



Good Practice Story Title: Dumrea EcoPark: Revitalization and Sustainable Development of Marinza Lake

Destination: Municipality of Belsh

Country: Albania

Submitting Organization: Municipality of Belsh

Category:

- Destination Management
- Nature & Scenery
- Environment & Climate
- Culture & Tradition
- Thriving Communities
- Business & Marketing

Destination description:

Situated in the center of Albania, the municipality of Belsh stands out for its commitment to both environmental preservation and cultural heritage. Spanning just under 200 km² of breathtaking terrain, this municipality boasts vibrant karst lakes, picturesque olive-tree-covered hills, and a wealth of cultural treasures. With a population primarily composed of 33,000 farmers and fishermen, Belsh warmly embraces visitors. What distinguishes Belsh is its fervent dedication to safeguarding its natural and cultural riches, positioning itself as not just a steward but a vigilant guardian. Rather than viewing tourism as a threat, Belsh has embraced a sustainable tourism model, incorporating local voices and values to minimize environmental impact. Through this ethos, they not only honor their past but also chart a sustainable future, inviting all to experience Belsh's mindful tourism approach and leave a lasting, positive imprint.



Summary of Good Practice Story:

The Good Practice story from the Municipality of Belsh, Albania, focuses on transforming Marinza Lake from a neglected and polluted site into a thriving tourist destination. Over the years, the lake suffered from severe neglect. It was primarily used for agricultural purposes, leading to waste accumulation and degradation. The implemented solution involved a shift towards sustainable tourism practices. Key actions included comprehensive environmental cleanup, community involvement in preservation efforts, and the development of eco-friendly infrastructure. By addressing pollution and enhancing the lake's natural beauty, Belsh successfully unlocked its tourism potential. The project, known as "Dumrea Eko Park," led to increased tourist arrivals, improved the local economy, and empowered local communities by providing employment and fostering a sense of pride. This model of sustainable development serves as a valuable example for other destinations facing similar challenges, emphasizing the importance of environmental health, community engagement, and comprehensive planning.

Issues faced:

Marinza Lake had suffered neglect and degradation over the years. One of Belsh's many lakes, Marinza Lake had become polluted and overlooked, devoid of any tourist potential. It was primarily used for agricultural purposes, serving as a water source for local farmers' crops. This agricultural focus meant that the lake area was filled with waste and various debris, presenting an unsightly view for passersby. Despite its potential as a picturesque destination, Marinza Lake remained overlooked and underutilized for tourism. The solution implemented, as highlighted in the Good Practice Story, involved a shift towards sustainable tourism practices. By addressing environmental concerns and involving the local community in preservation efforts, Belsh successfully transformed Marinza Lake into a vibrant and sustainable tourist destination, showcasing its natural beauty while minimizing negative impacts on the environment.

Solution:

Our solution focused on transforming Marinza Lake from a neglected and polluted area into a thriving tourist destination. This transformation involves initiatives for lake cleanup, preservation of its natural beauty, and development of infrastructure and amenities to attract visitors. By addressing pollution and beautifying the area, Belsh has unlocked the tourism potential of Marinza Lake, turning it into a key attraction for the city. This shift from neglect to proactive development not only improves the local economy through tourism but also enhances Belsh's overall image and appeal as a destination.



Methods, Steps, and Tools applied:

In 2020, the Municipality of Belsh launched the "Development of Tourism in Lake Marinëz, Tourism in the Seferan Tourist Area and Rehabilitation of Hiking Trails Connecting the Rrahman and Marinëz Lakes" project with support from the Albanian Development Fund. This initiative aimed to cater to visitors eager to explore the Dumre region, enhance the area's tourism offerings, and boost local employment opportunities. The project began with a thorough analysis of visitor needs and the tourism potential of the area. This phase involved local residents, potential tourists, and tourism experts, utilizing surveys and market analyses to gather essential information.

Following this, a detailed plan was drafted, comprising several subprojects, with collaboration from architects, urban planners, and officials from the Municipality of Belsh, alongside consultants from the Albanian Development Fund. Securing funding from the Albanian Development Fund was a crucial step. The implementation phase included several key subprojects: A parking area at Lake Marinëz was created, designed to be minimally invasive by using trees to delineate parking spots and provide shade. A wooden pier on concrete pillars was constructed, ensuring both functionality and environmental sensitivity. A similar approach was applied to the parking area near the tobacco processing depots, which was flat and well-shaded. For visitors, a rest area for campers was established with minimal services like electricity to avoid pollution and noise. A separate camping zone for tents was created, offering a simple, shaded area without vehicle parking to maintain tranquility.

Additionally, a picnic zone with basic amenities such as tables and benches was set up to ensure a peaceful environment free of parked vehicles. The project included constructing a bridge at Lake Marinëz, featuring concrete pillars and a wooden deck designed to be sturdy yet transparent enough to avoid disturbing aquatic life. An 8-kilometer trail connecting Lake Rrahman to Lake Merhoj was developed to enhance access to key natural attractions and promote eco-tourism. Nine wooden cabins and a restaurant were positioned around Lake Marinëz. These cabins, with their minimal alpine design and eco-friendly materials, blended seamlessly into the natural landscape, minimizing environmental impact. Each cabin featured a ground-floor living area and an upper floor with bedrooms, totaling 45 square meters. The restaurant followed a similar design ethos, providing services without compromising the local ecosystem.

