



NGO Montenegrin Ecologists Society

# Narrative report on activities for the year 2023

Projects and activities

January 2024

Project name	Target groups	Budget (Euro) and Financed by	Implementation period and location
<b>Youth – Capacity building , Action and Responsibility for the Environment</b>	Young people from Montenegro, Albania, Greece, schools, Ministry of Education.	312.526 European Union	2023-2025 Montenegro-Albania-Greece

Youth-CARE (Capacity building, Action and Responsibility for the Environment), launched through the Erasmus+ program.

This two-year project is led by Beyond Barriers - Pertej Barrierave from Tirana in cooperation with four professional organizations in the field of environmental protection and non-formal education. They are: ANCE - Greece, TDM 2000 International - Italy, The Door Albania - Skadar, Albania, and CDE as representatives of Montenegro.

The results achieved so far are connecting and getting to know partner organizations and conducting comprehensive training with them on the implementation of this complex project. Through this project, MES met the Erasmus plus program for the first time, which further improved the organization's capacities.

In the next year of the project, joint efforts encompassed various activities, including research on non-formal education in the field of nature and environmental protection, case studies, nature education, youth exchanges, youth-led initiatives, training of trainers, creation of practical tools, etc. Through this diverse approach, hundreds of young individuals, experts and institutional actors were engaged, each in their own way contributing to the creation of a methodology that will enable young people to get to know their environment and contribute to its improvement.

Expected results of the project/program by the end of the project:

1. Conducted research on informal education in the field of nature and environmental protection, which will provide insight into the effectiveness of existing approaches and the necessary guidelines for further development.
2. Developed studies resulting from nature education, including analyzes and recommendations for future educational activities and programs.
3. Organized camps in nature that enabled a direct experience of learning about nature and the environment for young people.

4. Organized youth exchanges, through which participants will exchange knowledge and experience and expand the network of cooperation in the field of environmental protection.
5. Youth-led initiatives that will enable active participation and management of projects that affect the improvement of the environment.
6. Increased awareness and education about sustainability and the pressure that people exert on nature, with special emphasis on problems such as excessive consumption and waste, as well as the possibilities for individual response to these problems.
7. Training of trainers to provide the necessary skills and tools to effectively transfer knowledge and raise awareness among young people about the importance of nature conservation.
8. Created practical tools that will enable young people to directly apply the acquired knowledge in everyday life, especially in the context of reducing waste and excessive consumption.
9. Engaged hundreds of young individuals, experts and institutional actors who, through various activities, will contribute to the development of a methodology for a better understanding of the environment and the reduction of human impact on it.

Project name	Target groups	Budget (Euro) and Financed by	Implementation period and location
<b>Ecological networks - the key to development based on preserved nature</b>	Ministry of Ecology, Sustainable Development and Northern Region Development, Environmental Protection Agency of Montenegro, Environmental NGOs I local communities	36328.10 Centre for Civic Education and EU	April-December 2023, Podgorica, Montenegro

This project is one of the main thematic units that MES has been following for years and for which it has been recognized in the past, which is the establishment of the Emerald ecological network. Through this project, MES intensified its efforts and additionally engaged in advocacy and initiation processes.

The main achieved results of the project/program:

1. Launched national initiative for the process of establishing a national ecological network - Emerald towards decision makers and competent institutions.
2. Enhanced capacities of relevant CSOs and competent environmental institutions for active participation in the process of establishing an ecological network through two workshops with international experts.
3. Increased public awareness of the importance of ecological networks through the campaign, with a developed methodology that represents a replicable tool for effective communication with the local population and the general public on this topic.

In order to promote the importance of Emerald for Montenegro, we created and published several thematic films called:

### **Forests and Rivers Emerald in Montenegro Humans and Meadows**

We created a brochure: [Emerald Network - Protecting Europe's biodiversity for a sustainable future](#)

We did 5 investigative stories on the topic of different Emerald locations and networks in Montenegro. They are available on our website. Alongside that, we started a campaign for the establishment of the Emerald network in Montenegro with organizations from the region and created a "shadow report" for Ručen ecosystems.

We organized two events and exhibitions dedicated to the dialogue between local residents who live in different areas.

