide incentives for more local residents to stay and work in rural areas, stem emigration, and create many more centers of local economic prosperity. Each of the protected areas along Sava can offer some recreation and leisure services. However, on its own these services are not sufficient to attract tourists and visitors in a long term and for a longer stay. The efforts of the Sava river countries and regions are focused on combining the unique features and elements of all the protected areas in order to provide a set of services for recreation and eco-tourism as a joint tourist product.

Two elements need to be addressed for the achievement of sustainable tourism development along Sava. The first is that protected area management must include benefits for the people living around the protected areas; and the second is that financial mechanisms must be developed to sustain both conservation activities and improvements to rural livelihood. Sava countries are faced with the challenge to provide benefits to the local communities, businesses and government to preserve the diverse cultural heritage while developing financial mechanisms and incentives.



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Many attempts have been made to practice ecological, cultural, and other forms of sustainable tourism in the countries along the Sava River basin. To date, however, there has been no systematic approach and strategic consistency to these efforts. A sustainable, ecotourism development strategy will help to guide an important segment of the Sava countries' tourism development activities. The strategy will further the efforts to provide regional leadership, and to give the country a competitive edge in both the expanding domestic and international tourism markets.

In this document we present a recommendation framework for development of a tourism strategy and an action plan along the Sava River basin based on preliminary feasibility study of the tourism potential and recourses in the Sava countries.

2. Sustainable regional development along the Sava River

Sava River is the third longest and the largest by discharge tributary of the Danube River. The length of the Sava River from its main source in western Slovenian mountains to its mouth to Danube in Belgrade is about 944 km. It runs through four countries (Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Serbia), and connects three capitals of these four countries: Ljubljana in Slovenia, Zagreb in Croatia, and Belgrade in Serbia.



With its average discharge of about 1,564 m³/s, the Sava River represents the most important Danube tributary, contributing with almost 25% to the Danube's total discharge at their meeting point, in Belgrade. Sava River is very important for the Danube River Basin for its outstanding biological and landscape diversity. It hosts the largest complex of alluvial wetlands in the Danube Basin (Posavina – Central Sava Basin) and large lowland forest complexes. The Sava River is a unique example of river with some of the floodplains still intact, thus supporting the flood alleviation and biodiversity.

After dissolution of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia in the early 90-ies, the Sava River, which was the biggest national river, has become an international river of recognized importance. The establishment of the Stability Pact for South-Eastern Europe (SP) provided a solid basis for active cooperation of all stakeholders in the region and paved a way toward creation of new approach to the management of the natural resources in the basin. In June 2005 the Sava Basin Commission was established followed by signing the International Framework Agreement to protect the water recourses and the Sava environment.

The Sava River is considered to be an important natural asset of Europe and the backbone of the Pan European Ecological network. A number of international initiatives are currently contributing to the biodiversity conservation and development of ecological corridors and buffer zones that will ensure the protection of the pristine habitats and species along the river while at the same time provide opportunities for improving the welfare of the local communities living along the river. The most important landscape characteristics are to be found in the Central Sava Basin in Croatia. Here, a mosaic of typical floodplain-type natural



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and cultural landscapes is a reminder of what used to be along all major Central European rivers. Four Ramsar sites (Cerkniško jezero, Crna Mlaka, Lonjsko Polje, Obedska Bara) have been designated in the Sava River Basin and numerous important bird and plant areas, protected areas at the national level and Natura 2000 sites are also situated there.

Next to the European significance of Sava River for preserving natural resources the river has as well significant socio-economic impact on the cross border regional development in Eastern and South Eastern Europe. The river connects three European capitals: Ljubljana, Zagreb and Belgrade. As the cities grow bigger they start including rural areas of Sava's delta such as the Črnuče or Zalog through Ljubljana's outskirts and Sarajevo suburbs. In both Zagreb and Belgrade, the river divides old and new parts of the cities (Zagreb-Novigrad, Belgrade-Novigrad). The Sava flows as well as through some highly industrialized regions such as Zasavje. The river delta includes more than thirty settlements (cities and towns) on the both sides of the border in Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia.

2.1. Feasibility study of eco-tourism development along the Sava River

The development of tourism along the Sava River is currently based mainly on regional and local initiatives within the four bordering Sava countries. These activities are strongly related to recreation within the natural parks along the Sava and to the promotion of rural tourism and local agricultural products.

In order to review the current state of art of the tourism in general and the eco-tourism development along the Sava River in particular, the following data has been analysed and summarized under the following headings:

- Diversity of resources;
- Policy framework;
- Stakeholders;
- Infrastructure;
- Market trends.

2.1.1 Resource diversity

The biodiversity and the protected areas along Sava River are crucial to the development of ecotourism. Currently a system of protected areas is under development covering nearly 34 focal sites with different degree and status of protection (see fig 1). The most representative landscape characteristics are found in the central Sava basin with mosaic of natural floodplains and cultural landscapes formed by traditional land-use patterns that were in the past typical to the river valleys of Central Europe. The Sava River has been selected as a focal region of the Pan European Biological and Landscape Diversity Strategy of the Council of Europe listing the Sava floodplains as a river corridor of European importance for preserving biodiversity. Five Ramsar sites, namely Cerkniško jezero (Slovenia), Lonjsko Polje (Croatia), Bardača (BiH), Obedska Bara and Zasavica (Serbia) have been designated in the Sava River Basin. These also include a numerous Important Bird and Plant Areas, part of the proposed national ecological networks and the Natura 2000 list of designated sites. The Lonjsko Polje in Croatia is one of the largest alluvial wetlands in Europe including floodplains important for its seasonality flooded *Quercus* and *Populus* woodlands, marches, meadows and fishponds. The site contains 236 bird species and is especially important for breeding birds, of which 33 are threatened species.



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The management of the Sava's natural resources is based in large part on the management of the flood plains. Today, the Sava is largely regulated by a series of embankments, and its flooding is almost completely controlled. Despite this, some areas such as Turopolje, Gajna or Obedska bara still spontaneously flood, while Lonjsko Polje and Mokro polje are essential retention areas where the preservation of the natural habitats and traditional pastures and grazing completely depend on the regular and timely inflow and outflow of water.

The Sava river is by itself a natural asset the beauty of which can be experienced by travels by boat to enjoy the landscape, the biodiversity and the cultural historic features along the River.

The regional cultural and historical heritage of the countries along Sava River is as well central to ecotourism development. The cultural and historical values recognized by the tourism boards of the countries offer many opportunities for promoting local traditions and products that are at the heart of cultural richness and diversity of each region and form the identity of the Sava River tourism vision as a whole. The cooperation between the settlements such as cities, towns and small villages along Sava have been essential in identifying the current opportunities for offering eco-tourism and recreation goods and services.

The Sava is one of the rare rivers in this part of Europe that is still marked by number of traditional agricultural practices. This is certainly evident in the number of native animal breeds that are still today successfully bred along the river. Livestock breeding is the most important economic activity of the local population in Lonjsko Polje Park in and other areas along Sava River such as Gajna and Zasavica. The traditional grazing system for native breeds of horse (Criatian Posavina), cattle (Slavonian Sarmian Podolian) and pig (Turopolje and Blanc Slavonian) is still present to this day in the large common pasture complexes, river plains or hay fields, while the forests are still used for traditional grazing on acorns pigs.



