

Ramsar Site Livanjsko Polje (Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina): some suggestions for communication planning and activities

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With input from:

- Martin Schneider Jacoby, Euronatur
- Igor Palandžić, UNDP
- Mato Gotovac, WWF
- Branko Vucijak, WWF
- Alberto Arroyo, WWF

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1. Introduction

A nature conservation organization is just as dependent on other people to get results as any other organization: no organization can successfully protect nature on their own. Step by step changes can be realized through strategic communication interventions, especially when combined with other adequate instruments, including economic, financial and others.

The establishment and management of protected areas is not an exception, including the EU Natura 2000 sites. Each Natura 2000 sites could need for example a Management Plan. Early communication is – as experienced in the EU member states – crucial for the success of the Natura 2000 implementation.

Although it is difficult to foresee the length and results of the process while working towards EU accession, the South Eastern European countries have an opportunity to improve their nature conservation practices. WWF is engaged in this process through several ongoing projects, with the overall goal of improving the biodiversity protection in the region.

This document is being elaborated in the framework of the WWF's Mediterranean Programme's project Europe's Living Heart Phase II (ELH II) in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The main goal of this project is to

enhance biodiversity conservation in Bosnia and Herzegovina by supporting the first steps of the implementation of the EU standards in the country.

The concrete current activity foresees to carry out a document to support the planning of the communication related activities in the area, including suggestions for strategic communication features (communication goals, target audiences, messages) and management tools/ facilities for the 2 pilot areas selected in each of the 2 Entities:

- National Park Sujetska (Republica Srska)
- Ramsar Site Livanjsko Polje (Federation of Bosnia and Hercegovina)

The selection of these areas implies a more active engagement of WWF in them, with the overarching idea of supporting the process of implementation of the EU biodiversity protection standards in Bosnia and Herzegovina through the concrete experiences and results from the activities carried out there.

This document will focus on the Ramsar Site Livanjsko Polje. Subsequent phases of the project can provide some capacity and resources for the concrete implementation of some of the key actions identified in this document.

2. Principles and main goal

The following are some key principles which will be followed in the elaboration of the current document:

- Building on the past, ongoing and planned communication activities related with sustainable development and conservation of natural resources and biodiversity.
- Working towards compatibility and practical use of its conclusions for current ongoing related processes.
- Ensuring input is provided by key persons and institutions during the elaboration of the document.
- Including some first steps to support the future implementation of EU biodiversity protection standards in the area.
- Trying to extract conclusions and recommendations useful for future work on communication on EU biodiversity protection standards in other levels in Bosnia and Herzegovina.
- Simplicity and clarity.

Keeping these principles in mind, the main objective of this document can be defined as

to identify key communication elements and tools to support nature conservation in the area, including first steps related with the EU biodiversity protection standards implementation.

3. Background information

Livanjsko polje¹ is situated in South-Western part of Bosnia and Herzegovina covering around 40 000 ha on 710 m. average altitude. Spatially divided among three municipalities (Livno, Tomislavgrad and Bosansko Grahovo), Livanjsko Polje administratively belongs to Hercegbosanska zupanija/Livanjski canton, Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina. In 2008 the site gained international recognition through its designation as Ramsar site. The large periodically flooded plain covered with temperated grassland, forest, mashes and peat land, habitat of endemic, rare and endangered fish species, key stopover site on Adriatic flyway migratory corridor and important breeding and wintering site for birds are just some of the values of Livanjsko polje.

The key information was obtained from some key individuals working in the Livno area, including some individual meetings the 3rd of April 2009 in the area, during the celebration of the first anniversary of the declaration of the site as Ramsar. Several individuals have been contacted for the preparation of this document, including

- Martin Schneider Jacoby, Euronatur
- Igor Palandžić, UNDP
- Jaroslav Vego, Focal Ramsar point in BiH
- Mato Gotovac, WWF
- Branko Vucijak, WWF
- Alberto Arroyo, WWF

4. Past, ongoing and planned related activities

Some projects and activities with a communication component have been or are running in the Ramsar site Livanjsko Polje, including:

