

2023 TOP 100 GOOD PRACTICE STORY

Title: White Water Rafting a Rapid Destination Management Tool

Destination, Country: Konjic City, Bosnia and Herzegovina

Submitted by: City of Konjic

Environment & Climate

Thriving Communities

In the category: Destination Management

Culture & Tradition

Business & Marketing

Nature & Scenery

The Story in a Picture:

The Neretva River originates in the mountainous regions of Herzegovina, creating a unique ecosystem. It serves as a major attraction in Konjic. Tourists flock to experience whitewater rafting on its emerald green waters, leading to both economic benefits and strain on the natural environment.



This has prompted the community to unite and implement sustainable development and protection measures for the destination of Konjic.

Summary:

City of Konjic has great potential for tourism due to its natural beauty and rich cultural heritage. It is an attractive destination in Bosnia and Herzegovina, located near popular tourist spots like Sarajevo, Mostar, and Dubrovnik. Tourists can enjoy exploring the city's historic sites, such as the renovated Stone Bridge, along with engaging in outdoor activities like hiking, camping, white water rafting, kayaking, and paragliding.

The Neretva River, known as the "divinity that flows," is an important tourist symbol in Konjic. It originates in the mountainous regions of high Herzegovina, forming a unique ecosystem. Rafting on the Neretva River offers thrilling experiences for both beginners and experienced adventurers.

However, the tourism sector in this area faces several challenges. There is a lack of regulation and legal framework, resulting in issues like disorderly use and access of the Neretva River, inadequate equipment, and insufficiently trained staff. Other challenges include a lack of environmental awareness, limited public-private dialogue regarding natural resources, and a lack of promotion as an attractive tourist destination.

To address these issues, the Konjic Municipality (Konjic City) has recognized the importance of establishing a rafting management system and resolving the issues mentioned through public-private dialogue. These steps have led to the first steps of creating a destination management organization responsible for sustainably developing the tourism sector in Konjic. Currently, underway, the City is to draft a resolution that clearly defines the key actors, their tasks, and activities, and specifies the conditions for providing rafting services.

Good Practice Story:

Destination description

Konjic City in Bosnia and Herzegovina is a captivating destination that combines natural beauty, rich cultural heritage, and exciting activities. Situated on the Neretva River and surrounded by picturesque mountains, Konjic offers breathtaking landscapes and clean air, making it an ideal place for outdoor enthusiasts.

The city is known for its medieval tombstones, with over 4,160 of them scattered across 150 locations. Numerous religious buildings also hold the status of national monuments, showcasing the city's historical and architectural significance. Konjic is home to four museums, including the Heritage Museum, the Birth house of Zuko Džumhur, the Woodcarving Museum (a UNESCO-listed intangible cultural heritage site), and the secretive D-0 ARK facility, also known as Tito's bunker.

Outdoor activities abound in Konjic, with options such as hiking, camping, kayaking, canoeing, mountain biking, paragliding, and canyoning. Rafting on the Neretva River is particularly famous, offering an adrenaline-pumping adventure. The city's excellent transportation connections and developed accommodation and catering services ensure a comfortable stay for visitors.

Konjic places a strong emphasis on sustainable tourism, with environmentally acceptable activities like hiking, cycling, and rafting. By utilizing and valorizing its cultural and natural resources, the city aims to improve the quality of life for its residents while providing an innovative and diverse tourist experience.

Issues faced

Issues Faced are :

1. **Lack of Tourism Regulation:** The absence of a specific Law on Tourism in the Herzegovina-Neretva Canton creates challenges in effectively regulating the rafting area. Without a comprehensive legal framework, local communities are left to regulate the area according to their own understanding and powers, leading to inconsistencies and disorder.
2. **Unregulated Exploitation:** The disorderly nature of the area allows for the uncontrolled exploitation of the Neretva River as a natural resource. Individuals and entities, regardless of their legal status, can exploit the river without adhering to specific regulations or considering the consequences of their actions.
3. **Infrastructure Issues:** The entrance and exit stations for rafting activities lack proper organization and management. This can lead to confusion and inefficiency in the operation of rafting tours. Additionally, there may be a lack of adequate equipment, which can impact the safety and quality of the experience.
4. **Insufficiently Trained Staff:** The personnel involved in rafting activities may lack sufficient training and expertise to represent the city of Konjic effectively. This can impact the overall experience for tourists and the reputation of the destination.
5. **Undefined Legal Framework:** The legal framework governing individuals and legal entities providing rafting and other tourist services in the area is not well-defined. This lack of clarity can lead to disputes and difficulties in determining the rights and responsibilities of different stakeholders.
6. **Environmental Awareness:** There is a need for greater emphasis on environmental protection and sustainable practices in the rafting area. Insufficient awareness and education regarding environmental issues may lead to negative impacts on the river ecosystem and surrounding environment.

