DAI

THE DINARIC ARC INITIATIVE

THE DINARIC ARC

WWF, UNESCO-ROSTE, UNDP, IUCN and the Council of Europe are concerned with the future of the Dinaric Arc, and are active in the region with a varied portfolio of projects and initiatives aimed at securing the long-term conservation and sustainable development of this part of Europe. These institutions have joined forces and created **THE DINARIC ARC INITIATIVE (DAI)**.

Cover
Tara River, Durmitor National Park, Serbia and Montenegro
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Brown bear (*Ursus arctos*)
© WWF-Mediterranean / F. Antonelli

Duman karst's spring, Livno, Bosnia and Herzegovina
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Loggerhead turtle (*Caretta caretta*) swimming in open sea
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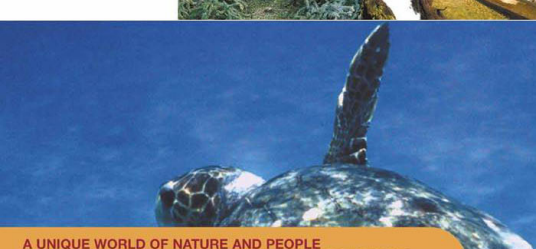
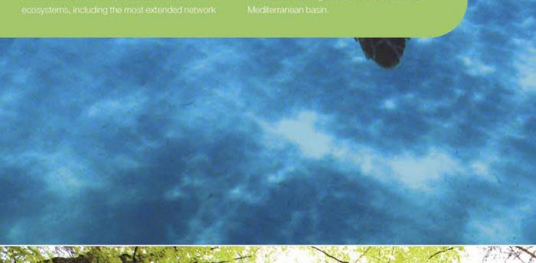


A UNIQUE WORLD OF NATURE AND PEOPLE WHERE EASTERN EUROPE MEETS THE MEDITERRANEAN

The Dinaric Arc is a region of south-eastern Europe with a surface of approximately 100,000 km² and more than 6,000 km of coastline, encompassing the whole region facing the eastern Adriatic Sea, from the city of Trieste (Italy) to Tirana (Albania). It includes portions of the following countries: Italy, Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia and Montenegro, and Albania.

The relatively high Dinaric Alps (maximum height is 2,692 m) run parallel to the eastern Adriatic coast, and are famous for their karstic geology – Livanjsko Polje in western Bosnia being the largest karstic field in the world. Towards the southern end of the region, the Prokletije Mazsif and the "Albanian Alps" are among the wildest mountains in Europe.
The Dinaric Arc hosts important freshwater ecosystems, including the most extended network of subterranean rivers and lakes in Europe, and wetlands of international importance, such as the Neretva delta (Bosnia and Herzegovina/Croatia), and Skadar/Shkodra lake (Serbia and Montenegro/Albania). The river Tara, which flows through Montenegro into the Drina, is well known for forming a long and wild canyon which is the second deepest in the world, after that of the Colorado.
The eastern Adriatic coast still includes unspoilt tracts, with limited major mass tourism development. Hundreds of islands characterise the eastern Adriatic coast – from Cres to Mljet – giving way to a variety of seascapes and coastal/marine ecosystems. The extremely indented Bay of Kotor is unique in the Mediterranean, while the coast of Albania is amongst the wildest in the whole Mediterranean basin.



THE DINARIC ARC INITIATIVE

The Dinaric Arc Initiative (DAI) is a broad framework of collaboration which aims to add value to the on-going programmes of all its partners, and put in place new specific actions aiming at:

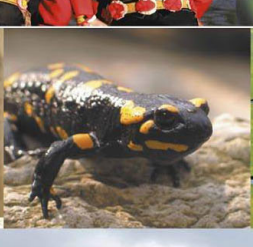
- the preservation of the wealth and integrity of the Dinaric Arc through the establishment of networks of protected areas and support to initiatives for the conservation of its biological diversity and the sustainable management of its resources;
- the preservation and valorisation of the cultural diversity and the cultural heritage of the Dinaric Arc;
- the promotion of intercultural dialogue, trans-boundary collaboration and scientific co-operation among the countries of the region;
- the empowerment of local societies to foster local community development;
- the integration of environmental policies across all the relevant sectoral initiatives.

