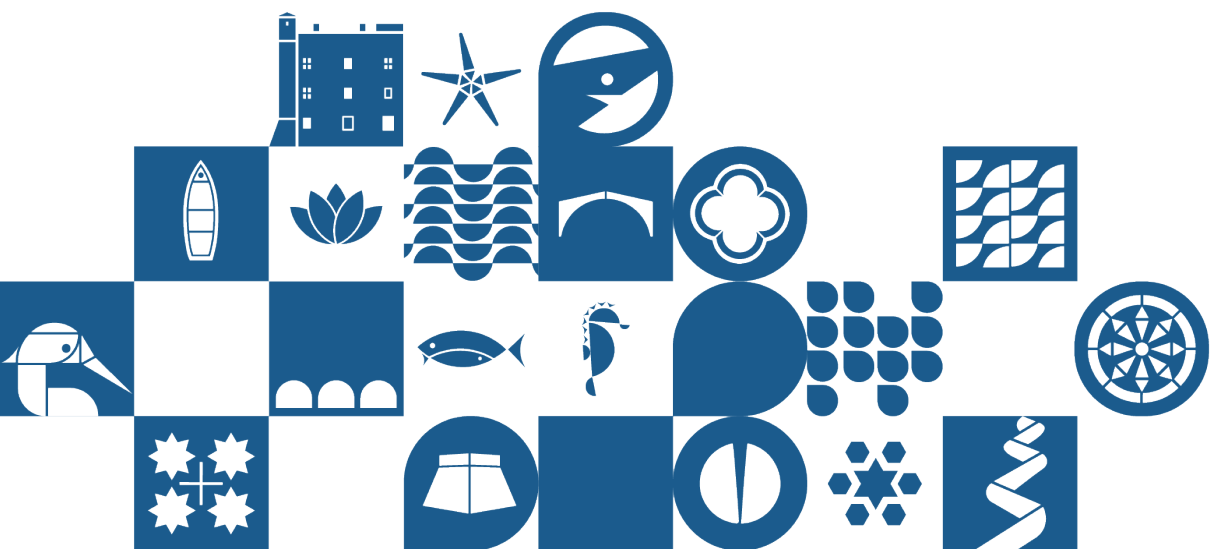




Blue Pass EXChAngE

Institute of Marine Biology
University of Montenegro
Kotor, Montenegro
2022



Project title and acronym	Explore Cross-border Aquatic Biodiversity - EXChAngE
Description of the project, including its aims, results, outputs, activities, etc	Project is developing a new cross-border tourism product – the Blue Pass, which enables visits of new thematic routes: Dubrovnik and Aquarium (CRO), Kotor and Aquarium Boka (MNE), Hutovo Blato Aqua Path, and Mostar Aqua Path (BiH), and attracts more tourists in the area
Total project budget (in EUR)	1.686.047,15
EU co-financing amount (in EUR)	1.433.140,05
Duration of the project	15.08.2020 - 14.11.2022
Information on the project's Priority Axis	Contributing to the development of tourism and preserving cultural and natural heritage
Name of the Lead Partner and Project Partners and description of their roles within the project	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> University of Dubrovnik (LP): Work package (WP): Management and trainings Tourist Organisation of Kotor (PP2): WP Implementation, in particular digital services and trainings University of Montenegro, Institute of Marine Biology (PP3): WP Management and graphic design Tourist Board of Herzegovina - Neretva Canton (PP4): WP Investment and trainings Public Company Hutovo Blato Nature Park, Čapljina (PP5): WP Communication
A reference to the Programme webpage	www.interreg-hr-ba-me2014@2020.eu
A reference to relevant Funds	The project is co-financed by ERDF and IPA II funds of the European Union
Disclaimer	This publication has been produced with the assistance of the European Union. The contents of this publication are the sole responsibility of the University of Montenegro, Institute of Marine Biology, and can in no way be taken to reflect the views of the European Union.

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EXChAngE Project

Explore Cross-border Aquatic
Biodiversity – EXChAngE

About

The project „Explore Cross-border Aquatic Biodiversity – EXChAngE” developed a new cross-border tourism product – the Blue Pass, which enables visits of new thematic routes: Dubrovnik and Aquarium (Croatia), Kotor and Aquarium Boka (Montenegro), Hutovo Blato Aqua Path, and Mostar Aqua Path (Bosnia and Herzegovina), and attracts more tourists in the area.



Dr Nenad Antolović

On the project main objective, Dr Nenad Antolović, the Head of the Institute for Marine and Coastal Research of the University of Dubrovnik – the lead partner, said, “Activities will be implemented with the main objective to strengthen and diversify the tourism offer through exploring cross-border aquatic biodiversity and to enable better management and sustainable use of cultural and natural heritage.”

