



**Environmental association "Vila Zora"-Veles**  
**Strategic plan**  
**2019- 2024**

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## **1. FOR VILA ZORA:**

Environmental association "Vila Zora" Veles is a non-governmental, non-profit organization, dedicated to protecting the environment. Main activities include: education, protection, prevention and solving environmental problems. During 30 years' activism, the organization raised activists for a healthy environment. The organization has developed, become more organized and shown concrete results. Completing the first mission in the fight against pollution from the Smelter-Topilnica (the largest pollutant) in the period from 1989 to 2003 was our biggest success. Our activism -developed as constant resistance to the pollution. It began with dozens of people, for 20 years, becoming involved in a massive resistance, supported by 20,000 inhabitants of Veles.

But, our work was not finished. The consequences of the long-standing historical pollution from the Smelter and the new industrial installations opening in the meantime were our next problem. Our strategy for the future is to develop as a modern and avant-garde environmental protection organization, in line with the sustainable development system.

Through this strategy "Vila Zora" defines its priorities and ways of solving problems in the Municipality of Veles. The intention is to keep continuous cooperation with citizens of Veles, to follow problems and needs related to pollution and a healthy environment. Also, to follow activities of institutions responsible for carrying out and implementing environmental laws, as well as the work of industrial installations, and potential polluters in the Veles region.

In accomplishing our mission and strategic priorities, we are educating and raising awareness of food producers (farmers), citizens, and youth from the Municipality of Veles. Through networking with civil society organizations, we exchange experiences with CSOs from other regions in Macedonia.

This is a mid-term strategy and action plan, prepared by members of organization, based on findings obtained through daily communication with citizens, local authorities, institutions, other civil society organizations and other stakeholders.

### **Our Vision:**

Raising public awareness of community based on the principles of sustainable development.

### **Our Mission:**

Protection and promotion of the environment and nature through concrete actions, education, raising public awareness, and participating in the creation of strategies and public policies towards sustainable development of the environment in the Municipality of Veles.

### **Our Values:**

Vila Zora is one of first non-governmental environmental associations in Macedonia, with 30 years of experience and knowledge. "Vila Zora" is recognized as one of the most active organizations, but also as a serious factor in making environmental policy.

During the years, dedicating itself to continuous education and unselfish knowledge sharing, the organization has the ability to mobilize a critical mass needed for successful actions to protect the environment. The trust and respect among citizens and the civil sector, as well as institutions at the local and state level are the power of this organization.

The organization is a-political, it is always independent and critically oriented to protect the environment.

## 2. ORGANIZATIONAL PROFILE

The organization dates from 1989, as the first environmental association in Republic of Macedonia, registered officially as a civic organization since 1992. The beginnings were voluntary, focusing on education to raise public awareness about the consequences of pollution from the smelter-Topilnica. There are currently two full-time employees in the organization, 10-15 activists of certain areas, 350 activists, which are engaged on a daily basis.

**Two main areas of action are:**

<b>1. Environmental protection:</b>	<b>2. Self-sustainability of the community:</b>
1.1 Waste management	2.1 Rural development
1.2 Protection of soil, water, air pollution	2.2 Organic production
	2.3 Production of biodiesel

So far, in these areas of operation, the organization has participated in and implemented several projects for raising public awareness, developing a cultural and sociological plan, as well as taking care of a cleaner and healthier environment. In the last ten years, Vila Zora realized more than 40 projects. Some of them have an educational character, some are concrete activities and through some of the projects we have been involved in the preparation of strategic plans for sustainable development of the municipality of Veles and Chashka. With the rest of the projects we pledged to create conditions for self-sustainability of the community.

Among the most important and influential projects are: "I love nature I love life", "School yards, paradise gardens", "Eco-natural", "Collection of international conventions and protocols", "Ecological Educational Corner", "Local Agenda 21 for the Municipality of Veles-", "-Veles on Bicycles", "Initiative for First GMO Free Zone", "Ecology-Internet education", "-Green Action for Veles-", "Green Platform of Macedonia-", "-Let`s save our future-", "Macedonia without GMO", "LEAP for the municipality of Caska-", "Green package junior", and Protests against pollution from the smelter Topilnica in 1996, 1998, 2003, 2008 and 2011.

In the fields of waste management, soil protection, water and air pollution, the following projects are most important: "Veles Recycling", "Selection of PET Packaging in Veles", "Save the soil from pollution", and "Phytoremediation of soil in Veles". In the area of self-sustainability of the community, the following projects: "Local initiatives for support of organic agriculture", "Veles - history, culture, tourism, economy", "Lower flow of the river Babuna and the canyon Peshta", "Sustainability of civil society" and other projects.