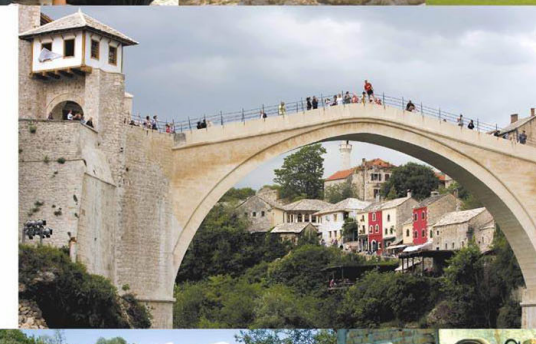
The partners of the DAI expect to reach these ambitious objectives by encouraging the development of diversified initiatives and putting in place specific field projects, supporting policy and advocacy processes, helping build the capacity of key stakeholders in the region, and promoting awareness and education campaigns for target audiences in the countries of the Dinaric Arc.

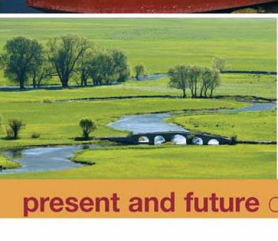
natural heritage

Throughout the Mediterranean region, the introduction of farming and livestock systems over 3,000 years ago led to a change and, in some cases, an increase in biological diversity. Over the millennia, these low-intensity farming practices created habitats which integrate forest, pasture and cropland, and provide a home for a unique set of species. These complex landscape mosaics are still present throughout the Dinaric Arc. Some of the most relevant conservation values and favourable conditions for conservation along the Dinaric Arc include:

- large and well-preserved forests with high diversity of flora species and a high rate of endemism (10-20% of all the plants are endemic to the region);
- unique karst ecosystems and cave habitats with a diversity of invertebrates, fish, amphibians, and reptiles;
- the Dinaric mountains harbour important populations of large carnivores – lynx, brown bear, wolf, jackal – and are a crucial ecological corridor between the Alps and the mountains of south-eastern Europe;
- the numerous wetlands and freshwater habitats host important nesting populations of endangered bird species, including the Dalmatian pelican, glossy ibis, pygmy cormorant, and many others;
- the variety of coastal and marine habitats – including shallow reefs, *Posidonia* meadows, small rocks and archipelagos, high coasts, caves – are feeding and breeding grounds for species including cetaceans, sea birds, and marine turtles;
- the eastern Adriatic is one of the richest fishing grounds of the Mediterranean. It also hosts the most diverse commercial marine species in the Basin;
- the presence of many nature-friendly traditional economic activities – especially small-scale agriculture and livestock-raising, traditional forestry, and small-scale fisheries – form a valuable basis for the sustainable development of the rural and natural regions of the Dinaric Arc.







Tara River forest, Durmitor National Park, Serbia and Montenegro
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Island of Lastovo, Croatia
© WWF-Mediterranean / F. Guglielmi

Children of the island of Vis, Croatia
© WWF-Mediterranean / L. Bura

Gecko (*Salamandra salamandra*)
© WWF-Mediterranean / M. Sallevic

River in grassland, Bosnia and Herzegovina
© WWF-Mediterranean / M. Gunther

Mostar bridge, Mostar, Bosnia and Herzegovina
© WWF-Mediterranean / M. Gunther

Grey wolf (*Canis lupus*)
© WWF-Canon / G.M. Behr

Traditional dance, island of Lastovo, Croatia
© WWF-Mediterranean / F. Guglielmi

Pyramidal Orchid (*Anacamptis pyramidalis*)
© WWF-Mediterranean / L. Dzerovic

Crevna river going to Skadar lake, Serbia and Montenegro
© WWF-Mediterranean / M. Gunther

Old men, Durazzo, Albania
© WWF-Mediterranean / F. Guglielmi

present and future challenges

Over the last twenty years the countries of the Dinaric Arc have experienced periods of high instability, war, economic crisis and transition towards a market economy and European integration. Environmental policies and institutions have suffered a long period of eclipse and are now being rebuilt, although with varying results. While Slovenia is a full member of the European Union and Croatia is currently negotiating its accession, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia and Montenegro and Albania are still among the least developed countries in Europe. The region is under strong economic development pressure, and the need to generate income and improve the living standards of the population is leading to the growing exploitation of natural resources. The development challenge is both a threat and an opportunity to the conservation of the natural and cultural heritage of the Dinaric Arc. Among the major current and future threats are: illegal logging, deforestation, poaching, river damming, unregulated coastal development, unregulated exploitation of marine resources.
A complex governance system, the unsatisfactory level of enforcement of existing laws, and a widespread lack of capacity at different levels of the societies are limiting factors and additional challenges to the sound development of the region.