The variety of the local lifestyles and agriculture in the settlements along Sava offers traditional food and beverages products. Some of the most popular products include organic food such as cheese, honey and horse's meet. Some exclusive products are the mangulica meat offered in Zasavica Nature Park prepared in different types of sausages, smoked ham and bacon. Mangulica pigs are descended from wild boar populations and are bred as traditional animals which still need to be made more profitable for the local communities. Breeding of indigenous animals, such as the mangulica pig as well as the Podolian cattle along Sava river is an example of the agricultural practices that need to be preserved and continued as part of the local traditions and promotion of local food products.

In this study an assessment has been made of the potential tourism activities within the three important focal points along Sava river basin i.e. the Lonjsko Polje Park and Gajna area in Croatia and the Zasavica park in Serbia. The natural values of these areas were considered significant for the establishment of ecologically linked corridors along the entire Sava River offering opportunities for eco-tourism.



2.1.2 Tourism policy frameworks in the countries along Sava

Currently there is no unified policy framework for tourism development along Sava River basin and all tourism activities are managed by the countries individually based on their national sectoral legislation and operating institutional frameworks. For linking and contributing to the tourism activities along Sava river basin as a whole important role plays the establishment of trans-boundary cooperation for coordinating the tourism developments and identifying common opportunities to enhance the socio-economic benefits and preservation of the biodiversity along the river. This section reviews the general tourism policies currently operating in the four Sava River countries i.e.: Serbia, Croatia, Bosnia & Herzegovina and Slovenia which to one degree or another influence the regional tourism development along Sava river basin as a whole.

Tourism policy in Serbia

Well-preserved nature is one of the fundamental competitive advantages for tourism development in Serbia. Variety of natural resources is a reason to consider development of ecotourism in Serbia as important tool for sustainable tourism development and as a long-term approach to achieve regional sustainability. The bases for development of ecotourism as a niche market for Serbian tourism are the protected areas (five national parks, three Ramsar sites such as Zasavica, biosphere reserve, nature reserves, nature parks, etc.). At this moment five percent of Serbia's territory is regulated for nature protection. The Landscape Management Plan of Serbia foresees to include 10% of the territory for nature protection by the year 2010.

In Serbia appropriated normative preconditions for tourism development are already created: Law on Tourism (1994), changes of Law on Tourism (1999), various acts based on Law on Tourism (1994-1997), Spatial plan of the Republic of Serbia (1995). It is to expect that these documents will be harmonized with European Union regulations and adapted to the contemporary tendencies in tourism development. In spite of the existence of normative preconditions for tourism development, it is especially important to emphasize the fact that between 1989 and 2000 tourism in Serbia, especially foreign, dropped dramatically caused by domestic and international political and socio-economic factors.

In 2006 the Serbian government adopted a strategy for tourism development. The strategy outlines a plan for investing in Serbian tourism until 2015. In this strategy the Serbian Tourism Ministry defines its vision for developing tourism in Serbia, and an action plan for its implementation. The strategy points out that Serbia has considerable potentials for new development, products that can and need to be recovered and commercialised rapidly, both with their own resources and with expected support of the community. The objectives of the Tourism Strategy are the following:

- a) To stimulate, thanks to tourism, especially foreign tourism, economic growth, employment and quality of life of the population;
- b) Through tourism, to ensure development of positive international image of the country;
- c) In the best interest of the development of tourism, to ensure long term protection of natural and cultural resources;
- d) To achieve international quality standards and first and foremost protection of tourist consumers, in accordance with the present European practices.



Considering the implementation of the strategy until 2015, the tourism development of Serbia shall take place under the authority of a centralised state agency which needs to be established, as the competent body of the Government for management, coordination and control in the field of tourism. Pursuant to the Strategy, Serbian tourism will be structured in four tourist clusters based on different forms of economic experience and concentration of various types of resources in different parts of the country, and following modern trends and principles of regional development.

Tourism policy in Croatia

During the last years different policy measures have been introduced in Croatia with regard to tourism. These have been built into the main development documents as the National Strategy of Tourism Development, the Master plan for tourism, Classification and categorisation of Tourism supply facilities, and in numerous additional regulations.

The current strategy on tourism of Croatia analyses the market demand preferences, and identifies a few types of tourism being present on the market such as ecotourism, cultural tourism, thematic tourism, adventure tourism, cruises and nautical tourism.

In Croatia the “ecologically and socially responsible way of travelling” such as ecotourism develops more and more into an economically important product, “travelling with a natural element”. Thus far, ecotourism has created possibilities for development in inadequately developed tourism regions, as well as for the maintenance and funding of protected areas. Ecotourism in Croatia has been differentiated according to two important segments: small groups with special interests in ecotourism who spend their whole vacation this way; and the large number of tourists who spend their vacation, for example, on the beach, but also take part in “short nature excursions”.

Croatian national parks, and the other protected areas that have great attractiveness, are a huge potential for ecotourism development, sustainable hunting tourism, rural tourism, year-round mountain holidays, as well as excursion tourism. The significant obstacles to development lies in the fact that the areas which have a special natural value are not yet organized or equipped to accept and offer a quality stay to a large number of guests. Development of a trekking infrastructure, a system of signposts, rest areas, and an adequate transportation system, would significantly improve the tourism potential of these areas. It is imperative to stress the preservation of nature, as well as the control of traffic through these protected areas.

Ecologically produced food is yet another component of tourism and ecology which has become an important factor in defining the tourism product and its differentiation in the market. Opportunities for the production of ecologically-grown food and its sale in catering facilities which offer their services to tourists must be further developed and used in light of the fact that the importance of this segment of the tourist supply is increasing.

Cultural tourism is more and more becoming a significant part of the supply. In the area of cultural tourism, it is necessary to identify market niches with special cultural interests. In 2003, the Croatian Ministry of Tourism initiated the development of the cultural tourism strategy recognizing, firstly, the potential that cultural tourism offers in terms of diversifying



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the 'sun and sea'-based products and, secondly, the fact that significant latent demand for this kind of product already exists among visitors, with half of the Croatian summer tourists participating in some kind of cultural activities, but are mostly dissatisfied with what is offered in this respect.

Thematic tourism has become one of the most important catalysts of development. It is mainly based on the 3-E principle: Entertainment, Excitement, and Education, and therefore includes tourism offerings and contents which combine these three elements. In addition adventure tourism is a small market niche with the potential for growth. Croatia has the natural potential to develop many very diverse aspects of adventure tourism, such as white water rafting, canoeing, kayaking, paragliding, hot air balloon flights, free climbing, off-road racing, and many other activities.

Currently the regional authorities have as well the responsibilities to develop tourism strategies at regional level and ensure the involvement of the key stakeholders in this process. There are number of tourism boards and associations established for this purpose including in the regions of the Sava basin in Croatia.

Tourism policy in Bosnia and Herzegovina

Tourism has developed into the key sector of economy. Its development has extremely positive effects on the national economy and society on the whole, particularly in terms of the creation of new jobs. World Tourism Organization (WTO) has ranked BiH among the group of countries with the highest anticipated annual growth, estimating annual growth rate at the level of 10,5 %. In 2004, the number of tourist arrivals in BiH was 3,5% higher than in 2003; it is projected that BiH, in terms of the growth of tourism, will have the third highest growth degree in the world until the end of 2020. The main tourist branches include mountain tourism cultural and heritage tourism, religious tourism, eco tourism, active and adventure sport tourism, spa tourism, sea tourism (FIPA, 2005).

Federal Ministry of Environment and Tourism of BiH is responsible for the tourism policy and legislation enforcement in the area of tourism including monitoring of tourist flows and trends in local and international markets; directing the long-term development of tourism within the economic system. However due to the complex institutional framework divided on entities and counties the realization of this policy is rather fragmented among the different tiers of the governmental organizations at state, regional and local level.