Pupils from primary and secondary schools in Veles were included in the educational activities of the organization. These young people were educated about protection of water, air, soil and forests. They were also introduced to the problems of municipal waste and the need for selection and recycling of waste. Through the programs of Vila Zora, the young people of Veles are continuously developing responsible behavior for environmental protection and actively participating in the activities for protection and improvement of the environment in the Municipality of Veles.

Raising public awareness for the protection of the environment among the citizens of the City of Veles is one of the activities of Villa Zora. Also, a lot of actions, protests, constant informing of citizens through the media, social networks and promotional material have been organized. The results of the last protest against the Smelter when more than 20.000 people supported our protest, was successful, completing a 20-year long fight against pollution from the smelter Topilnica.

During the project for organic production, 50 farmers were educated and promoted as producers of healthy food. Activities for GMO free Macedonia were realized in seven municipalities in Macedonia which were declared as GMO free zones: Veles, Caska, Vasilevo, Valandovo, Mogila, Ohrid, and Bitola. The Council of these municipalities accepted the declaration and prohibited the use and production of genetically modified products.

For solving historical pollution and consequences from soil contamination from the smelter Topilnica, three projects were realized for soil remediation, covering around 10 hectares of cultivated area with oil seed rape, together with education of farmers in Veles region.

In preparing laws and strategies, Vila Zora has participated in 6 projects. Results were the adoption of strategies for the sustainable development of the Municipality of Veles and LEAP of the Municipality of Caska. Also, Vila Zora, submitted an amendment on the environmental law, demanding a ban on building heavy industries within five kilometers of inhabited areas.

In the area of rural development, several projects for promotion of eco-tourism were implemented. During project activities, the potential for rural tourism was presented to the local population and the business sector, as well as opportunities for developing rural communities. Protection and promotion of Canyon Peshti, available for organized tourism tours, improvement of the conditions and protection of two endangered bird species (Egyptian Vulture and Black Stork) was the first project. Further, as a contribution to the promotion and development of the Municipality of Veles, a publication, a multimedia CD and an electronic store were created as a unique platform for the promotion of tourism in Veles.

For the realization of these and other similar projects, Vila Zora received support from foreign and domestic donors, such as: Regional Environmental Center, UNDP, Open Society Foundation of the Republic of Macedonia, Balkan Bank - Skopje, the Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Macedonia, the Ministry of Environment and Physical Planning of the Republic of Macedonia, Macedonian Center for International Cooperation, Global Environmental Fund - SGP, Foundation and Open Society Institute Macedonia, Institute for National Democracy, CEP-USAID and other donors.

In addition to the observed results, our previous success also was affirmed with the following awards and recognitions:

- Acknowledgment for overall results in the protection and improvement of the environment in 1990 and 1991, granted in 1992 by the Coordination Council of the Ecologists' Movement in Macedonia
- "Do you know how green", 2003, to promote public awareness and civil society development, granted by MOEPP
- Award for best project for 2004 for "Approach to Local Agenda 21" for sustainable development of the municipality of Veles, awarded by the NGO sector from Veles
- Acknowledgment for selfless commitment, humane gesture and understanding, 2005, awarded by the Daily Center for Children with Special Needs - Veles
- Civil Society and Democracy Award for long-standing contribution for 2004, awarded by the Macedonian Center for International Cooperation
- Acknowledgment for contribution in the realization of the program activities, 2006, granted by TV Zdravkin Veles
- Macedonian Center for International Cooperation "Civil Society and Democracy Award" for long-standing achievements in the field of civil society development
- Award for contribution in development of the civil society in the Republic of Macedonia- for 2015 awarded by the French Embassy of Macedonia.

## **2.1. Our current approach**

Vila Zora has an activist approach in the fight for a healthy environment. Aware of the need for cooperation with institutions, Vila Zora establishes good partnerships and relations with local authorities and institutions, which include our members in commissions and governmental bodies during the creation of policies or monitoring environmental issues. When the competent institutions mislead, activism and protests are a non-institutional democratic way of dealing with problems.

DEM and the Green Coalition are networks of civil society organizations, which undertake common activities, achieving mutual interests. Also, continuous work with volunteers contributes to this by activating and educating young members of the organization.

In order to monitor trends and introduce new practices in the areas of ecology, rural development and ecotourism and to provide the latest, ongoing expertise, the organization continuously builds its internal capacities and cooperates with external experts.