- International Summer Camps in Livno: yearly voluntary programme for 20-60 persons. Activities included eg cleaning the river; the local population has been involved in this camps (eg taking parts in actions, lending their tools to the voluntaries). From 2002 up to now camp hosted more than 350 volunteers. Program is supported by local government and international donations.
- Petition to municipal government from local population for clean river Sturba: 7 years ago the Youth Centre Livno successfully organized this petition in Livno and surrounding villages (1800 signatures). The aim was to put pressure on the municipal communal inspections for control of sewage systems in nearby households. Project “who is still afraid of the wolf?”: 5 years ago the Youth Centre Livno (with support of WWF) carried out this project in the municipality of Livno, in order to identify the local population’s knowledge on ecology, feelings and possible management of the the wolf population. At the end of the project brochures with information on wolf ecology, their management in other countries, as well as result of the survey made during this project (446 interviews) was disseminated to various stakeholders (hunters, livestock breeders,...).
- Some marketing activities related with the local cheese of Livno (very famous in the whole Balkan area).

¹ Term “polje” usually represent closed depressions in karst area draining underground, with flat floors across which there may be intermittent or perennial streams.

- Project “Sharing waters”: currently running project through a coalition of NGOs led by WWF, with a strong watchdog component, working also beyond Livno (Cetina river basin) in water related issues.
- Planned DAI “Community-based Rural Development and Natural Resource Management in the Dinara Area” project led by the FAO includes a communication component. Some of the planned outcomes include improved knowledge of Karst poljes’ natural and cultural assets, improved destination and rural tourism marketing of the area, etc. However, its possible that the budget will be severely cut (from 2.5 mill € to 300.000 €), so it is difficult to foresee the final concrete content of the project.
- GEF project led by UNDP on peat land rehabilitation: currently developed the ToRs.
- Internet petition for the protection of the wild horses addressed to cantonal government: organized last year by the internet portal Livno-online.com, currently it includes close to 10.000 signatures.
- Monitoring of birds by EuroNatur started as early as in 2002 and has been built up to a regular program since 2006 in the frame of the “Sharing Waters” project jointly organized with WWF MedPo.
- Preparation of the Ramsar Nomination by EuroNatur in cooperation with Ramsar Focal point Jaroslav Vego, WWF MedPo and the Youth Centre Livno.
- Habitat mapping and development of thematic maps for the polje EuroNatur in cooperation with Fluvius to describe the historic and actual situation in the karst polje.

5. Challenges and opportunities

As the declaration of the area as a Ramsar site is very recent (1 year), and the area has not been yet designated as protected area at any level of BiH administration, there is **no administrative structure or legal entity in place related with nature conservation of this Ramsar site**. The Ramsar process could help to facilitate the first steps towards the creation of such structure, as the example of the other 2 Ramsar sites in BiH suggest. In the meanwhile, the decision making over natural resources use and nature conservation is mainly cantonal or regional.

Although “protected” sounds challenging in general in BiH, and probably it is not easy to know the general attitude of the local population, according to some local experts the **local population could be in principle positive about the establishment of specific levels of protection of the nature** in the area; eg, the Livno cheese producers would be receptive about the protection the grasslands against open mining projects, and some system to avoid the dumping in the area would be seen positively by the local population (although probably some exemplary punishments could also help to improve the situation). Actually, the Ramsar designation provides a good opportunity to demonstrate, that “protected” does not mean no development. The Ramsar Convention promotes the term “wise use” for wetlands and protected defined by the special protection category and status. For Livanjsko Polje this definition process of “wise use” and protection has even not been started.

Normally decision making in the area has been carried out with a low engagement of the local population, so any attempt to improve their involvement would be seen as positive. Furthermore, probably there is an **opportunity to provide ideas to move forward to the Cantonal Government**, as there is not clarity yet what would be best steps to follow at this point.

Dumping of solid waste is a relevant challenge also in the public arena (covered by the media). Except Livno town inhabitants, local population from the surrounding villages does not have to pay for this service; therefore it is very irregular and sometimes inexistent.

There is an idea now currently under discussion to construct a **thermal electricity power plant within the Canton, with high opposition from the local population**. The project would include the extraction of lignite, plus the construction of the thermal plant close to it. The main driver of this idea is the Federal Government, and therefore a possible referendum on the municipality level is under discussion (its results would not be binding, though). The key argument of the federal Government is the creation of about 300 jobs in an area with 30% unemployment.