Besides the main Tourism Association of Bosnia and Herzegovina at the Entity levels there are two tourism promotion agencies: the FBiH Tourism Community and the RS Tourism Organization. Further the Federation Tourism Community is broken into 10 Tourism Community offices at the cantonal level. The two entity agencies have also established a State-level Tourism Association in BiH, with the sole purpose of coordinating tourism promotion of BiH at international fairs. At the cantonal level, the administrative units may exist in name, but only a few have a tourism program in place. The tourism offices at all levels are funded from a mandated membership among tourist businesses, and an accommodation tax, that are then distributed at agreed ratios. The State-level Association has no direct funding sources; rather, adequate funds are forwarded from the entity level agencies on an agreed project-by-project basis.



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The FBiH legal framework for tourism consists of two main laws such as the Law on Tourism and Catering Businesses (“Official Gazette of Federation BiH”, No. 19/96 and 28/03) and the Law on Tourism Associations and Tourism Promotion in Federation BiH (“Official Gazette of Federation BiH”, No. 19/96 and 28/03).

Tourism strategy and product development, capacity-building, adoption of new business models and technology standards are the critical next steps in bringing BiH into the recognized tourism community. The task ahead is for the BiH tourism development to commit to a unified strategy in several priority areas, creating programs that can be funded, designed, implemented, and sustained. One of the tasks standing before BiH is the implementation of her Mid-term Development Strategy (PRSP), with the following key priorities for 2004-2007: increase of employment, strengthening of public sector, reduction of public spending, the establishment of a stable welfare system and accession to the European Union.

The areas along the Sava River in BiH are located to the extreme northeast and are the most fertile regions in the country. With over 50% of its territory used for agricultural purposes, the area is important for developing rural and eco-tourism.

Tourism policy in Slovenia

Organizing and basic orientations of Slovene tourism are regulated from the Law for stimulation of tourism (Official gazette RS, number 57/1998) and Resolution about the strategic aims in the field of tourism development in RS with the program of activity and measures (Official gazette RS, number 7/1995). The law has subscribed three levels of organizing of Slovene tourism: competent ministry of tourism, the Slovenian tourist board (STB) on the national level, territorial and regional tourist boards and local tourist boards (LTO). Ministry of tourism was abolished in the year 2000, the Slovenian Tourist Board was transformed into a public institution, at this moment there are 32 LTO.

Today in Slovenia a series of public, civil, mixed and private institutions operate on all three levels, for which unclear separation of competences and responsibilities is characteristic. Circumstances show that in the field of organization of tourism on the local and regional basis in the past three years have not made a progress by connecting and stimulating cooperation between tourist subjects. Most successful were the organization by the development of the destination management of those local tourist boards on developed tourist field, which have been founded before the law was passed. They managed to connect at least a part of tourist subjects on the local and regional tourist field, where they operate.

In spite of the fact that many local tourist offices have reached important results in the field of promotion and connections of local tourist offers, the whole system of organizing the Slovene tourism was a relatively unsuccessful because 1) the system was meant to promote and not to stimulate tourist programs 2) the system based on budget sources or obligatory membership instead of marketing and interest membership, and 3) the system didn't use the European comparable modern methods of new public partnership.



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The Development plan and the policy of the Slovenian Tourism consist of number of strategic and legal documents presented in box 1.

- Slovenia's Development Strategy 2007-2013;
- Sectoral national strategies (spatial, transport, cultural, regional, environmental protection, biotic diversity, etc.);
- Framework of Economic and Social Reforms to Increase Prosperity in Slovenia;
- Development Plan and Policies of Slovene Tourism 2002-2006;
- Spatial Development Strategy of Slovenia;
- Regional development programmes;
- Local tourist strategies;
- Strategic business and tourist plans and programmes of tourist organisations in the public, private and social sectors;
- Strategies of individual tourism products (gambling tourism, business tourism, health/wellness tourism, cycling tourism, youth tourism, etc.);
- Development policies in the field of tourism in the EU;
- UNWTO development policies and principles.

Box 1. Policy documents on Tourism Development of Slovenia

In spite of the above-mentioned disadvantages the implementation plan of the current Slovenian strategy on tourism proposes a number of concepts that have been upgraded and well defined in the last strategic document. The main emphasis for improvement is given on the investments policy, development of human resources and quality of the touristic offers and products.

2.1.3 Stakeholders

During the last decade the socio-economic situation along the Sava River has been changing rapidly. While in the 1990s the area has undergone through depopulation, hindered economic development and decreasing welfare of the local communities in the second half of the 20 century an intensification of the agriculture took place. These changes had an effect on the management of the Sava basin natural resources and on the pursuit to balance between different national, regional and local interests of stakeholders, involved in the revitalization of the area and the economic developments. The development of tourism as a branch of the economy is currently considered as an opportunity to redevelop the agricultural practices, create new regional looks and develop inland touristic activities, which will give local population the chance to stay in the area in a better welfare. However, the pressure of different economic developments within the Sava Basin regions of the bordering countries and the need to conserve the pristine river ecosystems requires a comprehensive and careful consideration of the different stakeholders' interests.

Within the Communication Strategy (Popović & Koopmanschap, 2007) of the LIFE project initiative for the Protection of Biodiversity of the Sava River Basin Floodplains number of important stakeholders were identified that play significant role in the management of the River Basin as a whole. The priority stakeholders' groups identified within this initiative are described in box 2.



- People living in the area along the Sava River such as farmers, cattle/horse/pig breeders, villages, towns inhabitants (families);
- Recourse managers: Nature Parks' Managers, Foresters, agricultural areas managers;
- Decision makers: governmental administrations at national, regional and local level;
- International organizations: International Sava River basin Commission, International Commission for protection and sustainable use of the river Danube;
- Non-governmental organizations (NGOs): nature conservation NGOs;
- Private actors such as land & property owners, family tourism businesses.

Box 2. Priority stakeholders groups Sava river basin

For the development of the tourism along the Sava River Basin few other important and more specific stakeholders were identified within the management planning of the some of the nature parks along the river. For example in the Nature Park Lonjsko Polje (Croatia) a number of stakeholders has been identified (Box 3).

- Regional authorities: Sisačko-Moslavačka and Brodsko-Posavska counties;
- Tourist Boards: tourist Associations of Sisak-Moslavina and Tourist Association of Towns and Municipalities;
- Local Boards: Municipalities and Towns Moslavina and Posavina, Slavonia;
- Public Organizations: Croatian Water Directorate and Water management offices, Croatian Forest Directorate, Croatian Forest Management Offices, Port Authority Sisak;
- Breeders Associations: Croatian cattle center
- Breeders Associations (Moslavina, Posavina, Slavonia)
- Hunters & Fishing: Hunting Associations (Moslavina, Posavina, Slavonia)
- Scientists: Social science researchers
- Natural sciences researchers

Box 3. Stakeholders in tourism sector in Lonjsko Polje Nature Park (Croatia)

In 2004, the management board of the Lonjsko Polje Park has initiated the formation of a Stakeholder committee, the *Lonjsko Polje Nature Park Council*, aiming to involve all land users and local people living and working in the park in its management. The Lonjsko Polje stakeholder committee coordinates its activities with the stakeholder committee established at the regional level of the Central Posavina region. Currently similar initiatives are undertaken in the other nature parks of the Sava River such as in Zasavica Nature Reserve.

2.1.4 Infrastructure

Infrastructure cannot be specifically isolated for the purposes of tourism. Rather, infrastructure must be viewed as it relates to rural areas that are the focus of tourism along the Sava River Basin. Basic utility infrastructure such as transportation networks, power and heating supply, water supply, sewage and waste management, communications, and

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telecommunication networks are generally available in the towns and villages of the Sava river Basin.



