Title of the Story: From the battle to protect one river to the formation of critical mass and a new green destination

Destination Name: (include any state, province or region)
Dinardica
Country: Bosnia and Herzegovina

Submitter name: Emir Dervisevic
Email address: emir@greenways.ba
Position: Sustainability Coordinator

Nomination Category: (Please check the boxes that indicate the focus of your story)
- Localizing the destination supply chain
- Decarbonizing the destination supply chain
- Culture & Communities
- Environment & Climate
- Nature & Ecotourism
- Tourism Reset & Recovery
- Other

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Address each aspect of your good practice story in the different sections being specific including relevant quantitative and qualitative information.

Issues faced

When the Civic Coalition for the Protection of the Sana River was formed in February 2009, it was hard to predict the outcome of this joint action. A coalition of 20 citizens' associations and hundreds of individuals actively opposed the construction of a hydropower plant on the river, which is extremely important for the biodiversity of a wide area of western Bosnia. The fight involved a legal battle over investor irregularities in obtaining building permits, advocacy towards local government officials, protests, online campaigns, and field actions to raise local awareness.

However, despite two successful lawsuits against investors for irregularities in obtaining environmental and construction permits, the construction of the hydropower plant had not stopped. The only but significant success of the Coalition was that the location for the construction of the hydroelectric power plant was relocated not to endanger the sources of the river. Immediately after that, an initiative was launched to declare the wide area around the source of the river Sana as a protected area, i.e. a monument of nature.

State institutions in charge of natural resource management and environmental protection seemed completely powerless under pressure from domestic and international investors to implement policies based on the principles of sustainable development. We small communities in rural areas do not need development and growth that puts the interests of corporations first while ignoring ecosystem sustainability and biodiversity development. Building hydropower plants that destroy biodiversity and desecrate the landscape, breaking down forest roads due to deforestation, deforestation without responsible and sustainable management, are practices that all must stop, and alternative forms of ecosystem service management must be developed.

Methods, steps and tools applied

Aware of such threats to our environment, institutional instability, as well as challenges to the economic recovery of the war-ravaged area, a critical mass of organizations and individuals have been established who want to positively impact the future of our communities. The critical mass consists of citizens' associations operating in the region, local government officials, public companies, university professors and researchers, and owners of companies that want to do business sustainably.

In the context of the described events, a partnership of government institutions, local governments, non-governmental organizations, and private companies has been established. The establishment of an organizational structure and operational mechanisms for destination management and development has been initiated, unique in its multi-stakeholder character in Bosnia and Herzegovina. A common approach was to design and apply a model of actionable destination management to perform strategic prioritization and focus on actions that are realistically solvable.
After the formation of the organizational structure, the partners designed and launched a series of concrete actions that aimed to further animate the local population and strengthen the internal brand identity of the destination. That was followed by activities to identify and initiate processes for the protection of the most valuable natural habitats. Moreover, the possibilities of using solar energy for food production, for the need of the households, and in tourist accommodation facilities were showcased. Furthermore, by developing new infrastructure, education programs, and tourism experiences that put ecosystem conservation and responsible business at the forefront, we showed that significant change was possible.

Key success factors
All our achievements have resulted from a conjunction of people, opportunities and small resources, through which our community commitment was generated and a shared belief in creating economic, environmental and social values in a skilled, open-minded and well-managed way.

Similar to what successful regions in other parts of the world have done, our ambition is to find a future for our community which, while accepting the energy and investment from different sources, provides opportunities for young women and men to live decent lives. This has demanded constant recognition of the complex interrelations between citizens, businesses and governments and development of multi-focused development initiatives. Thus, our success to develop our destination fully depends on mutual trust, commitment to change by our partners and quality of their interactions.

Lessons learned
Our story talks about how important it is for all parties to be involved in destination planning and development. It witnesses that sustainable tourism can be developed through pooling resources and coordinated activities and that cooperation has no alternative if we want to achieve sustainability of ecosystems and local communities in rural areas. To have an integrated approach to development, it is necessary to take into account the state of the environment and ecosystem services, human resources, energy, infrastructure, enabling environment, market opportunities, quality of products and services, etc. Our experience shows how it is possible to form a destination identity around the principle that natural resources cannot be exploited indefinitely, and that the public interest and the interest of future generations are more important than the short-term benefits of the individual.

Our story can be useful to all who strive for integrated sustainable development of ecotourism destinations, which operate in the context of underdeveloped institutions of environmental protection and sustainable rural development. The negative phenomena that surround us, such as forest exploitation, non-transparent concessions on rivers, construction of hydropower plants, coal mines, mass tourism, benefit very limited groups, while the development of ecotourism benefits the wider community in rural areas. Our experience speaks not only of the compromises that need to be made but also of the victories we had to gain to be able to achieve long-term goals.
Results, achievements and recognitions
The comprehensive development path of the Dinardica destination is at the very beginning, but it is already showing significant results. As a result of joint efforts, already in the first year of operation, we placed an additional 230 hectares under official protection, including the sources of the Sana River, which was the driving motive and which united us.

We are continuously working to identify new areas that we need to protect and in which we need to develop biodiversity. We have developed detailed projects of landscape architecture and provided finances for the construction of infrastructure, waste cleaning, and arrangement of riverbeds so that we can improve the stay of our users, and at the same time manage their behavior.

In a joint partners' action, we have formed a destination Visitor Center through which we inform users and provide support during their stay. We built the center by completely renovating an old and abandoned school building in the central part of the destination. In July of this year, we realized a project for building capacity for the production of solar energy in the center, to create a showcase for private households and tourist facilities.

Additional references
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u_eCTMhkYik.