I. ATTENDANCE

The first Regional Workshop “DEVELOPMENT OF ECO-TOURISM IN CONTEXT OF CROSS BORDER COOPERATION” within the project “Promoting Eco-tourism development in the Sava River Basin” was held on June 20-21, 2012 at the Brod Fortress in Slavonski Brod (Croatia). The workshop gathered over 50 participants from Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Serbia and Slovenia from national authorities (Ministries) and local authorities (municipalities), tourist organizations, chambers of commerce, public institutions (national parks and protected areas authorities), NGOs, universities and from international organizations (ISRBC, REC, Ramsar Secretariat, WWF, UNESCO) and US Embassy. List of participants is attached as Annex I. to this Report.

II. AGENDA

Wednesday, 20th June 2012

1. Welcome addresses
   - Municipality of Slavonski Brod (Zoran Ivanović, Deputy Mayor)
   - International Commission for Sava River Basin (ISRBC), (D. Komatina, Secretary)
   - US Embassy (Hoyt B. Yee, Deputy Ambassador)

2. Framework Agreement on the Sava River Basin and cross-border cooperation in the basin area countries

3. Opportunities and challenges of developing eco-tourism
   - Opportunities and challenges of eco-tourism
   - Eco-tourism aspects in Croatia
   - Ramsar sites as potential areas for eco-tourism
   - Experiences from different aspects of eco-tourism in wetlands
   - Experiences from the region – Ramsar sites and other areas (Lonjsko polje, Bardača, Škocjanske jampe, Zasavica, etc.)
   - Discussion

4. Workgroups
   - Group 1: Raising public awareness on advantages of eco-tourism in wetlands
   - Group 2: Planning and management of eco-tourism on national and local level
   - Group 3: Capacity building on specific skills needed for eco-tourism on sensitive areas (Ramsar areas)
Thursday, 21st June 2012

5. Plenary session – presentation of all workgroup results
6. Presentation of a possible model example of cross-border cooperation - Lonjsko polje/Bardača
7. Panel discussion
   - Future perspectives of sustainable development of eco-tourism with focus to sensitive areas (e.g. Ramsar sites)
   - Importance for national and local economy development
   - Potential for transboundary and regional cooperation
8. Conclusions
   - Future steps in preparation of the Outline of Operational Guidelines for the Sava River Basin on eco-tourism

AD 1 Welcome addresses

At the beginning Mr. Zoran Ivanović, Deputy Mayor of Slavonski Brod, welcomed the participants and stressed the importance of the workshop for development of different kinds of tourism for the Municipality of Slavonski Brod.

Secretary of the ISRBC, Mr. Dejan Komatina stressed that the Parties to the Framework Agreement on the Sava River Basin (FASRB) declared tourism as one of the main priorities for sustainable development of the region on the Meeting of the Parties held in June 2011. He also presented the main goals of the workshop which are focused on the exchange of experiences and different views of eco-tourism and to the discussion on eco-tourism opportunities in the area of SRB.

Mr. Hoyt Yee, Deputy Ambassador, offers three reasons why the US Embassy supports and co-sponsors the conference for ecotourism within the Sava River Basin. First, he describes that a shared common interest exists for protecting the environment and encouraging sustainable development. Secondly, he mentions that this program will support the creation of a green economy, and green jobs that will create economic growth for the region. Finally he discusses the benefit of encouraging transboundary cooperation. Cooperation and collaboration will encourage more tourists, longer stays, and will provide for better protection of environmental resources. He encourages a balance between wetland protection and tourism and further states that this region can be a model for other countries to follow. He mentioned that US Embassy has donated more than 100,000 USD for the demining in the Sava River Basin which could help to the eco-tourism as well. He closes with: One River, Four Countries, Unlimited Possibilities.
AD 2 Framework Agreement on the Sava River Basin and cross-border cooperation in the basin area countries

Background documents:

**AD 2 Razvoj eko-turizma Komatina**

Mr. Komatina (ISRBC) presented the FASRB in relation to tourism in the Sava River Basin. The main issues of his presentation were:

- Sava River Basin as a natural basis for cooperation
- Legal and institutional frameworks for cooperation (FASRB and ISRBC)
- Activities and results of the ISRBC regarding the sustainable development of the SRB.
- Key conclusions

He stressed that ISRBC represents suitable framework for implementation of the regional projects and development of different kinds of river tourism. The idea has strong support from the Parties to FASRB. The project on development of eco-tourism is a good basis for further activities of the countries in this regard.