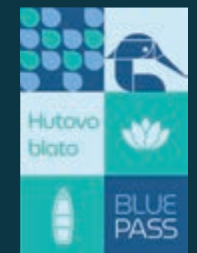
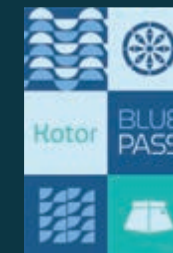
Project partners implemented a set of activities: developing the cross-border tourism product, developing, promoting, and branding the Blue Pass pack, and developing and implementing a training program in standardization of natural heritage. Small-scale infrastructure is developed and improved: upgraded Dubrovnik Aquarium (CRO), extended Aquarium Boka in Kotor (MNE), upgraded aqua path in Hutovo Blato, and renovated City Bath in Mostar (BiH).



Project Partners

EXChAngE project was implemented by five partners: The University of Dubrovnik – the Institute for Marine and Coastal Research (CRO), Tourism Organisation of Kotor

Municipality, The University of Montenegro – the Institute of Marine Biology (MNE), Tourist Board of Herzegovina-Neretva Canton and Nature Park Hutovo Blato (BiH).





■ The University of Dubrovnik, the Institute for Marine and Coastal Research ■

Lead partner, the University of Dubrovnik – the Institute for Marine and Coastal Research (IMCR) was founded in the mid-twentieth century.

Organized research work in the field of oceanography and fisheries in Dubrovnik began after the Second World War with the founding of the Fisheries Station in 1946 and the founding of the Biological Institute of the Yugoslav Academy of Sciences and Arts (JAZU) in 1949. The activities of the Institute are basic and applied research of natural features of the Adriatic Sea and the coast. Through their four laboratories, the Institute's scientists research the fields of oceanology, plankton ecology and population genetics, marine organisms, aquaristics, flora and fauna of the land.

The Institute also develops other activities such as: monitoring of living resources in the sea and on land, monitoring of sea quality, maintenance and popularization of aquariums, maintenance and popularization of the Botanical Garden on Lokrum, formation of scientific and professional collections, and organization of courses and lectures. Its core business Core competencies of the Institute are marine biodiversity, ecology, and management of the Aquarium. Recent results detect environmental conditions in the cross-border Croatia – Montenegro region and rural educational, cultural, and ethnographic tourist attractions.

Project activities.

The IMCR was provided overall coordination (management) and internal quality control. The IMCR was responsible for the overall project financial and administrative management. As lead partner, the IMCR organized launching event, developed project communication strategy, and provided translation services for all audio guides. The IMCR was also responsible for organization of a seminar with webinar titled „Adriatic Sea Biodiversity“ and for reconstruction of Aquarium Dubrovnik.

Tourism Organisation of Kotor Municipality

Project Partner 2: Tourism Organisation of Kotor municipality (TOK) is located in one of the most charming and historical touristic sites of Montenegro – the medieval town of Kotor, which is due to its environmental, cultural and historical values listed under UNESCO protection.

TOK's main role is preservation, improvement and promotion of authentic values of Kotor, as well as organization and promotion of manifestations and traditional events, encouraging and organizing activities aimed at protecting and preserving the tourists'

place, the environment and cultural heritage, valorization of all resources that Kotor city possess to enrich Kotor's tourist offer, organization of study trips of journalists to promote Kotor's tourism offer, and providing services and information for tourists.

Project activities

TOK was responsible for developing project action plan and for managing all project web and social media services. TOK oversaw development of e-guide and its related content. TOK was also responsible for organization of the seminar with webinar titled „Touristic Presentation in English“, as well as the training for project webmasters.



■ The University of Montenegro, the Institute of Marine Biology ■

Project Partner 3, the University of Montenegro – the Institute of Marine Biology (IMB) main activities and competencies are investigation and protection of the Adriatic Sea with particular interest on the South Adriatic part.

Core competencies of the IMB lies in the comprehensive research of the marine and coastal area, which has its wide impact to the environmental protection and prevention of those areas. Recent results present the marine biodiversity of Boka Kotorska bay and provide inputs for the National Strategy for Integrated Coastal Zone Management of Montenegro.

Project activities

IMB was responsible for managing project graphic design and promotion, including production of the promo packs, printing Blue Pass card template sheets and organization of the closing conference. IMB was also in charge of reconstruction and extension of Aquarium Boka.

■ Tourist Board of Herzegovina- Neretva Canton ■

Project Partner 4, the Tourist Board of the Herzegovina-Neretva Canton (TBHNC), was founded in 2002 to create and improve the identity and reputation of tourism of the Herzegovina – Neretva canton, planning and implementing a joint strategy and concept of its promotion, proposing and implementing promotional activities in the country and abroad, and raising the quality of the entire tourist offer of Herzegovina – Neretva Canton (HNC).

