



RIVER

INTELLECTUALS

STUDENTS FOR RIVERS CAMP

JULY 7-13 2019, SOČA RIVER, SLOVENIA

SUMMARY REPORT

RIVER INTELLECTUALS - ORIGIN

Balkan River Defence was initiated as a reaction to the alarming number of 3.000 proposed hydropower dams in the Balkan peninsula. The Balkan rivers are the last pristine and free-flowing rivers left in Europe. Balkan River Defence successfully supports a network of local river defenders through campaigns such as the Balkan Rivers Tour.

Protecting these pristine Balkan rivers in their natural state is a multi-disciplinary task involving scientific argument as well as action. Science and grassroots activism are two worlds that are often kept separate in order to preserve the credibility of scientists. However, in order to make a change, we believe these worlds need to work together. This is why we thought to connect students, scientists and activists. We gave the idea a name - River Intellectuals - and a year later, the Students for Rivers Camp (SRC) was the official kick-off of this network.

“It was fun, inspiring and energizing to have students and experts from 20 countries working together, exploring the problems faced by rivers of the Balkans and finding ways of saving them. We are excited by the number of dedicated people with incredible project ideas. SRC is clearly not just a one-week project. It has become the foundation for a new wave of scientists and river defenders who are committed to finding long term solutions for endangered rivers.”

Vera Knook, River Intellectuals Initiator, The Netherlands



Photo © Katja Pokorn

AUSTRIA, SLOVENIA, GERMANY, BOSNIA & HERZEGOVINA, ALBANIA, MONTENEGRO, NORTH MACEDONIA, SERBIA, CROATIA, GREECE, ITALY, SPAIN, SWEDEN, NEPAL, UK, USA, CANADA, CHILE, BULGARIA, NETHERLANDS.

A WIDE RANGE OF PARTICIPANTS

The banks of the Soča River in Slovenia became the playground and classroom of the first Students for Rivers Camp during the fourth Balkan Rivers Tour. Twenty-eight students and more than twenty speakers from twenty different nations came together with one common goal: to use their expertise in order to protect the last remaining wild rivers of Europe.

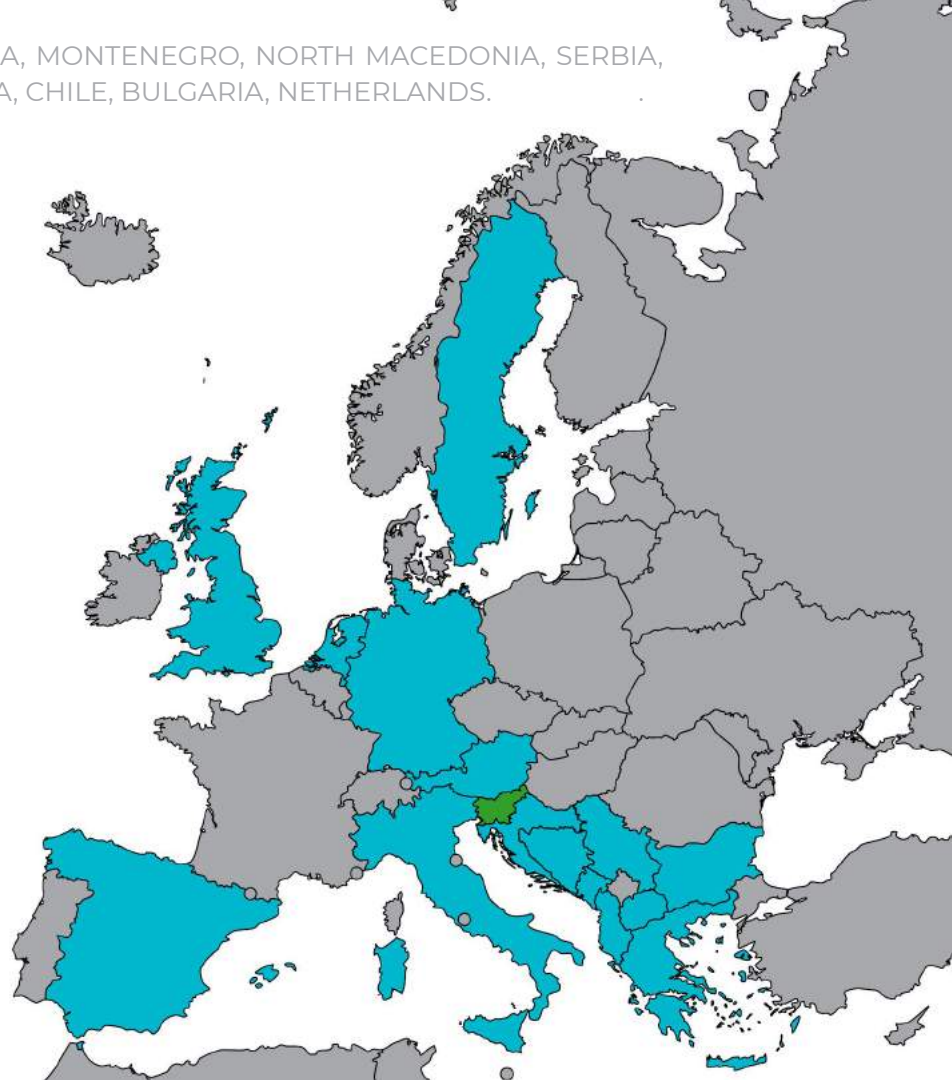
“I basically came here to find out how to help my friend Aaos and its tributaries”