AD 3 Opportunities and challenges of developing eco-tourism

Background documents:

**AD 3 Ecotourism Croatia Conference 12 Thomas Crisman**

**AD 3 Jelena Šobat EKO-TURIZAM U RH**

**AD 3 Ramsar sites Tobias Salathe**

**AD 3 Experiences of eco-tourism Zoran Klarić**

**AD 3 Lonjsko polje Goran Gugic**

**AD 3 BARDACA Ramsarsko mjesto 1658 M Markovic**

**AD 3 Skocjanske jame Gordana Beltram prezentacija**

**AD 3 ZASAVICA PREZENTACIJA TURIZAM**

Mr. Thomas Crisman (University of South Florida) talked about the opportunities, challenges and purposes of eco-tourism in wetland areas in particular. He pointed out the definition of eco-tourism and which ecosystems are worthy ecotourism sites. He presented some practical examples of wetland areas where eco-tourism is well developed and represents an important economy that could lead to the improvement of transport, local cultures, and small private enterprises (bars, hotels). But on the other hand, wetland damages, scars to the ecosystem, and the contaminants eco-tourism can bring should be taken into account. He referred to the many opportunities on the Sava River Basin, highlighting its rich ecological sites. Eco-tourism could be used for economic development and for environment management and protection as well.
Mrs. Jelena Šobat (Ministry for Tourism of Croatia) presented development of Eco-tourism in Croatia. She stressed that the impact of tourism to the environment has to be taken into account. She talked about the Strategic Plan of Ministry for tourism of Croatia and the projects which have been included in the funding programme of the Ministry. She discussed Ramsar sites as potential areas for eco-tourism. She listed some successful former programmes and publications regarding the promotion of cultural and architectural heritage in Croatia and in the region of Slavonija, Baranja and Posavina. Croatia has also developed the system of labeling good eco-products as a trend in the modern tourist marketing (Croatia has the system of eco-products labeling for food products and “Environmentally friendly” label).

Mr. Tobias Salathe, Ramsar Convention Secretariat, presented the challenges of Ramsar sites as areas of eco-tourism. He pointed out the advantages and disadvantages of wetland tourism, main principles of sustainable tourism and main messages of the Ramsar Convention. He discussed different kinds of tourism in wetlands (e.g. floodplain agro tourism, fish pond business models etc. The main messages of his presentation were to use Ramsar as a Quality label!

Mr. Zoran Klarić (Institute for tourism Zagreb) presented experiences from different aspects of eco-tourism in wetlands in Croatia and about the sustainable development of tourism. He talked about the main problems in management of protected areas and about the limitations in future development. Referring to some similar examples in Europe, he defined the possible directions of the sustainable development of eco-tourism in protected areas.

Mr. Goran Gugić (Park of Nature Lonjsko polje), Mr Mihajlo Marković (University of Banja Luka- Barđača), Mrs. Gordana Beltram (Park Škocjanske jame) and Mr. Slobodan Simić (Special Park of Nature Zasavica) discussed on their experiences from the Ramsar sites and other protected areas in the region. They stressed different status of particular Parks regarding the environmental protection and their main activities for promotion of tourism which could help in development of the local economy. They stressed the importance of cooperation with the nature parks authorities and the local population, and to strengthen the involvement of local people in the activities in protected areas as well as buffer zones. It is very important to raise awareness and educate different stakeholders (children, teachers, local people, tourist guides- professionals and volunteers, visitors to parks etc.).

**AD 4, 5 Workgroups**

**Background documents:**

| AD 4 Ecotourism_Workshop_Questions_final |

The participants were divided in three different groups.

- Group 1: Raising public awareness on advantages of eco-tourism in wetlands
- Group 2: Planning and management of eco-tourism on national and local level
- Group 3: Capacity building on specific skills needed for eco-tourism on sensitive areas (Ramsar areas)
Group 1:
The main goal of the Group 1 was to provide recommendations for policy makers in Sava countries - how to make general perceptions of tourism more oriented towards eco-tourism as a desirable form. The participants were independent tourism and wetlands experts (international & from Sava countries).