The aim of the TBHNC is to unify the total tourist offer of the canton, conduct market research for the needs of improving tourism in the HNC, develop and supervise all activities related to the promotion of the HNC tourist product, encourage and coordinate the work of all

economic and other entities in tourism, establishes branches for one or more municipalities as needed, cooperates with international tourism organizations, and is involved in various multinational and regional promotional tourism projects and programs.

Project activities

TBHNC was responsible for organization of the project presentation and promotion at Mostar Fair. TBHNC also organized seminar with webinar: River Neretva Biodiversity. Furthermore, TBHNC was responsible for reconstruction of City Bath in Mostar.





■ Nature Park Hutovo Blato ■

Project Partner 5, Nature Park Hutovo Blato (NPHB) is a protected bird reserve, nature park and a unique sub-Mediterranean wetland in Europe. It has been known since ancient times as a green oasis, with an abundance of water in which conditions for life found many plant and animal species.

Hutovo Blato is located at the south of Herzegovina, surrounded by typical karst environment and ambience. It is a place where you can float and enjoy the view of vast water area with white and yellow water lilies. The presence of numerous birds is breath taking, especially the presence of truly rare kinds, which were the reason why the whole area became protected. This green oasis close to Čapljina has been protected since 1954, when the ornitho fauna reserve was established. Hutovo Blato was included in the "The Convention on Wetlands of International Importance" in 1971 because of its international importance.

The exceptional importance and beauty of Hutovo Blato made it a Nature Park in 1995. There are some interesting facts about it, for example – Hutovo Blato is a vast area of 7,411 hectares and is located at one of the four routes for the birds that migrate from the north and central Europe to Asia and Africa. The swamp is interesting and significant with ornithological, ichthyological, scientific, ecological and tourist point of view. Basic activities Hutovo Blato Nature Park are protection, preservation, improvement, sustainable management, and promotion of the Hutovo Blato wetland as a nature park, through tourism and presentation cultural heritage.

Project activities.

NPHB was responsible for managing project video services and recording audio services. Furthermore, NPHB was in charge for organizing seminar with webinar titled „Hutovo Blato Biodiversity“. NPHB was also responsible for managing of upgrading Hutovo Blato aqua path.

Project deliverables ■

Project activities produced set of deliverables, as follows:



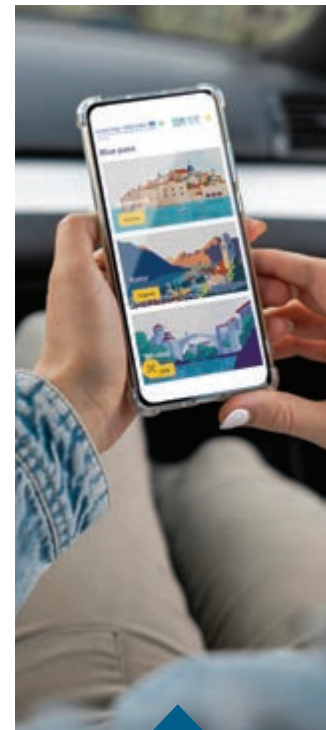
Trainings



Seminars



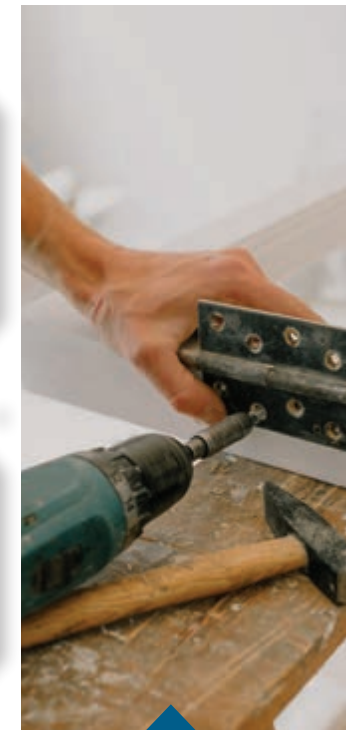
Promotional events



Blue Pass
EXChAngE
Guide



Blue Pass

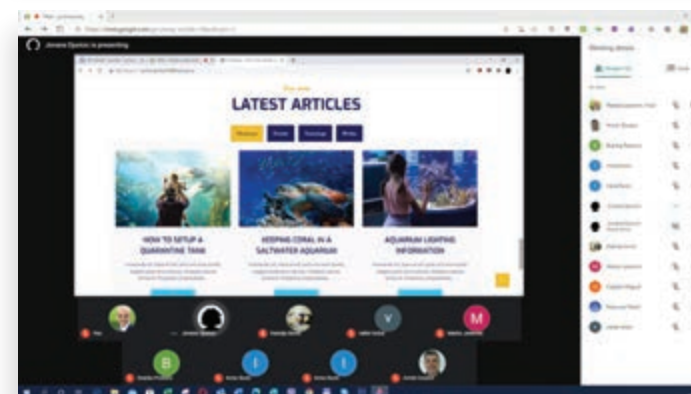
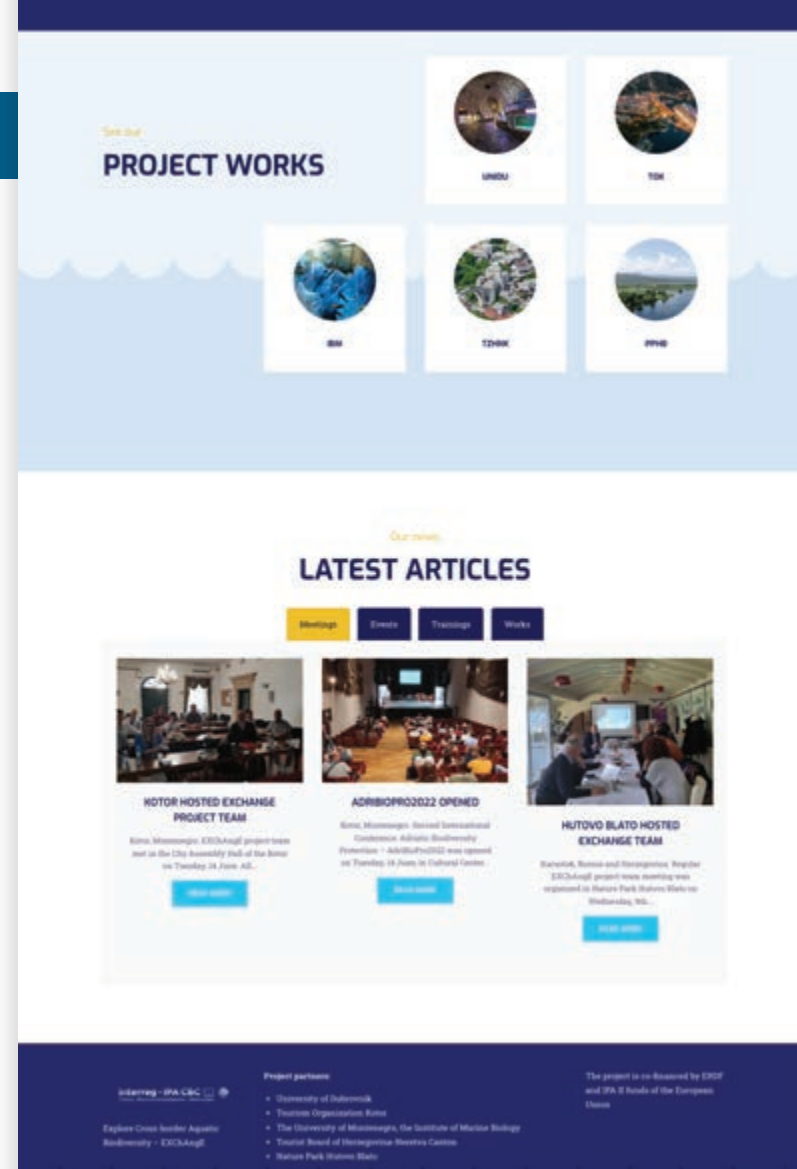
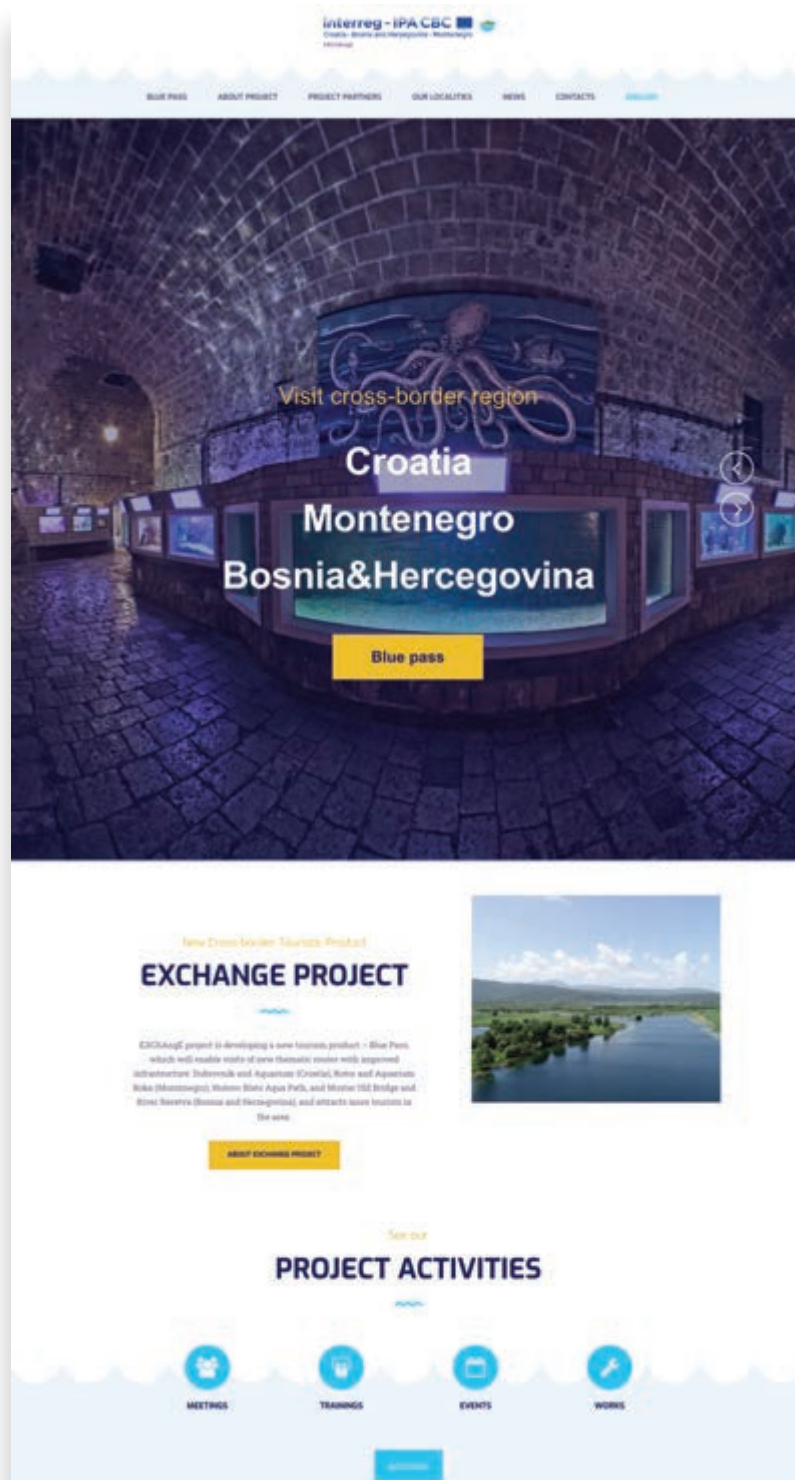