The organization has direct contact with citizens and monitors the environment in Veles, implementation of environmental legislation, strategies and environmental policies. In this way, we remain informed about the needs and potential problems of citizens in the municipality of Veles.

### 3. CONTEXT

ED Vila Zora adheres to the existing legal regulations that cover the environment, and acts when laws are not implemented by institutions. The organization coordinates with environment-related institutions, participates in the creation of environmental protection policies, and in changing legal regulations that are not efficient.

The Municipality of Veles has serious problems with the pollution of air, water and soil. The reasons for this situation are:

- Unplanned installation of industrial facilities in the city,
- Old and worn installations that do not meet environmental standards,
- Disregard for the laws and principles of environmental protection by the institutions, the business sector.

The consequences of pollution in the Municipality of Veles are: polluted air with a concentration of PM 10 above the maximum allowed; negative influence on the flora and fauna; presence of heavy metals in fruits and vegetables grown on Veles soils; and increased health problems with increasing morbidity and mortality. Several research initiatives have been carried out in several projects, including: EPISA project supported by the Ministry of Environment; Medical examinations of Russian Scientific Teams; tests of the Institute of Chemistry of the Republic of Macedonia led by Prof. Dr. Trajche Stafilov; and the preparation of the Geochemical Atlas of the Municipality of Veles.

Vila Zora continuously works to solve problems with the historical pollution of soils. We believe that the adoption of the Strategy for decontamination of the soil and then making the Law for soils is a key step towards improving the environment conditions in Veles. Education and cooperation with farmers should continue as one of the priorities for ensuring participation of farmers in further activities and the production of healthy food.

#### 3.1 Stakeholders in the activities of Vila Zora

- Municipality of Veles and local Inspectorate for joint action in the field of environment protection, cooperation with the local agriculture authorities and tourism development department.
- On the state level, the Ministry of environment and physical planning – MEOPP; Ministry of Economy, Ministry of agriculture, forestry and water; and Ministry of economy with cooperation in various sectors such as: waste protection, water, nature, environment and industrial pollution, and others.
- Non-governmental civic organizations through networking, personalization and joint activities for achieving common interests;
- Collaboration with different experts from several areas for better projects implementation;
- Citizens of other municipalities in the Republic of Macedonia as an essential part of our work are a part of the stakeholders. By sharing our experiences with the general public, we will provide a clearer picture of our work and the fight for a healthy environment.

- Cooperation with professional firms specializing in our areas of interest
- Donors are important for our survival and development, and fostering cooperation in the future will be crucial.

### **3.2 Target groups and target areas**

The target groups are: the citizens of the municipality of Veles and the Republic of Macedonia, organizations, institutions, schools, the council of the municipality of Veles, the sector for the environment and local economic development, the business sector, industries, ministries, the state secretary and the ministers, the Institute for public health, farmers, catering and tourist service providers, and others. Geographical target areas of the company's activities are: the Municipality of Veles, the areas around the city of Veles (Bashino Selo, Rečani, Lake Mladost, Shtip road and Karaslari), Kavadarci Municipality - Selo Vozarci, the Municipality of Skopje - Stajkovci, the Municipality of Tetovo-Slatino, and other municipalities in the Republic of Macedonia.

### **3.3 External opportunities**

#### **Opportunities:**

- Better cooperation with institutions and ministries at the local and national level

The organization will work on providing constant inflow of money. Also, depreciation of equipment and small working space are problems that we solve continuously.

New funds for the current operation of the organization through our own sources, through projects from foreign and domestic donors, as well as using social entrepreneurship.

Restoration of existing tools for promotion of the organization and its activities in cooperation with the young members.

Opportunity to better divide activities and tasks, as well as create an organizational chart that will facilitate the work and also help the organization in its management.

#### **Threats:**

Lack of financial and human resources

## 4. STRATEGIC PLAN

### STRATEGIC PRIORITY #1:

***Solving the consequences of historical pollution in the Municipality of Veles and protecting the environment from other sources of pollution.***

The current situation with historical pollution from the Smelter:

- Problems with contaminated soil, because of pollution with heavy metals
- Contaminated fruits and vegetables with heavy metals from contaminated soil
- Problem with the industrial waste from the Smelter and its spreading across the city with the wind

The polluted soil represents ecological, social and health problem for Veles. Contaminated foods also affect the health of the people who consume it. When aware of the contaminated soil, consumers do not want to buy food from the Veles region, which has an economic and social impact on the farmers from Veles.