cultural heritage

South-east Europe has historically been a rich conglomerate of cultures and religions, mainly due to its position as a cross-roads between western Europe and the Middle East. Its political, philosophical and historical development has been central to the formation of a broad European vision. This rich background is reflected in a wide and varied cultural heritage.
The location and geographical distribution of various settlements, for example, reflect a search for harmony in the development of towns and their natural surroundings: Kotor and its bay, and Dubrovnik and the coastline, represent two symbolic examples of this. Unfortunately, such symbols of cultural and natural unity have been frequently targets during the conflicts that have affected the region.
Traces of the ancient borders (e.g. the "Roman limes" along the Danube River) and more recent ones (the Iron Curtain) are relevant elements of cultural landscapes that are important to protect and value within the local development frameworks. Local heritage – the result of the long interaction between human settlements and their natural settings – can be an important factor in fostering mutual understanding between various communities and a means of focusing their rapid national socio-economic transitions.
The Dinaric Arc Initiative intends to facilitate this process, serving as a cross-sectoral framework of cooperation, where natural and cultural assets are harmonised within common territorial and development frameworks.

Council of Europe
Directorate for Culture and Cultural and Natural Heritage (DGIV)
Mikael de Thyse
Head for the technical co-operation and field actions unit
Palais de l'Europe
67075 Strasbourg Cedex, France
Tel: + 33 (0) 3 88 41 28 61
Fax: + 33 (0) 3 88 41 27 55/37 83
mikhael.dethyse@coe.int
www.coe.int/heritage/tcu

IUCN - The World Conservation Union
Programme Office for south-eastern Europe
Maja Zitkovic
Project Officer
Dr. Ivana Fiborn 91
11070 Belgrade
Serbia and Montenegro
Tel: + 381 11 22 72 411
Fax: + 381 11 22 72 531
maja.zitkovic@iucn.org
www.iucneurope.org

UNESCO
Regional Bureau for Science in Europe (ROSTE)
Dr. Giorgio Andrian
Environmental Programmes Consultant
Palazzo Zorzi - 4930 Castello
30122 Venezia, Italy
Tel: + 39 041 260 15 24 / +39 041 266 15 11
Fax: + 39 041 528 99 95
g.andrian@unesco.org
www.portal.unesco.org/venice

WWF
Mediterranean Programme office
Marco Pagliani
Head of Programme Development
Via Po 25/C - 00198 Rome, Italy
Tel: + 34 91 31 67 381 / + 39 06 844 97 227
Fax: + 34 91 31 67 381 / + 39 06 841 38 66
mpagliani@wwfmedpo.org
www.panda.org/mediterranean

UNDP Albania
Bafkhuyag Baldangombo
Assistant Resident Representative
Rruga: "Deshmorët e 4 Shkurtit"
Villa 35, Tirana, Albania
Tel: + 355 (4) 233 122 /148 - ext 130
Fax: + 355 (4) 232 075
bafkhuyag.baldangombo@undp.org
www.undp.org.al

UNDP Bosnia and Herzegovina
Mr. Goran Vukmir,
Environment Portfolio Manager
48 Marsala Tita
71000 Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina
Tel: + 387 33 276 800 / + 387 51 303318
Fax: + 387 33 552 330 / + 387 51 303318
gvukmir@undp.ba
www.undp.ba

UNDP Croatia
Sandra Balent
Environment Programme Associate
Kesterčanekova 1
HR-10000 Zagreb, Croatia
Tel: + 385 1 236 16 23
Fax: + 385 1 236 16 20
sandra.balent@undp.org
www.undp.hr

UNDP Serbia and Montenegro, LO Podgorica
Marina Banovic
Deputy Team Leader
Strengthening governance systems in urban planning in Montenegro
Bulevar Revolucije 24b, 81000 Podgorica
Serbia and Montenegro
Tel: + 381 81 231 251
Fax: + 381 81 231 644
marina.banovic@undp.org
www.undp.org.yu/montenegro

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