Improved
small touristic
infrastructure

Web master training ■

Web master training was held on 29 December 2020 as webinar.

The training provided a general introduction to the project web platform (<https://exchange.imp-du.com/>) and its structure. Project contractor, company Bild Studio doo Podgorica, performed interactive training for web page editing.



■ Training workshop “Biodiversity of the Neretva River” ■

Training workshop “Biodiversity of the Neretva River” was held on 30 June 2021 at the Hotel Mostar in Mostar (BiH).

Invited tour operators and tour guides were introduced by the project team and experts with diversity of aquatic life in the river Neretva.

Dr Anita Dedić, dr Anđelka Lasić, and dr Jerko Pavličević presented biological features of the River Neretva watershed, flora and fauna of the River Neretva, as well as fish diversity and its importance for angling, scientific tourism, and domestic fish gastronomic offer.

This training workshop contributed to the diversification of touristic presentation in the cross-border region Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Montenegro.



■ Training workshop “Adriatic Sea Biodiversity” ■

Training workshop “Adriatic Sea Biodiversity” was held on 21 October 2021 at the Hotel Lero, Dubrovnik (CRO).

Invited tour operators and tour guides from Dubrovnik county were introduced to the Project scope and the diversity of the Adriatic Sea. Dr Nenad Antolović presented the scope of the project “Explore Cross-Border Aquatic Biodiversity – EXChAngE”, painting on the new touristic product – Blue Pass. Antolović invited tour operators and tour guides to cooperate with the Project team and explore possibilities how to include data on the Adriatic Sea biodiversity in their regular presentations to touristic groups visiting the region.

Dr Nikša Glavić presented geographical and biological features of the Adriatic Sea. Dr Valter Kožul presented biodiversity features of the Adriatic Sea with a focus on dynamic changes, and in particular on the new (allochthonous) species.



This training workshop contributed to the diversification of touristic presentation in the cross-border region Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Montenegro.