Historically, Vila Zora has worked to solve pollution problems by:

- Raising public awareness regarding the influence of pollution on health
- Requesting address of the hill of industrial waste

Related to contaminated soil, Vila Zora has collaborated with state institutions. The Institute of Chemistry has determined the amount of heavy metals in the soil and the places where these concentrations are the highest. A geochemical atlas of the municipality of Veles was presented and the hot spots with the highest concentration of heavy metals were determined. The tests showed ten times higher concentrations of heavy metals than the maximum allowable concentrations.

In cooperation with the “Faculty of agricultural sciences and food” in Skopje, we conducted several field trials for decontamination of the soil through phytoremediation and we tried several herbs as phytoremediators. The results were surprisingly positive and as the best hyper-absorber from the trials was oil seed agape. We have proven that through this process it is possible to decontaminate and for a period of several seasons the amount of heavy metals decreases to within the allowable limits.

### **Strategic objective 1.1: Decontamination of the soil and improved quality of agriculture areas in the Municipality of Veles**

#### **• Result 1.1.1: Decontaminated soil in arable land of the farmers in the city of Veles**

# 1 Activity: Phytoremediation of the soil by planting hyper-absorbing plants for 10% of the families who produce vegetables and fruits in Veles region.

# 2 Activity: Phytoremediation by mixing the soil with mineral absorbers.

#### **• Result 1.1.2: Improved soil quality regulation in the Municipality of Veles and adoption of a soil decontamination strategy**



# 1 Activity: Preparation of a local soil decontamination Strategy in Veles

# 2 Activity: Preparing of national law for soil quality

- **Result 1.1.3: Increased number of farmers who produce healthy products (vegetables, fruits)**

# 1 Activity: Farmers education for soil decontamination through phytoremediation

### **Strategic objective 1.2: Environmental protection from waste, erosion and air pollution**

- **Results 1.2.1: Established system of classification of various types of waste in the municipality of Veles and reduction of waste deposited in a landfill**

# 1 Activity: Projects for selection and recycling of waste

# 2 Activity: Organizing collection of selected waste

- **Results 1.2.2: Reduced erosion and cleaner air in Veles**

# 1 Activity: Organized planting of the surrounding area of Veles

# 2 Activity: Cooperation with public institutions for joint planting

# 3 Activity: Collaborating with the part of business sector, other donors to provide material for planting, citizens and volunteers.

• **STRATEGIC PRIORITY #2:**

***Development of sustainable rural tourism in the region of Chashka.***

Rural areas in the municipality of Veles and in the wider region such as the municipality of Chaska have huge capacities for developing rural tourism. It is a large region full of natural beauty, but sparsely populated. More than 2/3 of the villages are uninhabited and several villages have few inhabitants. The economic potential for the development of an economy is minimal and poor infrastructure makes it more difficult for development.

There is a potential for development of rural tourism in this region, in the areas of untouched nature. There are possibilities for involving the local population in engaging in an offer for authentic accommodation in old architecture, as well as in the area of wealth of historical events, archaeological sites and specific natural phenomena and attractions.

Tourism services in rural areas currently is low: only two restaurants, two motels, three mountain huts and several monasteries.

Vila Zora has had several projects for developing ecotourism:

- Publication for history, culture and tourism capacities of Veles with a multimedia CD and a book promoting this region
- Promotion, protection and conservation, as well building access paths to Peshta canyon, making information boards, benches and waste boxes, providing conditions for protection of endangered species of birds on the lower branch of the river Babuna.

We identified all potential tourist attractions, analyzed their importance (potential) and availability, their current functioning and the opportunity to use them for tourist purposes. We also cooperated with all stakeholders (tourists, local residents, service providers and the business sector). Potential and interest exists for the development of eco-tourism, but a body is needed that will coordinate development and will provide conditions for development. We made valorization of several tourism tours, attractive places and space for networking of service providers.