The specific tourism related infrastructure and supporting facilities within the rural areas and the nature parks of Sava are widely diverse throughout the four bordering countries. Accommodation and services vary widely in quality. The most popular are the locally preserved traditional family houses. Yet significant improvements are needed in terms of the accommodation such as the wooden houses or other types of culturally inherited traditional housing in order to meet higher touristic standards. In most of the nature parks in the Sava river Basin such as Zasavica, Gajna, Lonjsko Polje, Mokro Polje etc. the tourism infrastructure is in the early stages of development and in line with the financial capacities and the needs of the market. The development of visiting systems and infrastructure network for educational and recreational routes such as cycling and hiking routes are still to be developed or improved. In some cases such as in Lonjsko Polje Park it is as well considered that the visiting system is based on reduction of the car use and parking within the park.

The fostering of the tourism development in the Sava River Basin will dependent on further improvements of the current infrastructure network and provision of good access to the rural areas. In addition the support of the local communities in provision of accommodation and maintenance of the areas will be essential while the municipalities and nature park offices and visitor canters can serve as hubs for the ecotourism facilities and tourism promotion.

2.1.5 Market Trends

The domestic tourism market currently offers the most opportunities for the tourism promotion along the Sava River Basin. The currently undergoing tourism activities in the nature parks of the Sava River indicate that the domestic market will be important for the growth of tourism development along Sava and will be increasingly focused on rural and ecotourism. In one of the biggest protected areas along the Sava, Lonjsko Polje Nature Park in Croatia there has been an increasing trend of the visits in the park. The statistical data of the nature park office indicates that during the years 2001 and 2008 the number of visitors increased from 2510 to 21100 and respectively the accommodation provision has increased from 11 to 68 available beds between the years 2005-2008 (Bogović, 2009).

Next to the domestic market, however, there are indications for the potential increase in international tourist in the regions of the river. For this the cultural tourism that has developed in recent years will play an important role. There are indications from the Park management authorities along Sava that there are a higher number of tourists motivated by nature and cultural heritage. The further improvement of the tourist offers such as complete packages with diverse types of cultural heritage and natural sites' visits, combined with well-developed tourist, information and transportation infrastructure seem to attract more international tourist in the future. There is no statistical information on international nature and cultural visitors along the Sava nature parks as there have been no attempts yet to track the number of these visitors and tourists.



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The economic trends of the Sava river tourism show that there is a potential for developing special forms of tourism such as eco-tourism, educational tourism, adventure tourism, cultural tourism, agri-tourism. The different forms of tourism offer not only tourists to travel for the purpose of recreation and longer stay in the area, but also for short time visitors' pursuits undertaken in their leisure time. In this relation the Sava tourism and recreation activities should evolve in market terms to as service industry, comprising tangible elements including transport systems; hospitality services, accommodation, foods and beverages, tours, souvenirs; and related public services and intangible elements such as rest and relaxation, culture, adventure, new and different experiences of local lifestyles and nature. The trends for cultural tourism along Sava seem to be increasing as leisure opportunities for visitors.

However, as the economic importance of tourism and recreation depends on the stage of the countries economic development there should be a more detailed local market analysis at the microeconomic level of the Sava river regions of the four bordering countries. Such microeconomic analysis is needed to identify the economic patterns of demand which will determine which specific tourism recreation and leisure goods and services to supply in each area and how to increase the cumulative benefit from the added values of these services and supplies as a Sava tourism product.

2.1.6 Situation analysis of current tourism development trends: SWOT

Based on the SWOT analysis of current tourism development trends along the Sava River a matrix has been drawn up reviewing the current state of art of the tourism development framework at the level of the nature parks and focal areas within three countries and at the trans-boundary level of Sava River area as a whole. Key strengths and opportunities have been brought in focus while trying to address the weaknesses with appropriate policies and activities and change them into strengths.

| STRENGTHS | WEAKNESSES |
|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Preserved nature and rich biodiversity • Cultural heritage and local traditions • Traditional Cuisine • Geographic location • Hospitality of service providers and the local communities • Motivated protected areas managers • Accessibility • Ecologically produced agricultural products • Traditional agricultural practices and animal (life stock) breeding | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of sufficient and quality tourist infrastructure (lodging, food) • Few entrepreneurs and integrated offers • Insufficient human resources • Lack of funds and investments • Institutional and administrative constraints • Lack of integration of touristic activities within other economic sectors • Illegal practices (hunting & fishery) • Lack of cooperation between initiatives and organizations involved in tourism development • Lack of agreed plans on tourism development • Insufficient cross-border cooperation • Low recognition of the protected areas as a destination or sub-destination • Low enforcement of regulations • No implementation of public private partnership |



| OPPORTUNITIES | THREATS |
|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Utilize the Sava tourism potential at locally, regionally and trans-nationally Joint products branding Ecological agriculture and traditional grazing practices Increasing the regional economic development and communities welfare Landscape restoration practices Contributing to nature conservation and building up ecological corridors Marketing Sava destinations such as: individual family offers, off-season offers, culturally rich offers, eco-tourism offers, active recreation offers Tourism for short repeated holidays New sub-destinations in Europe | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Low interest and lack of understanding of the government for the development of the tourism activities Eventual flood risks Natural Habitats' fragmentation Strict river regulation Unstable socio-economic and political situation Lack of focus and interest to develop tourism along the Sava Local pollution |

Table 1. SWOT matrix Sava river tourism development

2.2. Vision for tourism development along the Sava River

Identifying a vision for the Sava River tourism development would mean to develop a shared concept or picture of what the local communities and the key stakeholders involved in the regional development want the tourism sector look like in period of ten to twenty years. Such a vision will provide the opportunity to step outside the immediate and most pressing problems and to look toward the future of the area.

The vision on tourism development would address a combination of issues environmental issues considered as central to the local community's future or the regional development, such as economic development, education, government service and quality of life.

The first ideas of the Sava River tourism vision expressed by the local stakeholders put emphasis on ecotourism. It is apparent that ecotourism will be an essential element of the Sava tourism strategy as a pillar of tourist attractiveness and a viable element of the regional economy. However the vision on Sava Tourism development should as well become an important part of local government planning, revenue generation, and civic pride.

The tourism development along Sava river will offer high quality products throughout the year, taking advantage of the diversity, uniqueness, and authenticity of its natural and cultural resources. These products will be targeted to national and international visitors who are responsible, caring and supportive of nature protection, biodiversity conservation and cultural heritage. The tourism of Sava River Basin, therefore, is envisioned as a brand of tourism that:

- Contributes to local economic growth and social development;
- Attracts national and international tourists at higher expenditure levels, and for longer periods to meet the demands of the domestic market and increase the opportunities for international marketing;
- Diversifies existing tourism products and services by expanding regional and trans-boundary cooperation with the other Sava countries and regions;
- Develops positive attitudes and knowledge among the local communities towards;
- Biodiversity conservation and cultural preservation;
- Perpetuates and develops ecologically friendly livelihoods and agricultural products;
- Expands the number of tools and financial mechanisms for preserving natural;



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- and cultural resources; and
- Drives infrastructure development in appropriate, environment friendly ways.