The rich biodiversity of Hutovo Blato was presented by Prof. Višnja Bukvić. Prof. Svjetlana Stanić Koštroman spoke about the presentation of the water biodiversity of Hutovo Blato via "Waterway".



■ Training workshop “Biodiversity of Hutovo Blato” ■

Training workshop was held on 8 March 2022 at the Park Motel in Karaotok, Bosnia and Herzegovina.

On Tuesday, March 8, 2022, the “Biodiversity of Hutovo Blato” training workshop was held at the Park Motel, in the Hutovo Blato Nature Park (BiH). The workshop was organized by Public Enterprise Nature Park Hutovo Blato, Čapljina. This workshop was an opportunity to exchange experiences in the presentation and promotion of the aquatic biodiversity.

The aim of the workshop was to train the tourist guides and representatives of the institutions responsible for the standardization of natural heritage with the natural heritage of Hutovo Blato Nature Park. The focus was on the presentation of natural heritage to tourists – visitors to the Park.

International Economy Fair Mostar 2022 ■

The EXChAngE project was presented on the International Economy Fair Mostar 2022, held from 5th April to 9th April 2022 in Mostar, Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Nearly 800 exhibitors from Bosnia and Herzegovina, Hungary, Croatia, Serbia, Montenegro, Poland, Greece, Italy, Slovenia, Albania, China, Turkey, Israel, and Germany present their potential at the 30,000 m2 exhibition space.

The EXChAngE project team presented a new cross-border tourist product – The Blue Card, which allows visits to new thematic routes: Dubrovnik and the Aquarium (CRO), Kotor and the Boka Aquarium (MNE), the Hutovo Blato Aqua Path, as well as the Mostar Aqua Path (BiH), and attracts more tourists to the area. On the exhibition booth of the project a new mobile application for Android and iOS platforms – EXChAngE Blue Pass e-guide was launched. With this guide users are discovering a part of the cross-border area Croatia – Bosnia and Herzegovina – Montenegro.



■ Promotional events



In the Gallery of Cultural Center “Nikola Djurković” (Kotor, Montenegro), four artists from the cross-border region Croatia-Bosna and Herzegovina-Montenegro, Valter Kožul, Mile Albijanić, Petar Martinović and Bosiljka Bakočević, presented their works.



■ The Second International Conference: Protection of Biodiversity of the Adriatic – AdriBioPro2022 ■

The Conference was organized as a final project event dedicated to gathering all relevant national and regional stakeholders and securing closer regional cooperation in the Adriatic Sea region.

The Conference attracted more than 300 participants from 22 countries. The Conference participants presented 84 papers on six topics at the Conference: marine biodiversity and conservation, freshwater biodiversity and conservation, cross-border water biodiversity, water and invasive species, marine and freshwater pollution, and sustainable use of marine resources. The Conference lasted four working days, from June 14th until June 17th 2022, in parallel sessions in Cultural Center “Nikola Djurković” (Kotor) and the Institute of Marine Biology of the University of Montenegro.

The Exhibition Water as inspiration is organized as side event of the AdriBioPro2022. It is not just by the case that the Conference started with exhibition opening. Water is essential for surviving of all organisms and water is the environment for all Adriatic Sea species. There is a harmony of form between many natural objects and water as most precious natural element. While the conference participants will discuss the water as the environment for organisms, the artists are presenting the water as their inspiration.

Blue Pass EXChAngE Guide ■

Blue Pass EXChAngE Guide enables exploring cultural and natural heritage of the region, in particular aquatic biodiversity of the cross-border area Croatia – Bosnia and Herzegovina – Montenegro.



Jovan Ristić

The guide is developed as multilingual, free of charge, mobile application available for all platforms.

For easy reading and navigation through the content, the guide is structured in sections – each dedicated to one thematic route. Each section has four chapters, presenting (1) natural heritage, (2) cultural heritage, (3) one thematic route and (4) transportation to the site. Chapters are structured into thematic topics, keeping as similar as possible outline across the guide.

On this e-guide, Mr. Jovan Ristić, director of the Tourist Organization of Kotor, said: “It enables exploring cultural and natural heritage of the region, in particular cross-border aquatic biodiversity. For easy reading and navigation through the content, the guide is structured in sections – each dedicated to one thematic route: Dubrovnik and Aquarium (Croatia), Kotor and Aquarium Boka (Montenegro), Mostar and River Neretva, and (4) Nature Park Hutovo Blato (Bosnia and Herzegovina).”

To maximize the usefulness of this guide, you need a Blue Pass, a new touristic ticket which enables discounted visits of four thematic routes: (1) Dubrovnik and Aquarium (Croatia), (2) Kotor and Aquarium Boka (Montenegro), (3) Mostar and River Neretva, and (4) Nature Park Hutovo Blato (Bosnia and Herzegovina).