The **hydropower** is another current hot discussion in the area, even an international dispute with their Croatian neighbors. The local population believes that the collection of water in Livno would benefit more Croatia than BiH, and especially the local population will obtain no benefits.

There is a herd of about 150 **wild horses** in the highland. There are some important challenges for their survival, including car accidents, poaching or maybe even wolf attacks. Probably the biggest problem is that these horses do not have a clear ownership, and this should be the first issue to be addressed to ensure their adequate management. Moreover, these horses suck the salt in the roads in winter, so they often cause accidents; therefore their image is not completely positive.

The **Ramsar process has been followed up by the media**, and some interest has been generated in the local population. **WWF foresees the organization of an event** addressing the general public related with the declaration of the site as Ramsar during the summer 2009 (in the framework of the “Sharing Waters” project).

There is a **long tradition of NGO work** in the area. These organizations have carried out several projects also on awareness raising, which have resulted in a better knowledge of the local population about the natural values of the area.

6. Some suggested basic communication elements

Building on the previous information, it can be assumed that the key need of the area is to ensure an appropriate management can be done in future. For this purpose, the establishment of a management structure or body with clear competences on nature protection would be probably the best way forward. And to have this structure in place, the designation of the area as a national Protected Area in Bosnia and Herzegovina would be the first step.

Considering the different opportunities that the legislation in BiH offers, and taking into account the current land use and natural values, probably this area would be managed as a sustainable use area (probably categories IV or V of the IUCN), like eg a Biosphere Reserve or a Regional Park. Even transboundary cooperation with the Karst poljes in Croatia is an option. Keeping this in mind, probably the best way forward would be to analyze the adequacy of designating the area as protected area² and finding the best development options. This means that the main responsible for the declaration and management would be the Cantonal Authorities. The idea of suggesting the Cantonal Authorities to become “greener” and aim to be considered as an “eco-canton”, would be helpful for this possible declaration.

² Once the concrete data on natural values has been analysed (results from the Europe’s Ñiving Heart phase II project), probably a concrete protected area category could be suggested.

With all this in mind, and taking into account the main objective of this document, the following possible communication goals can be identified:

- In two years the local population considers the declaration of the area as protected area the best way forward.
- In three years the Cantonal and Regional Authorities consider the area suitable for declaration as a protected area³.
- In three years, a kind of local unit in cooperation with the canton has been established to steer the process, which can be developed in a management unit for natural heritage (comparable to Croatian counties).

Building up on the previous possible goals, the following key target audiences are suggested, including possible adapted messages for each of them:

- Cantonal authorities (creation of the protected area)
 - An “ecocanton” brand would be very helpful for your own promotion (tourism, products)
 - A new protected area can be your flag ship as an ecocanton! It can also flag you as positively working towards EU biodiversity protection standards, which can be helpful to access to EU funding related.
 - Such process (“ecocanton”) could be helpful to support the local economy, as the differentiation would make your canton and its products more attractive.
- Entity authorities
 - The thermal plant project would put the local population against you – and environmental NGOs too.
 - There are better alternatives which could have more support from the local population, like the protection and promotion of the area as protected area, especially taking into account potential EU membership, climate change compromises, etc.
- Local population
 - The natural values around you could have economic advantages for you (examples should be provided, including eg benefits from tourism, added value of products from protected areas).
 - Do you know you live in a very valuable area, not only for BiH, but for the EU? (should be accompanied by examples of socio-economic benefits derived from these values)
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7. Possible activities identified

Keeping in mind the previous structure (goals, target audiences, messages + identified opportunities), some possible concrete actions can be suggested:

- Individual meetings, preparation of targeted information material targeted and invitation to relevant events to entity and cantonal authorities.
- Organization of events, preparation of information material, use of the local media for awareness raising among local population and authorities of the relevance and benefits from the protected area,

³ See previous footnote.

including its value from an European and global perspective. Also consider direct support to concrete pilot activities to show the possible socio-economic benefits of the protected area.

- Facilitation and support to the process of establishment of a structure type Local small facility (PIU), as a pre-management unit for the future management of natural values.

Subsequent phases of the Europe's Living Heart project (phases III, IV and V) could consider some of these activities as eligible to be financed and implemented.