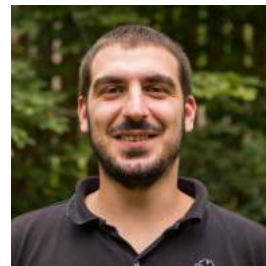
Dimitris Papageorgiou from the Aaos River, Greece

Students and speakers from many different disciplines were invited to evaluate the threat of hydropower development from a wide range of perspectives. These rivers can only be saved by understanding the whole picture.

“This was one of a kind. I really liked the diversity of students and speakers [...] The idea of bringing young people together who combine scientific approach with activism, offers an opportunity for science to be used directly in order to ensure countries improve their practices.”

Pippa Gallop, Bankwatch, Croatia







EXPERT LECTURES

The Students for Rivers Camp comprised of a wide range of lectures given by experts in the field, practical classes and fieldwork. Our mornings were filled with lectures that covered the following topics.

The clean river system

From mountains to the ocean, varied and numerous processes contribute to sustaining healthy river systems. Our expert speakers shed light on the vital interaction between ecology, hydrology, morphology, biogeochemistry and the habitats created by them.

Impacts of hydropower development and alternatives

How does hydropower development influence the natural processes of a river, with special attention to the rivers in the Balkans. Which alternatives can be considered?

Drivers of hydropower development

Currently, there are about 1.000 hydropower dams in the Balkans. Construction of another 3.000 small and big dams are being planned. This is not simply driven by the need for renewable energy. We explored the issue of complex collision between politics, economics and law.

Examples from the Balkans

We were delighted to have our river heroes - those that fight for the rivers in their daily lives - join us and share their stories. Some are experts in legislative processes, some aim to raise environmental awareness, while others focus on sustainable tourism. Our Balkan river aficionados shared their in-depth knowledge and offered local examples, inspiring a remarkable flow of ideas, solutions to problems, and, most importantly, a sense of hope that we can save these rivers.

With a.o. Steven Weiss, Gabriel Singer, Markus Noack, Andrej Gubina, Pippa Gallop, Dušan Jesenšek





CORRUPTION GAME AND RIVER CAFE

The afternoons were reserved for interaction between participants: the students and the lecturers. The River Cafe hosted several discussions on the most effective ways the River Intellectuals network can contribute to river protection. Kasper, one of our first River Intellectuals, developed an inventive board game which highlights the impacts of corruption with regards to investment in hydropower.





STUDENT PROJECTS

Throughout the week, the students were given the opportunity to develop their own project ideas. They were divided into small groups and were tasked to come up with creative solutions to the challenge of protecting the Balkan rivers from the 3.000 proposed hydropower plants. By the end of the week seven inspiring projects were born and presented to the locals of the Soca valley and the whole Balkan Rivers Tour crew. Thanks to the Free Rivers Fund and a spontaneous grant of 'Stritih, Sustainable Development Consultancy', the three most promising projects, which focus on bringing science to the people and vice versa, received a small kickstarter grant. Judging from the students' motivation (or the amount of schnapps drunk to celebrate their success), we can expect the initial project ideas to be transformed into practical actions for river conservation in 2020.



STUDENT PROJECTS

Find a short description of the projects on the right. Some projects will be combined to reach common goals most effectively. If an idea sparks your interest, please get in touch and we will provide you with more detailed information. We are looking for ways of getting these projects off the ground.

Do you live close to the Sava river? Do get in touch, the plan is to run some of these pilot projects along the Sava river during the fifth Balkan Rivers Tour!

RIVER DETECTIVES - Voted most promising project Is there something odd about your river? Dead fish, low flow? Report it to the app. You will be guided through anonymous steps that can lead towards legal actions against the polluter.

RIVER INTELLECTUALS JUNIORS - Voted promising project School children are encouraged to investigate the historical and emotional value of their rivers. Their family members' experience of natural rivers, not only provides a starting point for scientists, but also directly raises awareness of the importance of free-flowing rivers.

SCIENCE RAFT - Voted promising project An interdisciplinary group of scientists descends a threatened river stretch to collect data using standardized scientific methods, reporting on the river's value from various perspectives. This provides a tool for public debate and policy.

KNOW YOUR RIVER A citizen science project that involves fishermen and tourists, children and other locals. Along hiking trails, people are encouraged to upload a photo which, through existing technology, can be analysed generating hydrological data.