7. **Lack of Public-Private Dialogue:** The dialogue and cooperation between the public and private sectors in managing natural resources, such as the Neretva River, are not adequately developed. This hinders effective collaboration and coordination in addressing the challenges faced in the area.
8. **Promotion and Statistics:** The destination's potential as an extremely attractive tourist brand may not be fully realized due to a lack of promotion. Additionally, the absence of relevant statistics on the number of service users makes it difficult to assess the impact of tourism activities and plan for future development.

Efforts to Address these Issues:

The City of Konjic has recognized the importance of resolving these issues and has taken action by initiating the formation of a working group. The goal is to facilitate public-private dialogue and find the best model for organizing the rafting area. The working group aims to establish a rafting control system and regulate other tourist services on the Neretva River. The ultimate objective is to draft a "Resolution on the establishment of a control system for rafting and other tourist services on the Neretva River." Through these efforts, the sustainability of the platform can be ensured, and conditions for the future development of tourism can be improved.

Methods, steps, and tools applied

The solutions implemented to address the sustainability issues related to rafting and other tourist services on the Neretva River include:

- **Establishment of a working group:** The first step taken was the formation of a working group comprising representatives from various sectors, including the Konjic City, Agency "PRVI KORAK" Ltd. Konjic, and rafting service providers. This collaborative approach allowed for a comprehensive discussion and involvement of all relevant actors.
- **Engagement of a tourism consultant:** To enhance and provide the practical tools for problem-solving, a consultant with expertise in the field of tourism was engaged. The consultant likely brought in specialized knowledge and experience to support the implementation of sustainable practices and effective management of rafting services.
- **Public-private dialogue:** The working group together with the engaged tourism consultant facilitated public-private dialogue, providing a platform for different stakeholders to share their perspectives, concerns, and suggestions. This open dialogue helped in finding the best model for managing the area and addressing sustainability issues.
- **Drafting a resolution:** A draft resolution titled "Resolution on the establishment of a control system for rafting and other tourist services on the Neretva River" was prepared. The resolution aimed to define the activities that are strictly prohibited on the rafting route to protect the environment.
- **Public hearing:** A public hearing was held in the City of Konjic, where individuals and organizations from the public, private, and non-governmental sectors had the opportunity to provide feedback on the draft resolution and suggest improvements. This participatory approach ensured that the concerns and ideas of all stakeholders were taken into account.
- **Environmental protection measures:** To emphasize the importance of environmental protection, the rafting route was mapped, and information tables were set up to educate visitors about the significance of preserving the environment and ensuring safety during rafting activities. All actors involved in rafting operations were made responsible for environmental protection.
- **Cleanliness and environmental maintenance:** The public company "Standard" Ltd., operating in the area of the city of Konjic, was assigned the responsibility of maintaining cleanliness in the city and its surrounding areas. This measure aimed to ensure the overall cleanliness and environmental well-being of the region.

- **Clear definition of roles and responsibilities:** The adoption of the resolution was expected to provide a clear definition of the key actors involved in solving problems related to rafting, their tasks, and activities. It aimed to establish a system of control over the provision of rafting services and outline the rights and obligations of all actors. This clarity would facilitate effective management and coordination among stakeholders.

Overall, these solutions aimed to promote sustainable practices, protect the environment, and ensure the responsible provision of rafting and tourist services on the Neretva River.

Key success factors

The successful resolution of the issues was achieved through several critical elements. First, we organized focus groups comprising all relevant actors in the tourism field, led by an engaged expert. This collaborative effort resulted in the creation of a comprehensive document outlining guidelines for addressing the challenges associated with organizing rafting on the Neretva River. Subsequently, the decision was adopted by the Council of Konjic City, ensuring local-level problem-solving.

However, the inclusion of diverse stakeholders with varying interests posed a significant challenge during the decision-making process. One major obstacle we encountered was the regulation of rights and obligations for all parties involved. To enhance the future implementation of the decision and facilitate sustainable tourism development activities, we initiated the establishment of a tourism cluster in Konjic City, named "Welcome to Konjic." This cluster will serve as a platform for connecting and coordinating the efforts of its members, aimed at improving tourism development in the city.

Currently, we are in the process of developing the Sustainable Tourism Development Strategy for the City of Konjic for the period 2023-2027. Workshops have been conducted involving stakeholders from the private, public, and non-governmental sectors to define the direction of tourism development in Konjic for the next five years and identify projects to enhance the tourism sector. Participants from the tourism cluster actively contributed to these workshops, collaborating synergistically to determine the key activities for developing Konjic as a prominent tourist destination.