Links:

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Project name	Target groups	Budget (Euro) and Financed by	Implementation period and location
<b>Towards Biodiversity Conservation and Strengthening Protected Area management of Cijevna River</b>	The scientific community, the local population of the municipality are suing, the management of PA Cijevna river canyon, the citizens	39.825,40, Euronatur foundation	October 2022-April 2024. Podgorica-Tuzi-Niksic, Montenegro

The project was focused on the scientific research work of the unique plant community (phytocenosis) *Adianto-Pinguiculetum hirtiflorae Stevanović & Bulić 1989*. After defining the state and eventual discovery of this natural diversity, the team of botanist experts engaged in the project will assess the state of this community in the canyon and give specific guidelines for recovery and its actual preservation. The project also included work and communication with local communities and managers of this PA with the aim of more efficient management.

#### Achieved Results

1. Improved status of endangered species and their habitats: the project contributed to enhancing the health and stability of endangered species by conducting scientific research, proposing protection and revitalization measures, and delivering these findings to current managers, along with initiating urgent action plans.
2. Prepared and submitted to stakeholders Assessment of the state of *Pinguicula hirtiflora* populations in the Cijevna canyon and guidelines for habitat protection, restoration and monitoring.
3. Identification of economic potential: opportunities for the sustainable economic valorization of this PA were identified and analyzed. These findings were incorporated into a comprehensive socioeconomic analysis and used to start dialogue with relevant authorities.
4. Increased public awareness: structured and targeted online campaigns, raised awareness about the importance and ecological value of the Cijevna River as a protected area, reaching over 600,000 people in Montenegro. Fascinating educative digital content and Cijevna: life in stone as short documentary movie was created for this purpose.
5. We participated in the Scientific Conference where we presented some of the scientific data collected during the project.

Project name	Target groups	Budget (Euro) and Financed by	Implementation period and location
<b>Contribution to the future protection and management of priority areas of CZM watershed protection in the vicinity of Nikšić</b>	Ministry of Ecology, Sustainable Development and Northern Region Development, Environmental protection Agency of Montenegro, Environmental NGOs and local communities	19.873 USD, Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund (CEPF)	December 2022-December 2023

The project was aimed at improving the protection of the Zeta river basin area through scientific research and advocacy at the level of decision-makers and the local community as beneficiaries.

We researched fish species lead by our partner BIOTA from Croatia: We were actively working to collect data on fish species in this region, with special emphasis on cave-dwelling species. In addition, we were studying the potential habitats of the human fish.

We trained new researchers: Our team was training three young researchers to work in the field of fish fauna research and nature conservation.

Cooperation with institutions: We worked with local and state institutions to promote nature protection in Nikšić.

We propose protection measures: We provided specific protection recommendations for certain fish species and their habitats.

We raised capacities of our organization: Created strategic plan that will improve the work and impact of our organization, and help us achieve better results in the field of nature conservation.

The main achieved results of the project/programme:

1. A detailed survey of the fish fauna of the Zeta river basin;
2. Supplemented distribution data for the upper Zeta area and revised the IUCN Red List status;
3. Defined basic threats and stresses of the freshwater ecosystem, including waste and wastewater, with proposed solutions;
4. Promoted values of fish fauna and freshwater habitats through a media campaign;
5. Improved cooperation with the local community and decision-makers in order to remove stress and declare the upper Zeta a protected natural asset;
6. Published a comprehensive publication with the findings of the project.

Cooperation was improved with partners from Croatia, the scientific research organization BIOTA, which, in addition to scientific work, also provided training for young researchers in the field of ichthyofauna and thus further improved the capacities of the MES organization.

In addition, with the aim of increasing knowledge and encouraging inclusion of young people from the region that gravitates to the Zeta River Nature Park, we organized an educational eco-camp on the Zeta River for 20 children from the region of the Zeta River Nature Park.

Project name	Target groups	Budget (Euro) and Financed by	Implementation period and location
<b>Komarnica canyon: educational - protest camp</b>	Decision-makers (the Ministry responsible for Energetics, spatial planning and environmental protection), the wider public of Montenegro, international organizations.	10 000 EUR, EuroNatur, River Collective i Packraft Europe	2023

For a few years now, MES has been focused on preserving the Komarnica river canyon from potential destruction during the planned construction of a large HPP on it. In addition to the national level, thanks to great efforts and the campaign, our work has also reached the international level, and in the course of 2023, we managed to collect a large amount of both professional and financial help in order to continue our efforts in this area. One of the key activities was the organization of a protest educational camp in order to promote, educate and raise public awareness of this problem.