Group one discussed perceptions of ecotourism and considered ways to use ecotourism to promote wetland conservation, cultural preservation, community prosperity, and economic development in the Sava River Region. The group talked about opportunities to collaborate and to market ecotourism as a way to attract ecotourism operators and tourists. They considered incentives to motivate communities to choose ecotourism over traditional tourism practices and discussed ways to achieve community consensus on what is considered appropriate use of wetlands, acknowledging that some activities can harm wetland ecosystems.

After the discussion, the following conclusions were made:

- A mechanism of cooperation exists;
- It is necessary to have a head plan the purpose of the protected areas;
- It is necessary to educate the public e.g. through schools about importance of nature and to develop public awareness from the bottom to the top and to include policy makers and locals. The stakeholders should be aware of the values of the locations;
- Natural values should remain but they should be coupled with tourism. Smart tourism could bring revenues;
- The sustainable water management should be taken into account – when and where the water is needed;
- It is necessary to focus on synergies between the traditional manner of living in the wetlands areas and tourism through for example offering specific products;
- The authorities (e.g. governments) should be more progressive in development of eco-tourism on wetlands;
- It is necessary to define the issues which attracts the tourists;
- The economic benefits should be clear;
- It is necessary to build the knowledge of good and bad examples in the SRB and abroad, although each location is unique and the differences should be celebrated
- It is important to make the stakeholders aware of the value of their locations, so they could increase the possibilities to develop and prosper. Also, there is a need to develop awareness from the bottom to the top – from local people/inhabitants to the higher level of authorities;

The group also proposed that in the next few months a similar conference should be organized. The communication tool could be established through the web page of the ISRBC.
Group 2:
The main goal of the Group 2 was to provide recommendations for multi-stakeholder planning & management of eco-tourism activities. The participants were local and national authorities, protected area management authorities and NGOs.

Group two discussed ways to support the management of Ramsar wetlands and acknowledged the importance of various stakeholders. The group talked about Ramsar wetland management expectations and discussed ways to integrate existing guidelines and policies to better protect the sites. They also considered additional protection measures and monitoring to prevent ecological damage associated with increased tourism. The discussion considered not only tourist presence, but also ways to develop tourism infrastructure with regard to waste/water management, green energy, and transportation. Finally, the group considered ways to create a tourism network to link Ramsar sites along the Sava River.

After the discussion following conclusions has been made:

- Stakeholders are important in the process of development of eco-tourism: local people, local authorities (county, municipality ...), private owners / concessionaires, fishermen, farmers, water management authorities, forests (forest farm), Country authorities (inspectors, ministries, entities ...), academic community, experts

- The problems encountered in the management of the protected areas (Ramsar sites):
  - Lack of management plans;
  - Lack of cooperation between national and local institutions (the solution should be a cooperation between all levels of authorities);
  - Lack of regulations on national, regional and local levels;
  - Lack of expert institutions;
  - Lack of communications between different stakeholders on all levels;

- Steps towards the better management of protected areas:
  - The balance between the sustainable development and tourism as an important branch of economy should be established;
  - Transboundary coordination between the Ramsar sites managers should be established as well as with other existing institutions (e.g. NGOs, bike organizations etc);
  - Education of stakeholders including the local people is very important. They should be aware about the value of the sites;
  - The existing potentials should be used;
  - Inclusion of Ramsar sites in the everyday way of life, and tourism
  - Developing other possible resources (e.g. cycling)
  - Cooperation between state institutions and local governments, also within various sectors
Promotion of tourism potential (there is interest, but further development is needed)
- Definition and classification of potential forms of tourism

Group 3:
The main goal of the Group 3 was to provide recommendations for adapting tourism sector capacities in the Sava region to the needs of eco-tourism. The participants were tourism sector workers & organizations, business sector, and development representatives. They discussed on the questions.
The discussion began by defining ecotourism from the perspective of the participants. The group was then asked to identify businesses and expertise existing in the region, acknowledging that operation of an ecotourism business can be competitive and challenging. The group discussed opportunities to provide training and resources to local communities to assist them in ecotourism development and considered ways to ensure that the economic gains from ecotourism benefit local communities by enhancing wetlands and developing local skills. The group talked about ways to determine carrying capacity at each site, and considered ways to monitor the success or failure of ecotourism development from the perspective of the environment, the businesses, the community, and the tourist. There are some examples of good practice, such as Lonjsko polje (HR), Chamber of Commerce Sisak (HR), project Sava Navigo (HR, BiH), pool Starača (BiH), Ascending through the Sava etc.