3. Identifying Strategic Objectives

In order to identify a strategy for tourism targeting along Sava River it is needed to define the main objectives for the tourism development that address the main target groups of tourists such as foreign versus domestic, sportive versus easy going or special interests such as nature or eco-tourism activities. Based on the SWOT analysis several strategic objectives can be defined with regard to the tourism development in the areas along the Sava presented in Table 2.

| | Strengths | Weaknesses |
|---------------|---|---|
| Opportunities | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tourism development should be focused on: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Nature observation and recreation ✓ Promotion of ecological agricultural products ✓ Cultural heritage ✓ Active outdoor tourism ✓ Education ✓ Family holidays ✓ Farm holidays | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improve communication between stakeholders • Improve cross-border cooperation • Build up and improve the infrastructure • Clean up the sites from pollution • Create institutional and human resource capacity • Increase awareness on nature appreciation • Start Fund raising and PPP |
| Threats | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lobby among governmental organizations and decision makers to increase the interest in preservation of the natural resources and development of sustainable tourism • Apply Landscape restoration approaches for flood risks prevention | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop integrated management plans for nature areas along Sava in which tourism actions are well integrated • Improve management capacity of the Parks and protected areas • Inform governmental authorities about the current successes and potential opportunities in tourism development |

Table 2. Strategic directions for Sava tourism development based on the SWOT analysis

The strategic objectives for the tourism development can be grouped into five themes which are to be reflected in the countries tourism strategies at national and regional level. These themes include:

- Biodiversity Conservation and Cultural Heritage Preservation;
- Eco-tourism Market development;
- Nature Management and Planning;



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- Regional and Local Development;
- Transboundary cooperation for eco-tourism.

3.1 Biodiversity Conservation and Cultural Heritage Preservation

Biodiversity conservation is already recognized as a legitimate part of the Sava River Basin development and protection strategies. The adaptation of the Guidelines for Activities Related to Sustainable Tourism and Biological Diversity produced by the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) are being used to guide the process of developing and planning the Sava river basin nature management.

The existing management plans of the Nature parks

along Sava River such as the Lonjsko Polje, Zasavica, Gajna and other protected areas along Sava are serving as a foundation for tourism development. Many of the initiatives for eco-tourism are undertaken by the Nature parks' Management authorities in correlation to their nature conservation efforts in the areas. The already established in some of the parks such as Lonjsko Polje collaboration between eco-tourism and cultural tourism will stimulate the development of both and contribute to an integrated approach to conserve and preserve biodiversity of the nature parks.



The main strategic objectives with regard to biodiversity conservation and cultural heritage preservation can be defined as follows:

a) *Develop or improve the protected areas Management Plans and Regional Master Plans or Strategies for Sustainable Tourism Development so that they correspond to modern nature conservation concepts.* The following elements should be included in these plans:

- An inventory and assessment of appropriate opportunities for development of ecotourism inside and outside a protected area (PA) and Cultural Monument (CM) and within at least a 20 km radius of each area;
- Zones within PAs and CMs, in which ecotourism areas are prioritized based on an assessment of potential human impacts;
- Full participation of local communities, cultural heritage preservation groups, and local/regional government;
- Financial assessment of the initial investment needed for maintaining sites;
- Monitoring plans and periodic reviews of PAs, CMs, and ecotourism development activities; and
- Announcement of new PAs and CMS, and development of appropriate management plans.
- Provide Assurances that protected areas plans and cultural heritage plans mitigate environmental impacts associated with tourism.

b) *Ensure that revenue generation for biodiversity and cultural conservation is clearly provided for and includes voluntary visitor contributions, contracts, taxes and concessions.* In order to develop mutually beneficial arrangements there is a need to:

- Develop and legalize beneficial financial mechanisms that promote the primary objectives of sustainable development and nature conservation. Consider protected area and ecotourism financial mechanism models from



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other countries that employ the use of limited period concessions or commercial contracts;

- Develop model contracts that serve to guide concession relationships, and establish their duration and operating procedures.
- Assign the revenues generated from these contracts to benefit the objectives of nature conservation, cultural preservation and local economic growth;
- Support the establishment of a Protected Areas Fund (PAF) to ensure ongoing financial support for capital improvements and operating projects associated with a system of protected areas along Sava River Basin. The PAF would support capital investments, park and other protected area development projects, infrastructure, cultural sites, and provide ecotourism development grants to communities that work in close proximity to protected areas.

c) *Develop Inventories of Sustainable Agriculture, Cultural, and Historical Resources in Concert with the development of the Sava River Ecological Network.* These inventories are a prerequisite for developing a competitive ecotourism product. To link these three evolving networks the following measures are appropriate:

- Use the ecological network scheme as a guide for identifying and assessing sustainable agricultural resources for a ecotourism network
- Develop a Sava River network of cultural itineraries and include a database of all major cultural and historical heritage sites, and cultural events envisaged by country or a nature park and integrate the European Network of Cultural Itineraries;
- Develop ecotourism networks in compliance with existing national and international legislation.
- Develop and maintain a database to serve as the basis for a Geographic Information System (GIS), linking these elements at national and regional levels and at the level of the Sava River Commission.

d) *Support Sustainable Agriculture and Forestry, and Species and Habitat Restoration Activities that can also Serve as Ecotourism Opportunities.* A number of agricultural and forestry practices which are very prominent for the Sava River tourism development need to be still promoted as an incentive for collaboration between the private sector, ecotourism business, and agricultural and forestry organizations on conservation of species and habitats and cultural conservation. Necessary measures include:

- Providing incentives and investment opportunities for those businesses and local communities that develop new conservation areas within priority biodiversity areas outside of the protected area system;
- Providing incentives and investment opportunities for rural communities and businesses that retain and adopt sustainable agriculture practices, organic production systems, and the restoration of native species and cultivars;
- Providing subsidies and support for businesses and communities that take responsibility for cultural conservation.

e) *Develop and Implement Volunteer Programs that Support Biodiversity Conservation, Cultural Preservation, Sustainable Land Use Systems, and Ecotourism Development.* Some



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efforts on voluntary basis can be often the basis of nature and culture tourism along the Sava River that link communities and volunteers to conservation, sustainable agriculture, and cultural heritage and ecotourism programs. These initiatives are largely isolated and independent of central government support and recognition. There could be efforts made to link these voluntary organizations to the private sector, particularly to ecotourism activities. For this it is necessary to:

- Establish a Sava River volunteer ecotourism network around the themes of biodiversity conservation, culture, and sustainable agriculture. This would promote the regular exchange of information and experiences, and direct and guide volunteer activities along the river's nature areas and settlements;
- Develop schemes for theoretical and practical training of volunteers as guides and interpreters;
- Offer practical field training in ecotourism for students in educational institutions as an alternative or supplementary training to existing field-training programs (in hotels, restaurants, and travel agents service)

3.2 Eco-tourism market development

Well planned eco-tourism supports achieving the objectives of the protected area management while it in addition also can generate extra income for the area although this is not the first objective of eco-tourism. Sustained income generation requires business acumen and skills development. The elements of successful business development should be evaluated and applied to ecotourism development along the Sava River. The success of the market targeting for tourism depends on the complex process of promotion and direct marketing which influences the attraction and satisfaction of tourists as consumers (Figure 1).