The main activities of the project:

1: Active and citizen - science days - promoting the potential of the Komarnica canyon and the surrounding villages and natural mountain areas by organizing various activities that everyone can join, such as: kayaking / packrafting / canoeing downstream through the Komarnica canyon; fly fishing; hiking; sport climbing; as well as citizen science workshops to learn about different groups of biodiversity such as: large mammals, bats, insects, birds (bird watching and ringing), reptiles and amphibians and plants.

2: Networking event - connect wild river activists in the region and Europe, share our problems, but also ideas and solutions for preserving the last free rivers in Europe.

3: Day of traditional knowledge and agricultural values of the region: after educating participants about local values, peculiarities and potentials for the development of eco-friendly agricultural practices, participants learned and tried out the skills of local traditional knowledge, but also learned to make traditional dishes (pies, fritters...) , knitting and crocheting in the traditional way, while trying out local products at the agricultural fair that was organized.

4: Day of Culture - Sharing the cultural values of the area, and ending the camp with a concert on the square, which is the first time in the history of Šavnik that such an event is held. It gathered local residents and visitors on the main square, to enjoy the music of famous and new musicians who are at the same time fighters for rivers and for nature.



CRNOGORSKO DRUŠTVO

**EKOLOGA**

Note: The camp was visited by representatives of 17 countries, a total of about 400 people joined, participated and connected at the camp, and sent a clear and loud message to the decision makers in Šavnik and in Montenegro: that Šavnik can and should be a real Balkan and European outdoor tourism center, as well as a place that will proudly show the world the natural, cultural and agricultural heritage of Montenegro.

A film emerged from this camp, which perfectly conveys part of the atmosphere from it.

Through our intensive campaign, we managed to get the support of numerous famous people from the world of sports, acting, music and the like who recognized and supported our work. In addition, MES is one of the initiators of the Save the Komarnica initiative, so it invested a lot of work and energy in the development of that initiative with partners and other supporters.

## Other more significant activities of MES during 2023.

1. Created the following educational brochures:

**Fish of the Zeta River** in English

**Guide to the world of amphibians of Montenegro**, updated edition

**Guide through the world of reptiles of Montenegro**, updated edition

Participated with the organisational data and made a huge contribution to the creation of the

**Red List of Reptiles and Amphibians of Montenegro**.

2. We hosted the Biodiversity Survey scientific expedition in Komarnica Canyon.

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[heps:// www.biodiversitysurvey.eu/](https://www.biodiversitysurvey.eu/)

3. We have submitted a proposal for initiating the procedure for the protection of two Skadar oaks that adorn the territory of Bjelopavlići reagion.

[heps:// www.instagram.com/p/CrQ5GvvIkDK/?utm\\_source=ig\\_web\\_copy\\_link&igsh=MzRlODBiNWFIZA==](https://www.instagram.com/p/CrQ5GvvIkDK/?utm_source=ig_web_copy_link&igsh=MzRlODBiNWFIZA==)

4. Signed memorandum on cooperation with the Ministry of Ecology, Sustainable Development and Northern Region Development.

5. The story of Komarnica and our struggle for its freedom was conveyed to the world through the magazine of the well-known European organization dedicated to the preservation of nature, EuroNatur.

6. At the end of the year, MES also produced an ***Assessment of free-flowing rivers and tributaries with the potential to be designated as WRNP Report for Morača River***. This work was supported by Euronatur foundation. Created document was a desktop analysis, and it contains all the valuable data on the biodiversity and natural values of this river ecosystem with its surroundings, which can further serve as a basis for assessing the environmental impact of potential projects, then the basis for potential protection studies and other spatial planning strategic documents.

Throughout our work, we have established strong communication with local media outlets and online platforms. Since 2023, media interest in our activities has grown significantly, with frequent invitations to provide statements and participate as guests on various television programs. This increased visibility has been particularly linked to the promotion of scientific research, advocacy for the protection of freshwater ecosystems, and the engagement and education of young people. In parallel, we developed an effective social media outreach system, positioning us among the most active civil society organizations in the field of environmental protection in the country.

This is further confirmed by our financial performance, with the organization's revenue reaching more than 84,000 last year.

Montenegrin Ecologists Society

General secretary

Jelena Popović