Competitiveness, problems - support of existing specialists
- Tourist organizations are not recognized by the local / regional government as a partner, they can lead all the developmental tasks
- Lack of local support, but also the support of national authorities
- Lack of promotion and lobbying, additional incentives are needed so that successful examples do not remain at the level of (finished) project (PP Lonjsko polje finances local transportation lines)
- Revenues from eco-tourism receive only SLO and HR (foreign tourists)
- The Schengen border - a new potential problem
- Protection of areas often does not declare because it burdens local (regional) budget
- Branding of local breeds and the product is expensive
- Lack of communication skills (verbal / nonverbal) at all levels
- Lack of operational tourism strategies that accompany the financial resources
- "Eco" sales the products, but reality does not justify the expectations
- Marketing is tantamount to advertising (not defined target market)

After the discussion following conclusions has been made:
- Eco-tourism is additional branch of “classical tourism”, it might be considered as luxury;
- Tourist organizations should invest money to advertising and information;
The focus should be to attract local tourists;
- Different kinds of tourism should be considered (e.g. nautical tourism, bike tourism, canoeing (regattas));
- Coordination and connection of existing resources (national and local institutions) is necessary;
- It is proposed to develop common web site (e.g. ISRBC web site);
- The education of local guides (professional and volunteers) is necessary;
- Local (eco)products should be promoted;
- The area must be viewed as a whole, nothing can and can not work if it is harmful to some other aspect
- Natural values are (only) a small part, minimal interventions are necessary to develop the eco-tourism
- Customize forms of eco-tourism, to its area
- Travel agencies have to make itineraries and advertise tourist offers from their native countries, but also from neighboring countries
- Connect tourist destinations, tourist agencies and organizations
- Use different types of tourism (eco-education, schools ...)
- It is necessary to make a "story" along the entire river basin - Cultural routes
- Knowledge of own strengths and weaknesses
- Continuous training of tourism professionals
- RS / BiH have to develop tourism product - the shifts are seen at the fairs of tourism (rafting, rafting)
- GDP growth is a prerequisite for tourism development

AD 6 Presentation of a possible model example of cross-border cooperation - Lonjsko polje/Bardača

The participants discussed possibilities of cross-border eco-tourism cooperation, between two Ramsar sites: Lonjsko Polje (LP) and Bardača. This example was chosen to motivate the participants for a discussion whether these two sites (despite differences in institutional functioning and management) could cooperate to develop a joint tourism offer given their geographical proximity within the same natural unit, Central Posavina region. If pursued further, this could be an example to be replicated for other Ramsar sites, having in mind that presently (eco) tourism offer between the Ramsar sites in the Sava basin is not interconnected.

Following issues were stressed during the discussion:
- Both sites are Ramsar sites and they should be preserved as such; local people are important to preserve the nature;
- Different levels of management are implemented at the two sites: LP is managed by park administration, while there is no management institution at Bardača as legal ownership issues are still being resolved and the proclamation of protected area is in procedure before the Republika Srpska institutions;
- LP has developed Management Plan (although not officially adopted yet), while at Bardača no Management Plan exists; no measures could be implemented without the proper spatial planning;
- Lonjsko polje is prepared to share its good practice examples in implementing tourism activities and develop joint cross-border tourism offer with Bardača wetlands as soon as feasible;
- Schengen border regime which is expected upon Croatian accession into EU may be a problem for tourist migrations and implementing cross-border activities;
- Despite internal institutional difficulties, Bardača is a part of the Sava river basin and regional efforts (such as this ISRBC regional eco-tourism initiative) might be an impetus for resolving of the local institutional processes which would enable proper protected area management in accordance with its Ramsar status, as well as enable cross-border cooperation projects

**AD 7 Panel discussion**

**Background documents:**

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<th>AD 7 PREZENTACIJA-SARA</th>
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<td>AD 7 Šlavonski Brod - Turizam u zaštićenim prostorima</td>
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Mr. Thomas Crisman (University of Florida), Mrs. Gordana Beltram (Škocijan Caves), Mr. Kir Kuščer (University of Ljubljana), Mr. Goran Gugić (Lonjsko polje NP) and Mrs. Snežana Štetić (University of Novi Sad) were participants in the panel discussion.