■ Blue Pass ■

The Blue Pass ticket is new tourism product, developed within EXChAngE project, especially for visitors of the cross-border area Croatia – Bosnia and Herzegovina - Montenegro, which enables discounted visits of four thematic routes: (1) Dubrovnik and Aquarium (Croatia), (2) Kotor and Aquarium Boka (Montenegro), (3) Mostar Aqua Path, and (4) Nature Park Hutovo Blato Aqua Path (Bosnia and Herzegovina).



Aleksandar Joksimović

On the margins of the fifth Project team meeting, on 1 July 2021, a Signatory Ceremony of the Blue Pass Agreement was held in Mostar (BiH). Following this Agreement, all signatories (project partners) are entitled to sell Blue Pass ticket and offer buyers of that ticket a discount on its products and/or services. On the new cross-border tourist product – The Blue Pass, Dr Aleksandar Joksimović, director of the Institute of Marine Biology of the University of Montenegro, said: “It is much more than discount voucher for four thematic routes in three neighbouring countries. It promotes cross-border mobility of tourists end exploring cross-border nature and cultural diversity. Each tourist with the Blue Pass ticket will become a member of growing community for supporting sustainable use of the cross-border aquatic biodiversity”.

On the margins of the final project event, the Second International Conference: Protection of Biodiversity of the Adriatic – AdriBioPro2022, on 15 June 2022, the Annex 1 to the Agreement is signed in Kotor (MNE). Following the Annex 1, the University of Montenegro, Institute of Marine Biology is tasked to maintain central database for the Blue Pass ticket. All partners are entitled to make bilateral agreements with any interested entity to sell Blue Pass ticket and offer buyers of that ticket a discount on its products and/or services. Any new partner should be registered in the central database for the Blue Pass ticket.



Signatories to the Blue Pass Agreement (from left: Dr Nenad Antolović, Head of the Institute for Marine and Coastal Research of the University of Dubrovnik (Lead Partner), Jovan Ristić, Director of the Tourist Organisation of Kotor (PP2), Dr Aleksandar Joksimović, Director of the Institute of Marine Biology of the University of Montenegro (PP3), Andrija Krešić, Director of the Tourist Board of Herzegovina – Neretva Canton (PP4), and Nikola Zovko, Director of the Public Company Hutovo Blato Nature Park, Čapljina (PP5)

■ Explore with the Blue Pass ■

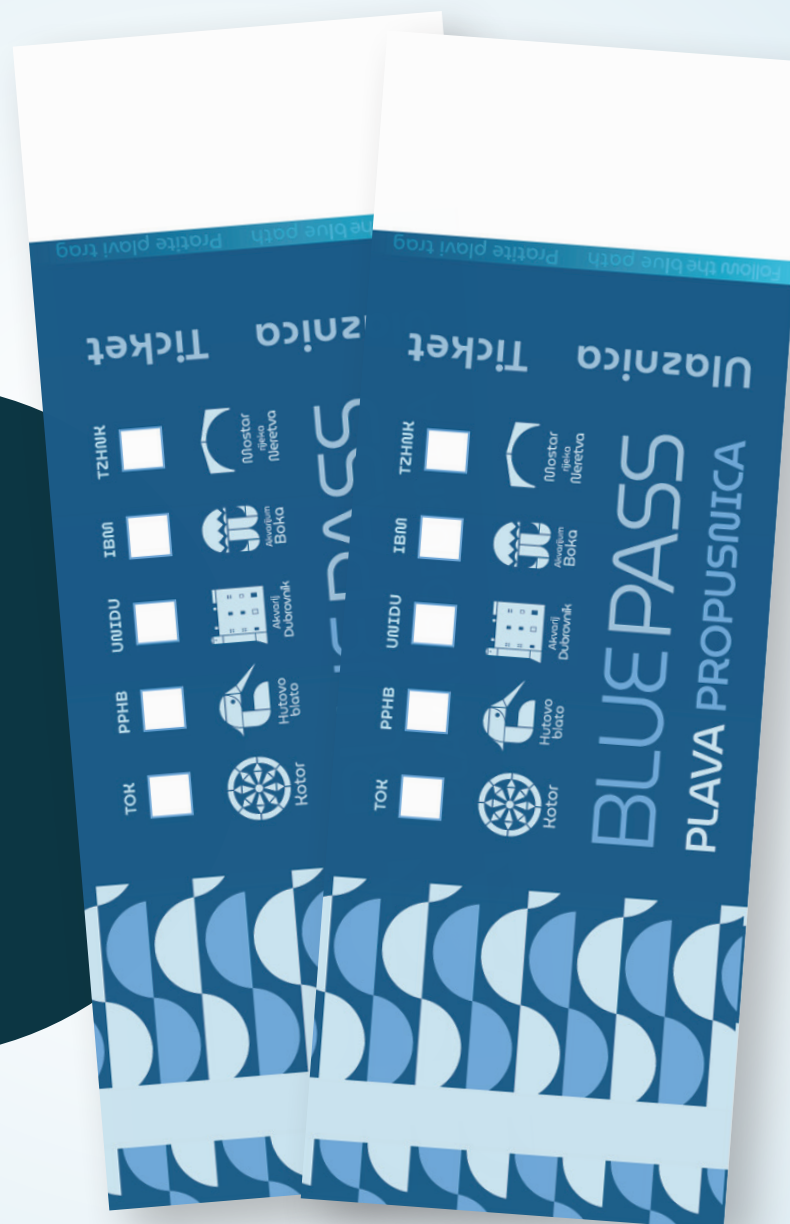
With purchased Blue Pass ticket you are invited to explore thematic routes in the cross-border area Croatia – Bosnia and Herzegovina - Montenegro: Dubrovnik and Aquarium (Croatia), Kotor and Aquarium Boka (Montenegro), Hutovo Blato Aqua Path, and Mostar Aqua Path (Bosnia and Herzegovina).