Figure 1. Different marketing activities influence the levels of operation

The main strategic objectives with respect to market development are:

a) Develop Clusters or Networks of Core Ecotourism and Supply Chain Businesses at Regional and Local Levels. Scattered ecotourism initiatives along the Sava River Basin could benefit from the exchange of information and cost savings associated with national or regional network of ecotourism providers. The scale of such a network is hard to determine at the present time and should evolve from a model that demonstrates the advantages to network subscribers. Ecotourism clusters or networks could start within key nature areas or cultural settlements along Sava, growing into a trans-boundary system. In order to advance this idea, it is important to:

- Establish relationships between national specialized tourism associations, leading travel agencies, and regional and local tourism information centers;



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- Integrate and unify available databases in the regions, which have been compiled at different time periods with different standards and criteria, and include them in an integrated national informational network;
- Develop a clear network charter that is supported by periodic meetings, annual exhibits and forums;
- Develop information networks that can demonstrate advantages to their subscribers and result in better business development.
- Identify clusters by products or regions and attract them into a cluster to facilitate contacts and relationships, and to establish joint programs for developing a marketing strategy and a means of funding the product and/or region;
- Develop outreach programs to international and regional special interest groups: caving, hiking, rock climbing, botany, birding, and craft specialties, among others;
- Develop a series of ecotourism and cultural tourism products and networks centered on a combination of biodiversity conservation, cultural and historic heritage preservation, sustainable agriculture, and cultural heritage.

b) Improve the Entrepreneurial Capacity of Businesses and Local Communities Providing Ecotourism Services. Many of the local communities that have potential for offering and benefiting from ecotourism need to gain more experience to provide ecotourism products and services to their clients. At a certain stage, small, rural communities are able to realize the advantages of ecotourism as an income-generating tool, but they lack the necessary means and skills to realize success. Thus, these communities require small and micro-business development assistance to strengthen their entrepreneurial capacities. Such an approach requires:

- Business orientation seminars – e.g., an introduction to the supply and demand of ecotourism;
- Programs for raising public awareness on ecotourism issues;
- An awards program for the best regional practices and best investment by entrepreneurs in the field of ecotourism;
- Business training provided within the educational system in developing products, marketing, small business operation, and business planning and credit applications;
- Nature and cultural heritage interpretation programs and training programs for guides;
- An exchange of visits at national, regional and international levels for sharing experience and studying successful practices in the field;
- Developing specialized training courses for entrepreneurs in ecotourism

c) Expand Access to Financing Mechanisms, Equity Investments and Other Funding Resources. Conditions for investing in and financing ecotourism along Sava River are relatively undeveloped. The scale and costs related to most rural ecotourism products and services are not sufficiently large enough to attract much commercial banking support. However, investments in a great number of small-size projects in key target areas, rather than in large-scale individual projects, are needed to develop rural ecotourism. The following mechanisms are seen as appropriate for advancing ecotourism models that benefit the goals of nature conservation, cultural preservation, small business development, and improvement in rural communities' economic growth:



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- Use state and donor contributions, and private and foreign donors, to “grow” an investment fund for ecotourism financing.
- Allow the municipally generated funds from the tourism tax to be used as matching funds for ecotourism development. Municipalities who successfully generate funds from this tax should be rewarded with matching grants from donor and government sources. Matching and/or challenge grants can also be tools for attracting private capital, and should operate at a scale that can be absorbed at local community levels.
- Commercial banks should be encouraged to administer and service ecotourism loans at a manageable scale by most rural ecotourism development businesses. Their risk should be lowered with credit guarantees from the government and donor credit authorities.
- Investigate and develop voluntary private contributions for ecotourism development and nature conservation, cultural tourism development, through international and national private sector parties.

d) Facilitate the Development of Effective Small and Medium Ecotourism Enterprises. Small and medium enterprises play a key role in sustainable tourism development. They are more flexible and readily tailored to provide tourists with extra care or customized services. Their operations are often more in tune with community needs, and their offerings more sensitive to local traditions and experience. A more considered small enterprise approach to ecotourism would:

- Introduce integrated consultative and business development “agencies” linked to key ecotourism regions, with assistance from the national or regional tourism agencies/boards or associations;
- Use the consultative services provided by various EU programs and projects and other donors;

e) Focus Ecotourism Development on Domestic Markets as an Initial Priority and then Expand to Targeted International Market Segments:

- In the short term, efforts to market and develop ecotourism products and services should be targeted at the regional and local domestic markets. Ecotourism service providers should be trained and assisted to assess and monitor the current customer satisfaction, and to further develop and improve their products.
- Focusing on specific target groups of tourists such as families and young people appears to be a timely and workable starting point, since youth markets appear to be the most readily adaptable to ecotourism products. Partnerships between ecotourism service providers and local recreation and outdoor sport clubs could provide tailored programs directed at this market segment. Regional trip circuits along the Sava River could be an interesting opportunity. Integrating ecotourism niche markets into a marketing strategy, using communications and the Internet, and actively participating in travel market expositions should expand this cooperative effort.

f) Formulate Guidelines for a Visitors’ Ecotourism and Cultural Tourism Interpretation and Education Program. There are no specific guidelines for tourist interpretation and education in the Sava countries protected area systems, surrounding areas or other



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attractive natural areas that promote the messages of biodiversity conservation, ecotourism, and cultural heritage. In order to strengthen this process it is necessary to:

- Develop successful interpretation prototypes/examples through specialized capacity- building programs, infrastructure, printed materials, signs, site interpretative materials, pre- and post-visit programs, and similar activities that can be used to guide interpretation and education efforts linked to biodiversity conservation, cultural conservation, and adjacent support/buffer zones.
- Develop the expertise and appropriate support within national and local departments, protected area staff and NGOs to promote these models.
- Develop programs, curricula and specific training courses.
- Integrate the development of infrastructure for ecotourism and cultural tourism with area-specific interpretation and education programs.

g) Establish a Program for Ecotourism Awareness and Capacity Building for Tourism Businesses and Government Officials. Managers protected areas, cultural site managers, and local governments might be faced with presenting ecotourism opportunities to representatives of small- and large-scale businesses. In order to afford communities and entrepreneurs a focused orientation to these opportunities efforts should be made for:

- Using existing models and practitioners, including exchange visits and best practices shared between successful communities and emerging ecotourism communities;
- Using these programs to assess and promote the preparedness of regional entrepreneurs and local government to respond to ecotourism as business and rural development opportunities.

h) Develop a Private Voluntary System for Ecotourism Product Certification. There are two main reasons for ecotourism destinations and businesses to get involved in certification and environmental management programs. First, marketing green certification has been successful in attracting customers and increasing profits. People are choosing locations and accommodations and other business relationships based on the green certification. Second, an environmental management system (EMS) is an essential part of tourist management in key biodiversity areas. Biodiversity conservation, communities, and the nation benefit from energy savings, effective waste management systems, and more environmental/ landscape-friendly infrastructure design. The development of a certification system can help to:

- Develop stronger relations with other European and international certification programs;
- Generate interest in participating in regional and international forums to promote EMS standards.
- Develop a voluntary certification and accreditation scheme in concert with regional development and promotion of private sector ecotourism.

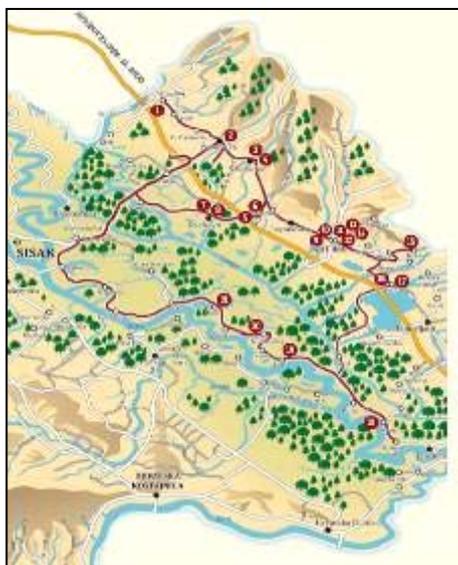
3.3 Regional and local development

The Regional development approach of planning in Croatia, Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Slovenia is well established within their institutional frameworks. Most of the regional authorities presented in the countries have to one degree responsibilities for tourism development in the regions. Number of regional authorities has already developed strategic



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plans for tourism development which objectives are addressed in the Protected Areas Management Plans.