BE LOUD! A platform designed to help river defenders on the ground, collecting and mapping conservation-related actions which also serves as a guide on how to take action. Envision a green dotted map of conservation based events and activities that soon outweighs the infamous [red dotted map](#) of planned hydropower dams.

UNIVERSITY COURSE A course designed to bring a group of students into the field to gather missing data. They are lead by professors to ensure the collection of high-quality data and are mixed with students from a local university to encourage knowledge exchange.

CONNECTING RIVERS A platform to help river defenders on the ground. Which legal actions can be taken? Which actions are taken in other watersheds?



RIVER EXPERIENCE

For most students, the highlight of the week was the River Experience. Finally getting hands wet reinforced the purpose of the camp. We celebrated the free Soča, trying out every thinkable watercraft.





**BALKAN
RIVER
DEFENCE**

BALKAN RIVERS TOUR

The Students for Rivers Camp ran parallel to the Balkan Rivers Tour. This appeared to be a winning formula. While the students got inspired by the rock'n roll way of drawing (media) attention to the rivers, the kayakers got to learn more about the rivers they love and what other ways there are to protect them. Discussions continued late at night around the campfire along with bonding jam sessions where people were united by their passion and concern for rivers.

On the last day, most students and speakers joined BRT's Free Soča Flotilla, the beer mile and the party. The most dedicated to the cause danced until sunrise!





DIRECT IMPACT OF SRC

The Students for Rivers Camp achieved its goal in providing students with the background knowledge needed to holistically see the problem of hydropower development in the Balkans. Understanding the complexity of socio-economic, political and environmental factors is essential to effectively protect the rivers from such a large scale hydropower development.

We have laid a foundation for a new wave of scientists who are committed to finding long term solutions for endangered rivers.



Encouragement from the like-minded river saving community brought a sense of acknowledgement for academics and NGOs that have fought lone battles in the past, and further consolidated their determination to persevere.

Some of the students were so impressed by the way kayaking reveals a completely different picture of the river, that they now wish to become kayakers themselves. We believe that nothing compares to studying a river from a kayaking perspective and having more river scientists on the river is a real achievement for us.



We felt it was extremely important to run the camp, not only at the international level, but also at the transboundary level. Getting students from the Balkans involved provides the region with local representatives that have the expertise to help protect their Balkan rivers.

One of the important outcomes of SRC is a close collaboration between the students, who are now finding ways of putting their initial ideas into action.



RESPONSES TO THE FIRST SRC

“Such camps provide an excellent opportunity for knowledge exchange between different generations and time frames.”

- Dušan Jesenšek, Fish Biologist and Professor, Ljubljana University, Slovenia

“The SRC is an inspirational experience for both activists as well as scientists. It helps a conservation activist to know the facts and understand economic, social and ecological backgrounds. But it's also invigorating for the scientist to see how knowledge can be put into action and catalyze change towards the better.”

Gabriel Singer, research group leader at IGB Berlin, Germany



“I had no idea that there might be scientists interested in wild rivers like the Aoos. I thought there were just some kayakers and some locals. I came here and found a bunch of scientists and students that write PhDs and Master theses about this topic. I know I will go back and fill up this gap between the locals and science.”

Dimitris Papageorgiou from the Aoos River, Greece

“It really opened my eyes to the potential for getting more research done on the biodiversity value and water quality of Balkan rivers. Knowing in more detail what we are trying to save would help our campaigns immensely.”

Pippa Gallop, Bankwatch, Croatia



“It's inspiring when you can meet people who are not only attached to science, but are already active in other areas. So, basically just give us enough of Rok's mom's food, beer and rakija, put us near a river and let us think, so we can solve a lot of problems that are affecting every living creature on this planet. With these people we can save the world!”

Evgenia Krstevska, Student in Law, North Macedonia



RIVER

INTELLECTUALS

A network of bold students, researchers and river defenders with a passion for free-flowing rivers, who combine their resources and expertise to effectively protect rivers from large scale hydropower development and other environmental threats to the rivers. Our goal is to strengthen the connection between the world of science and river conservation. We are aiming to turn this close collaboration into a powerful tool which will help to influence policy from the local to international level.

In 2020 we will organise the second Students for Rivers Camp in Montenegro and will connect many river conservation projects and scientists during the 'Bohinj to Belgrade' Balkan Rivers Tour 5. Want to take part with your project or help us with fundraising?

Get in touch with us - ri@balkanriverdefence.org

Our new website launches in mid September; www.riverintellectuals.org which will serve as a platform to connect students, researchers and river defenders. For now, you can find us on www.balkanriverdefence.org/intellectuals. You can already sign up for our newsletter via the QR code on the right or via [this link](#).



THANK YOU!

To Riverwatch for their donation as it helped us get all these minds together.

RiverWatch



The Students for Rivers Camp was organised in close collaboration with Balkan River Defence and we are immensely proud to be a part of this movement. We would like to thank them, and their sponsors, for the integral role they played in the success of our first event.



NRS

patagonia®



pyranha