The project also included paving and constructing the road leading to the depots in Seferan, improving access and connectivity within the tourist area. Promoting and marketing the project was a joint effort by the municipality, the Albanian Development Fund, and various media outlets. The initiative received backing from the Prime Minister and the Ministry of Tourism, helping to raise awareness and attract visitors. Information sources included demographic and tourism data from the Municipality of Belsh and national statistical agencies, as well as previous studies and reports on tourism in the Dumre region. This project aims to increase the number of tourists, enhance the local economy, and preserve the natural environment of Dumre.





A notable component of the project was the planting of over 3,000 decorative trees, significantly enhancing the aesthetic appeal of the area and contributing to environmental sustainability. This greening initiative not only beautified the landscape but also supported local biodiversity and provided additional shade for visitors.

Achievements and Results:

The implementation of the "Dumrea Eko Park" project by Belsh, with support from the Albanian Development Fund, has yielded significant direct and indirect results, showcasing a blend of qualitative and quantitative data. Addressing the pressing need for development in the region, the project focused on enhancing tourism around Lake Marinza, the Seferan tourist area, and rehabilitating tourist trails connecting Lake Rahman with Lake Marinza.

Quantitatively, the project's effectiveness is evident in the increase in tourist arrivals and revenue generation. With the establishment of eco-friendly accommodations comprising nine two-story cottages made from sustainable materials, the park has seen a notable surge in overnight stays. Additionally, the integration of a solar-powered shaded parking lot has not only tripled parking capacity but also reduced energy costs and carbon footprint, showcasing tangible environmental and economic benefits.

Furthermore, the planting of over 3,000 decorative trees has enhanced the region's natural beauty, attracting more visitors and providing environmental benefits such as improved air quality.

The park currently employs 8 people, including 5 men and 3 women. It attracts approximately 350 to 400 visitors each week, primarily Albanians, though it also welcomes international tourists. On average, 5 to 6 camper vans park in the area each week, and the camping zone sees 10 to 15 visitors weekly.

Qualitatively, the project has transformed the region's socio-economic landscape. The "Dumrea Eko Park" has become a beacon of sustainable development, attracting both local and international visitors. Its integrated services, including restaurants serving locally sourced cuisine and amenities like clean and secure camper parking with minimal ecological impact, have enhanced visitor experiences while preserving the natural environment.

Furthermore, the park's role as a model for sustainable development has empowered local communities, offering employment opportunities and fostering a sense of pride and ownership. The project's success has ripple effects beyond tourism, positively impacting the overall quality of life for residents in the area.

In summary, the "Dumrea Eko Park" project has effectively addressed the identified issues, showcasing tangible improvements in both quantitative metrics such as tourist numbers and revenue, as well as qualitative aspects like community empowerment and environmental sustainability.



Lessons Learned and Advice:

The transformation of Marinza Lake in Belsh, Albania, tackled neglect and pollution through sustainable tourism. Initially polluted and used for agriculture, the lake area required a comprehensive cleanup and community involvement. By engaging locals in preservation efforts, a sense of ownership and responsibility was fostered. Critical elements included adopting eco-friendly practices, such as solar-powered facilities, and developing infrastructure like sustainable accommodations. These initiatives not only enhanced the lake's natural beauty but also attracted tourists, boosting the local economy. Key strategies for success included prioritizing sustainability, involving the community, and comprehensive planning. For other destinations facing similar challenges, we recommend prioritizing environmental health and actively engaging local communities to ensure long-term viability and economic benefits. This holistic approach serves as a model for addressing environmental degradation while fostering sustainable development.

Recognitions and Additional References

Prime Minister Edi Rama

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Lspb7snMYrU>

Article - Belsh, new model of ecotourism near Marinza Lake, date: 30/10/2021

<https://ata.gov.al/2021/10/30/belsh-model-i-ri-i-ekoturizmit-prane-liqenit-te-marines/>

A new center for tourism and culture is coming up in Marinza Lake, Dumre.

<https://visitbelsh.al/marinez-lake/>

The project for the development of tourism in the Marine Lake, tourism in the Seferan tourist area and the rehabilitation of the tourist paths connecting the Rahman - Marinza Lakes, Belsh Municipality - May 17, 2021

<https://www.albaniandf.org/2021/05/17/projekti-per-zhvillimin-e-turizmit-ne-ligenin-marinez-turizmit-n-e-zonen-turistike-seferan-dhe-rehabilitimi-i-shtigjeve-turistike-qe-lidh-liqenet-e-rrahmanit-marinzes-bas-hkia-belsh/>

Photos

https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1jbgVUvKEurU9jJEK4vxCZyH5-KD4N_9o?usp=sharing