Mr. Thomas Crisman stressed that in order to move forward, we need to know where we are today, and provide a model that the private sector will implement. This is not a static project; it will be a dynamic, diverse project with a different plan for each wetland. While discussing the Ramsar wetlands, we should not forget the river.

Mrs. Gordana Beltran thought that the advantage of Park Škocijan Caves is because it represents a link among different levels. To be successful we have to understand how valuable our resources are. She expressed optimism that Slovenia was not that different than other countries, as well as stressed the importance of networking among the sites.

Mr. Kir Kuščer thought that any development needs to be sustainable. There should be small groups of visitors and a focus on education and research in these areas. He stressed the importance of education; in the way people should interact with nature and the way nature reacts to human actions. He thought that leadership and political assistance along with a strong ecological policy was needed. While thinking globally, we should act locally, and develop competences and competitiveness in order to prevent foreign (outside of Sava region) tour operators taking over domestic (regional) market in the Sava basin.

Mr. Goran Gugić said that it was good to focus on developing eco-tourism in the Ramsar sites because there is infrastructure and staff already existing on these sites. This project might be a good opportunity to earn money (demonstrate economic value of eco-tourism projects), incorporate the surrounding communities – neighboring to Ramsar areas, and to raise awareness about Ramsar wetlands and the environment.
This could be a chance to come up with a vision. He also proposed establishing of working groups in each country that could communicate towards Ramsar Convention.

Mrs. Snežana Štetić thought that Ramsar sites are not the only potential of the Sava River Basin. Different sorts of tourism could be developed. The domestic tourists are very important and should be included in the tourism strategy as well. She proposed the cooperation and networking of activities, for example via organizing nautical regatta, volunteer camps, the Sava day celebration etc. that could ‘bring life back to Sava river banks’, as well as additional development of cyclo-tourism that could especially target the Western Europe. She thought if the locals did not organize themselves the foreign tourist operators would come.

In addition two presentations have been provided regarding the tourist potentials of Surčin Municipality.

The subsequent discussion stressed again the importance of physical planning, which is a precondition and an instrument for planning any future eco-tourism development initiatives. This requires a well informed local population that can that way get involved and recognize its interest, as well as inter-sectoral cooperation at all levels.

**AD 8 Conclusions**

At the end of the workshop Mr. Dejan Komatina announced that main objectives of the workshop have been fulfilled. The project team has reviewed a lot of useful information on how to proceed. He provided some key words on future steps of the project as follows:

- Tourism in the Sava River basin is inhibited by the absence of major tourist destinations and attractions, though the local level industry has and continues to develop tourism opportunities. The market for tourism in the basin is competitively geared towards transient tourists (cyclists, bird watchers, etc.) that seek multiple attractions as a regional destination. However, the tourism sector in the basin is not currently organized to market itself as a region or attract the target tourists. Development of tourism in the Sava River Basin depends on a basin-level approach and regional cooperation between all four countries, particularly to provide a strategic approach to development and marketing the Sava River as a regional destination and cohesive tourist products/regional tourist identity;

- Eco-tourism and other forms of sustainable tourism (agro-tourism, ethno-tourism, etc.) should be strategic approach that can be promoted at the sub-regional and local levels in order to develop a cohesive approach to tourism and improve current efforts and trans-boundary cooperation and ecological and cultural protection.

- Ramsar sites provide existing focal points for developing ecotourism/sustainable tourism, and can be used as a starting point for networking the region and developing a basin level approach for both local economic growth and advancing sensitive protection issues.

Examining these needs, conference participants identified the need for a regional mechanism to advance discussions among the national and local stakeholder and facilitate new regional approaches. The ISRBC represents an existing option to develop regional dialogue among national and local levels through a stakeholder-based approach. The ISRBC will advise Parties on the opportunities, which workshop participants identified, and
develop recommendations drawing on its mandate to develop tourism by the Parties. The ISRBC has already responded to this mandate through: (a) reconstruction of waterway on the Sava River and its navigable tributaries is a basis for further development of tourism; (b) supporting a new initiative for basin-wide bike lanes running along the Sava River.

- Mr. Komatina presented some of the next activities in the project: It is necessary to prepare concrete proposal (e.g. guidance);
- Part of the ISRBC official webpage will be dedicated to Eco-tourism;
- A regional conference on ecotourism will be held in autumn (proposed location is Surčin (RS))