Lessons learned

Dialogue and synergistic action of all relevant actors play a crucial role in achieving the desired results. The process of systematically arranging the rafting area poses demands due to the differing interests and visions of various actors in solving the problem. While drafting the Resolution, we encountered the challenge of regulating the rights and obligations of all stakeholders. To ensure more efficient future implementation of both the aforementioned decision and future activities in tourism development, we have initiated the establishment of a Tourism cluster in Konjic City, named "Welcome to Konjic". The tourism cluster serves as a tool for connecting and fostering synergistic action among its members, aiming to enhance tourism development in the city area.

Achievements and Results

In order to solve the above-mentioned problem, the following results have been achieved:

- A Resolution was made to establish a control system for rafting and other tourist services on the Neretva River.
- The Main project was developed, including a hydrological study for the exit rafting station.
- The rafting section on the Neretva River was mapped and marked with environmental protection signs.
- A tourism cluster was established with the symbolic name "Welcome to Konjic."
- A promotional video was created to showcase the tourist potential of Konjic City.

Tips for other destinations

Only through the synergistic action of all relevant actors, a destination can achieve the desired results. The process is lengthy and slow, requiring additional effort from all parties involved. However, it is the only way to effectively achieve results.

No other destination in our region faces the same problem as ours. Therefore, we had to research cities that offer rafting on the Tara and Una Rivers. We studied their strategies and solutions and discovered that these cities locally manage rafting regulations. This means that every agency or individual offering rafting must pay a fee and register their guests. Such measures also prevent inexperienced and inadequately trained skippers from guiding tours, ultimately enhancing guest safety and minimizing the risk of fatal injuries. We sincerely hope that in the future, others will look to us for a solution or seek our assistance."

Recognitions and Additional references

For now, we have no recognition, but we believe that the activities undertaken will bring many benefits in the long run for both the destination and the users.

Here you can find links to the news related to our project activities and actions undertaken with the aim of improving our destination management:

HYPERLINK

<https://www.konjic.ba/ba/oglas/888-obavijest-o-odr%C5%BEavanju-javne-rasprave.html> (post related to inclusion of different stakeholders in the process of the making the Resolution on the establishment of a control system for rafting and other tourist services on the Neretva River).

<https://www.facebook.com/prvikorak/posts/pfbid02gXwFRsY9b3DmkDzYrdS5aYKEJnKDkRxsOvQv7qT5A7JN3xkQTBL2FLa26xLLE9ahl> (post on facebook related to the results of project Creating a platform for development of competitive touristic destination)

<https://www.akta.ba/promo/putovanja-i-hrana/13156/agencija-prvi-korak-doo-konjic-izrada-platforme-za-razvoj-konkurentne-turisticke> (link on the news related to the results of project "Creating a platform for development of competitive touristic destination)

<https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=496917545797141&set=pb.100064367005035.2207520000.&type=3> (Post of the first meeting of the workgroup for development of Strategy of Sustainable Tourism Development of Konjic City 2023-2027)

<https://www.konjic.ba/ba/oglasji/888-obavijest-o-odr%C5%BEavaniu-iavne-rasprave.html> (post related to inclusion of different stakeholders in the process of the making the Resolution on the establishment of a control system for rafting and other tourist services on the Neretva River).

<https://www.facebook.com/prvikorak/posts/pfbid02gXwFRsY9b3DmkDzYrdS5aYKEJnKDKRxsovQv7qT5A7JN3xkQTBL2FLa26xLLE9ahl> (post on facebook related to the results of project Creating a platform for development of competitive touristic destination)

<https://www.akta.ba/promo/putovanja-i-hrana/13156/agencija-prvi-korak-doo-konjic-izrada-platforme-za-razvoj-konkurentne-turisticke> (link on the news related to the results of project "Creating a platform for development of competitive touristic destination)

<https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=496917545797141&set=pb.100064367005035.-2207520000.&type=3> (Post of the first meeting of the workgroup for development of Strategy of Sustainable Tourism Development of Konjic City 2023-2027)

<https://www.facebook.com/prvikorak/posts/pfbid0v1t5nCLe9Jd3jpbNeYs6JYB1FMWPXZ2aoeTAayfmPZVzw4r6bMTHkDJUMiZuFtczI> (Post of the second meeting of the workgroup for development of Strategy of Sustainable Tourism Development of Konjic City 2023-2027)

<https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=523385513142827&set=pb.100064141476268.-2207520000.&type=3> (Establishment of Tourism Cluster of Konjic City with the aim of joint action in the field of tourism).