■ Travel with the Blue Pass ■

Each Blue Pass ticket has unique code which entitles you purchase discounted entry ticket for the thematic routes in the cross-border area Croatia – Bosnia and Herzegovina - Montenegro: Dubrovnik and Aquarium (Croatia), Kotor and Aquarium Boka (Montenegro), Hutovo Blato Aqua Path, and Mostar Aqua Path (Bosnia and Herzegovina).

Buy the Blue Pass

You can buy the Blue Pass ticket at any selling point on thematic routes: Dubrovnik and Aquarium (Croatia), Kotor and Aquarium Boka (Montenegro), Hutovo Blato Aqua Path, and Mostar Aqua Path (Bosnia and Herzegovina).



■ Learn with the Blue Pass ■

Each Blue Pass ticket has unique code which you can scan and visit dedicated electronic guide for the thematic routes in the cross-border area Croatia – Bosnia and Herzegovina - Montenegro: Dubrovnik and Aquarium (Croatia), Kotor and Aquarium Boka (Montenegro), Hutovo Blato Aqua Path, and Mostar Aqua Path (Bosnia and Herzegovina).

■ Save with the Blue Pass ■

With the Blue Pass ticket, you are entitled to purchase discounted entry ticket for the thematic routes in the cross-border area Croatia – Bosnia and Herzegovina - Montenegro: Dubrovnik and Aquarium (Croatia), Kotor and Aquarium Boka (Montenegro), Hutovo Blato Aqua Path, and Mostar Aqua Path (Bosnia and Herzegovina).

Improved small touristic infrastructure ■





Aquarium Dubrovnik

Part of the Dubrovnik Aquarium in St. John's Fortress has been upgraded through the project EXChAngE. Three floor tanks, the largest in the Dubrovnik Aquarium, were renovated and new tanks were installed. The value of this investment is about HRK 3.5 million.

Aquarium Boka

The Boka Aquarium was extended through the project EXChAngE. Two new aquarium tanks were installed, and aquarium life support systems were improved. These works secure high visitor's satisfaction, while improved water conditioning provides better living conditions for all displayed marine organisms. The extended Aquarium is also offering a new experience for visitors in the Open-Air Exhibition, equipped with two exhibition boots, presenting the invisible world of the sea, and ways how to protect the Adriatic Sea from pollution. In addition, two LED totems are broadcasting info material on the Aquarium and fascinating facts about the sea.

Hutovo Blato Aqua Path

Tourists offer in Hutovo Blato Nature Park was upgraded by development of the Aqua Path through the project EXChAnGE. The existing waterway, 8.8 kilometres long, 1.5 to 2.0 m deep and 5 m wide, has been reconstructed and eco-hydrologically arranged. These works ensured better navigability of boats and provided diversification of the tourist offer in Hutovo Blato Nature Park.

Mostar Aqua Path

City Bath “Banja”, which is one of the most significant construction achievements in the Austro - Hungarian period in Mostar, was renovated within the EXChAngE Project. The building is located on the bank of Neretva River in Mostar within the protected zone “Historic Urban Landscape of Mostar”. The roof of the building was repaired, and the interior of the building was adapted and renovated, giving special attention to the central hall decorated with motifs of different origins with the pool and the dome, building entrance and staircase leading to the central hall. This investment helped to preserve and present the facilities on the water or related to the water in Mostar, provided touristic valorisation of the building “Banja” and diversification of the tourist offer in the City of Mostar.

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