**Strategic objective 2.1. Improve the quality of and access to accommodation facilities for developing rural tourism in the Veles region**

• **Result 2.1.1: Increased standards of quality services in the accommodation facilities in the rural areas of Veles region**

# 1 Activity: Education of current and potential service providers

# 2 Activity: Education for providing accommodation facilities according to quality standards

# 3 Activity: Education of accommodation providers and the need to categorize facilities offering accommodation services

- **Result 2.1.2: Provided external technical support for hygiene and catering for accommodation facilities in rural areas**

# 1 Activity: Conclusion of a contract with a hygiene and catering company

- **Result 2.1.3: Increased offer and promotion of new attractive accommodation facilities in the Veles region**

# 1 Activity: Include networking providers of tourism services from the region in one electronic system: E- store [www.-ekoturist.mk](http://www.-ekoturist.mk)

# 2 Activity: Open a travel agency

# 3 Activity: Sell tourism services through the electronic store on the global tourism market

### **Strategic goal 2.2. Facilitate access to funds for rural tourism development**

- **Result 2.2.1: Improved capacities of service providers to access funds for rural tourism development**

# 1 Activity: Education for developing business plans

# 2 Activity: Education for funds that support the development of rural tourism

# 3 Activity: Expert assistance in the application of funds

### • STRATEGIC PRIORITY #3

#### ***Organizational development and sustainability of Vila Zora.***

The previous work of Vila Zora was a result of the enthusiastic motivation of its members to realize projects in their interest. Activities were not always planned in advance.

With the increasing engagement of the organization, there is a need for organizational restructuring and segmentation in line with the organization's areas of operation and future activities.

The organization's strengths are: work in accordance with sustainable development, continuity in operation, capacity in preparation of analyses and data processing, networking and creation of coalitions, cooperation with institutions, NGOs, business sector, public and media, volunteer capacities, experience, credibility in the field, and establishment in the community.

Opportunities are: Strengthening IT capacities; better cooperation with international institutions, organizations and donors; the possibility of receiving contributions from activists and experts as future members; promotion of information about environmental problems nationally; and advisory professional services in the field of ecology.

Weaknesses include: insufficient equipment and space; lack of an organizational scheme; insufficient allocation of activities and tasks; weak profiling of personnel by area; lack of consistent funding; lack of financial and human resource policies; advocacy policies.

Threats to the future work are: non-cooperation and passivity of institutions; insufficiently accessible information; reduction of people's interests in participating in the NGO sector; and an absence of legal regulations for nature protection.

#### **Strategic objective 3.1. Mobilizing the community in environmental protection actions in Veles and other regions**

##### **• Result 3.1.1: Improved strong, active, support from citizens, civic associations and competent institutions**

# 1 Activity: Cooperation with environmental sections in primary and secondary schools and formation of a council of young ecologists

# 2 Activity: Develop a volunteer program

# 3 Activity: Include experts and professionals; Eco seniors club will be included as experts, as needed

# 4 Activity: Establish a volunteer club for field work, cleaning, Reforestation?and the organization of public events

# 5 Activity: Join ecology associations at the national and international level

# 6 Activity: Initiate and develop good partnerships with local and national institutions competent in the field of ecology and environmental protection

# 7 Activity: Develop and implement a communication strategy

### **Strategic objective 3.2. Improve the internal, organizational, capacities and functioning of Vila Zora**

#### **• Result 3.2.1: Improved organizational structure of Vila Zora**

# 1 Activity: Redesign of organizational structure by departments according to the field of activity regarding strategic priorities

# 2 Activity: Develop organogram and job descriptions

# 3 Activity: Include seniors and juniors as part of -Vila Zora

#### **• Result 3.2.2: Improved governance of Vila Zora**

# 1 Activity: Share the strategy with members and articulate a mission and vision

# 2 Activity: Develop an annual action plan in cooperation with members

# 3 Activity: Develop organizational policies

# 4 Activity: Review and improve the role and work of the presidency

#### **• Result 3.2.3: Developed technical and human resources**

# 1 Activity: Develop internal processes and procedures (procurement, employment, archiving, financial operations, etc.)

# 2 Activity: Develop internal systems (for assessment, remuneration, training and development etc.)

# 3 Activity: Provide IT equipment and other office equipment from other non-profit sources or projects

# 4 Activity: Ensure cooperation with external experts in the field of ecology and expert for legal assistance

#### **• Result 3.2.4: Improved financial sustainability of Vila Zora**

# 1 Activity: Develop a fundraising plan

# 2 Activity: Found a social enterprise in the field of eco-tourism, or production of renewable energy

# 3 Activity: Improve the capacities for preparation of project proposals and their management

## **5. MONITORING AND EVALUATION**

Vila Zora as a support from the USAID Civic Engagement Project will receive a training for monitoring and evaluation, and within the training, a M & E plan will be prepared for monitoring and evaluation of achievements in the period.

## **6. COMMUNICATION WITH THE PUBLIC**

The communication and promotion of our activities are through social media, Facebook, twitter, our web site, local and national medias.