Establishing regional cooperation networks could become the basis for tourism promotion and marketing, using information hubs linked to visitor centers at major tourism destinations and at protected area gateways. The regional networks for tourism development such as the regional tourism councils, local ecotourism associations, and information centers can play essential role in maintaining regional cooperation. However, first prospective regional ecotourism destinations should be identified to maximize these networks. The role of the regional cooperation with this respect can be to contribute to foster regional business associations and Attract business investment; encourage stakeholders' involvement and ensure the long-term preservation of

the interest of local businesses and public in the sector and the conservation of natural resources.

The strategic objectives that can be formulated in this field are:

a) To stimulate and Nurture Existing Local and Regional Ecotourism Models and Best Practices. The following support should be provided to local and regional tourism or ecotourism associations:

- Requiring and developing orientation and training programs on nature conservation and environmental protection as a precondition for ecotourism development, and on ecotourism themes;
- Attracting/appointing tourism specialists in municipalities ready for extensive tourism/ ecotourism development;
- Using university capacity for research and information collection as well as submitting information on academic institutions to national and regional organizations;
- Establishing centers or focal points of business expertise and support, including train-the-trainer programs focused on business planning, risk analysis, financial analysis, and entrepreneurship;
- Expanding destination management capacity, including land use planning and zoning, multi-stakeholder collaboration, and cooperative marketing;
- Developing regional ecotourism marketing programs;
- Creating Internet and visitor center reservation and booking systems;
- Developing a regional database of ecotourism goods and services;
- Participating in other regional, national, and international marketplaces and fairs to promote products and exchange ideas;
- Expanding relationships with regional government, local government, and protected area managers.

b) Support Local Participation in the Planning Process to Identify Community-based Opportunities Associated with Protected Areas, Biodiversity Conservation, and Cultural



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Attractions. The success of ecotourism and its ability to serve the income generation needs of rural communities will depend on more focused, local engagement in protected areas and biodiversity planning, as well as other rural and cultural development efforts. Local participation is best supported by:

- Ensuring that collaborative process becomes part of the tourism marketing procedures to ensure transparency;
- Engaging local communities in assessing ecotourism opportunities long before final public hearings on any plans;
- Involving local entrepreneurs and interested parties in the collection and analysis of ecotourism planning information.

c) Integrate Ecotourism in Regional Development Plans. Ecotourism objectives should be integrated into regional and local plans for economic development. Tourism, including ecotourism, should be integral parts of these plans and endorsed by the regional and local authorities, thus becoming part of the official policy. The important issues to address with this respect are:

- The planning documentation should include use of ecotourism resources as part of the costs for conservation and management of the region, marketing and promotion; and on the revenue side—taxes derived from tourist enterprises can create new jobs and increase revenue;
- Plans should be interrelated both with municipal development plans (master plans, land use plans) and regional regulation plans at the municipal level, and with plans at regional and national levels;
- Assessing costs and benefits derived from tourist and ecotourism development while preparing strategic plans at regional or municipal level; and integrating principles, recommendations and activities envisaged in other sectoral planning documentation. These would necessitate the consideration of potential conflicts with other sectoral objectives and selection of priorities;
- Municipalities, regional authorities and nature park administrations including tourist associations should be involved in setting up the tourism development strategy of the region, municipality.



Map 1. Nature Parks Trail in Croatia



3.4 Transboundary cooperation for eco-tourism

The scope of cross-border cooperation in cultural heritage and nature conservation, and in the field of ecotourism and cultural tourism, between the Sava Basin countries is slowly improving. Transboundary Networks can be developed in order to be used to coordinate national and regional ecotourism activities along Sava River Basin. Such networks can be promoted via guidebooks, maps, and online route planning facilities. In addition, common signs and logos develop a common market presence across the full breath of the network. Based on the current observations and recommendations made by the regional and local authorities and nature parks management representatives indicate number of opportunities for establishment of such networks:

- Using World Heritage Sites as anchor attractions linked to other protected areas and local communities;
- Linking popular sites to those of less visited sites and forming links to outlying sites that are not necessarily protected area sites;
- Coordinating with tour operators and site managers at protected area sites to create trip circuits and tour itineraries;
- Improving the interpretative materials for tourists by linking several sites with stories describing their natural and cultural heritage, enhancing the visitors' experience and quality of the tour;
- Creating logos, signs and other information promoting the region;
- Creating networks of tourist information centers;
- Continue the Development of routes based on physical/geographical/cultural authenticity as unifying elements in different countries by themes (Lonjsko Polje cycling tours);
- Fostering transborder cooperation by developing and linking touristic infrastructure as part of the transboundary protected areas network.

4. Framework for development of a Sava Tourism Action Plan

4.1 Action planning process

For the implementation of the strategic objectives for tourism development along Sava River the first step is to develop an action plan with well defined actions and measures for their realization in a feasible time frame. These actions however, should be defined in conformance with the national tourism policies of the four Sava countries and the specific regional and local development trends. Therefore, in order to outline an integrate action plan for Sava River Basin tourism development in a long term it is recommended to first develop action plans for each of the important tourist destination at regional level with the involvement of the relevant and competent local stakeholders.



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A general framework for conducting the action planning process is presented in table 3 below.

| Action Planning Process |
|--|
| <p>STEP N 1- Assessing the main tourism issues</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish or identify an international coordination body and planning team • Develop a vision for the future • Identify problems and local community needs • Priority setting <p>STEP N 2-Developing the action plan</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Formulating objectives • Select a strategy • Identify a range of possible actions <p>STEP N 3-Implement, monitor and enforce the action plan</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implementation • Monitoring and evaluation |

Table 3. Recommendation frameworks for the action planning process

The process of identification and formulation of actions can be enforced by defining concrete actions within few priority themes relevant for the tourism development and regional and local level. The regional and local stakeholders in each Sava region in the four bordering countries can use the same groups of themes to formulate their specific actions. The proposed themes are presented in table 4.

| Priority Ecotourism Themes and Actions |
|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Product development and marketing • Ecotourism enterprise developments • Nature conservation activities • Human Resource Development and Training • Institutional Development • Regional Development |

Table 4. Defining tourism actions per themes

4.2 Funding requirements

Tourism financing remains a challenge, particularly ecotourism activities. The banking sector view ecotourism projects as small and medium enterprise (SME) loans, which must meet a standard set of loan approval criteria. Thus many banks have advised that rural, community-based and local ecotourism projects use private equity first and then, after a couple of years with a successful operating history, apply for a loan. There are, however, a growing number of investment banks that are increasingly supporting ecotourism development, focusing at the village/community level.

Over the last decade many different international donors programs and projects in the fields of tourism development, biodiversity and cultural heritage conservation, local government



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development, NGO sector development, and regional planning have focused on rural and ecotourism development. These efforts are usually funded by multilateral funding institutions (World Bank, UNDP, GEF, EU), or through bilateral support programs (USA, Switzerland, UK, Japan, Germany, and Netherlands). There is no systematic record of donor contributions to ecotourism development along the Sava River Basin regions and countries, and no clear information about the governmental counterparts' contributions from the Sava countries. Yet in the changing financial and socio-economic systems the new opportunities and possible financial mechanisms need to be explored and assessed by the stakeholders active in tourism development along Sava River Basin.

