

While the Balkans are increasingly popular as a holiday beach paradise, they hold a sparkling secret: The peninsula itself is home to the richest network of wild rivers on the continent. But the exclusive biodiversity, as well as the nature haven and water resources of many local communities are under a great threat. Over 3,000 hydropower dams and diversions are planned in the region, in addition to over 1,000 that already exist. This invasion is sponsored by international banks - but the people of the Balkans are not giving away their natural treasures without a fight.

A new documentary produced by media company Farm League and outdoor clothes brand Patagonia takes us to different settings of the battle to keep the river network, the "Blue Heart" of Europe, alive and in its natural rhythm. In Macedonia, the existence of an entire lynx species is at stake. In Albania, citizens are seeking creative ways of protest to defend mighty Vjosa, the last untamed river of Europe. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, women are leading the resistance against a planned dam on river Kruščica, their community's only source of fresh water.

Some familiar activists against the hydropower tsunami in the Balkans are featured in the film: Artist Luka Tomac from Zelena Akcija/Friends of the Earth Croatia, who created the victorious mural of a woman smashing the Idbar dam at Baščica River; and Nataša Crnković from Centar za životnu sredinu/Friends of the Earth Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Naturally there couldn't have been a better venue for the world premiere of "Blue Heart" than the Idbar dam itself, where wild waters finally made their way through the deficient dam construction. Over 500 people attended the screening and the following party, a celebratory kick-off of the global campaign. The film has been translated into 14 languages, and will be shown in over 500 locations worldwide.

"With this movie we finally present the problem of hydro energy projects in the Balkans to the world public. As 'Blue Heart' shows, the struggle to preserve the rivers is tough and can only be won if we are united. It is encouraging that so many brave communities are loudly opposing hydro projects in order to preserve their most valuable good: drinking water and pristine rivers!" said Nataša Crnković from Centar za životnu sredinu/Friends of the Earth Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Coalition for the Protection of Rivers of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

The documentary is currently on a cinema tour through Europe. Find out here where you can watch it and how to organise your own screening!

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