4.3 Coordination

Establishment of a coordinative body for the development and implementation of the Sava River basin joint tourism strategy is essential for the successful achievement of the objectives of such strategy. The tourism activities along the river involve high number of stakeholders not only from one country but across the borders of the four Sava River countries. Further expansion of the tourism development sector, particularly ecotourism will affect in different ways the interests of these stakeholders. To balance between these interests a long-term communication plan is needed to be developed to ensure a collaboration process and an open dialogue between the national, regional and local authorities along the Sava river and between these authorities, the private actors and local communities.

Currently, the coordination of the initiatives of the Sava river conservation and regional development is supported by established for that purpose international coordinative body such as the Sava Commission. Furthermore, specific project teams formed within bilateral project initiatives such as the current project have supported the coordination between nature park administrations, NGOs and regional authorities at trans-boundary level (figure 2). However, a coordination body of the eco-tourism development between the different countries is still to be established in a form of a network between the countries' representative authorities and stakeholders.

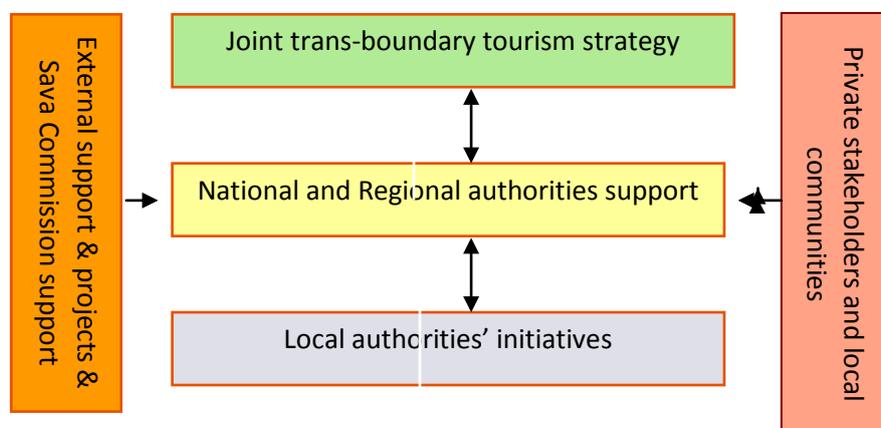


Figure 2. Coordination of the Sava River tourism and conservation initiatives



5. Recommendations

In this report number of strategic objectives have been defined that can be used as framework to develop a future tourism strategy for Sava River and a recommendation framework has been proposed for the elaboration of an action plan to implement these strategic objectives.

The first steps to be taken in short term are to continue stimulating and enhancing the already running tourism activities in the nature parks of the Sava River. Secondly, one of the ideas developed during the current project is to establish an overarching organizational framework in a form of a network to better coordinate the activities in the different protected areas and the development and implementation of the joint tourism strategy at transboundary level. This tourism strategy however should not be limited to the protected areas and the beauty of the landscape and biodiversity but also include cultural historic features and including those of the cities located along the Sava River. This network of protected areas should seek to cooperate closely with the International Sava Basin Commission to secure that the tourism plans are mainstreamed with the River Basin Management Plan.

The following recommendations have been identified during the project for the enhancement of the further tourism development along Sava and development of a joint tourism strategy:

- Increasing the knowledge and skills in tourism and recreation development among both cultural heritage and tourism professionals (training and exchange of experiences);
- Increasing the capacity of the local population in developing entrepreneurship and hospitality for attracting and managing visitors;
- Fund raising for improvement of the infrastructure for tourism and recreation such as the development of tourist routes, accommodation networks etc.;
- Investing in promotion of the local cultural tourism products with a focus on better interpretation and presentation of the resources already popular among visitors such as the nature assets and local food and beverage products;
- Creation of regional 'flagship' cultural tourism attractions, and improving the local and regional marketing and networking as a whole along Sava river.
- By promoting joint tourism products to start expanding the limited domestic demand for cross-border regional tourism with perspective for increasing the international demand.



6. Conclusions

This report presented a short assessment of the tourism development state of art along the Sava River area. Despite the differences in the national policies of Croatia, Slovenia, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia and the differences in the nature park management systems several common issues have been identified as essential for the future potential tourism development along Sava River. These include the lack of sufficient political support and lack of know-how exchange in both cultural and tourism sectors at national and regional level and insufficient marketing coordination and information flow to promote ecotourism activities among different target groups of tourist.

To meet the identified needs the development of a joint Sava river tourism marketing strategy has been proposed. The added value of such a common strategy would be to promote the natural, cultural and social values typical for each specific area in the four countries along the river as a joint touristic product which at the same time offers visitors to experience the variety of the traditional life styles and nature assets. For the development of this strategy, however, the establishment of a network is needed not only between the protected areas and tourist infrastructure but as well as between the competent governmental organizations, local entrepreneurs and NGOs in the bordering countries. Within the frame of the current Life 3rd countries project the first steps to such a cooperation network has been made which will serve as basis for the follow up of the collaborative process for development of the joint Sava tourism strategy. The state of art analysis, the defined strategic objectives and the recommendations described in this report will be considered by the competent governmental organizations together with other stakeholders as a framework for the development of the tourism strategy in order to ensure a sustainable use of the natural recourses along the river, while enhancing regional development and cross border cooperation.



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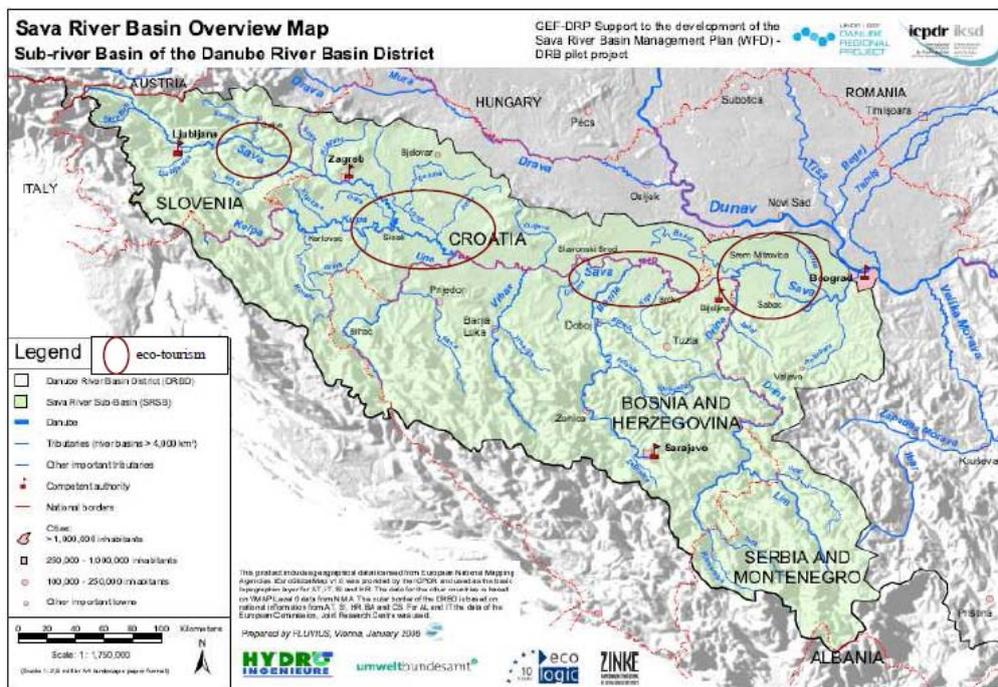
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Appendix 1 - Map of the Sava River Basin indicating potential eco-tourism areas



Source background map: Witteveen+Bos in association with NEA and CRUP
KRO21-1/Pre-Feasibility Study for the Sava River – final report.
Project managed by the Sava Commission