



BEST PRACTICE: LIKA, CROATIA



Key Challenge

Creating local added value through tourism.

Type of Solution

Stakeholder participation and management; Certification; Promotional campaigns; Capacity building; Investments in infrastructure and product development.

Case Classification

Type of Destination | Rural

Territorial Level | NUTS 3

Size of the Tourist Area | 5,350.5 km²
(Lika-Senj County)

Population | 42,748 in 2021 (Lika-Senj County)

Type of Tourism | Ecotourism; Rural; Cultural; Gastronomy.

DMO | 100% subsidiary of the Lika-Senj county, next to the tourists boards of the municipalities; Non-commercial.

Main Stakeholders Affected | Tourists; Accommodations; Restaurants and bars; Local farmers and producers.

Additional Challenges Covered | Maintenance and conservation of cultural heritage; Lack of stakeholder management; Lack of knowledge and skills of tourism stakeholders.

Context & Background

The Lika destination covers the areas of the Lika-Senj County and also extends to parts of the Karlovac and Zadar counties. In total, it covers 6,796 km² of continental and coastal area, with over 60% of the area being protected. Tourism is very unevenly distributed, with Croatia's most visited national park (Plitvice Lakes) and rural areas with little tourism development but extensive agricultural activity. Since 2010, tourism numbers have been increasing slowly but steadily, with 470,000 arrivals and 1.6 million overnight stays in 2023.

Key Challenge

From 1960 to 1990, the region experienced significant emigration due to the Croatian Wars of Independence. Although the population decline has slowed, it has continued due to poor economic prospects. The economy needed to be stimulated to stop emigration and improve the quality of life, with tourism seen as a way to increase local value added.

Implementation of Solutions: In order to increase the added value of tourism in the region, the traditional heritage in the region was built upon and the traditional family farms and traditional cuisine were used for tourism development in the rural areas.

SOLUTIONS

- [*Lika Destination Cluster*](#) (NGO) was established by the Local Action Group Lika (LAG Lika) in 2017 to act as a central coordination point for strengthening tourism development in the region. They promote the development of a nature and gastronomy destination that enables the integration of local products from agriculture, arts and crafts into the tourism value chain.
- Introduction of the [*Lika quality label*](#), a state-recognized regional quality system for local traditional food, drinks and handicrafts. The products are based on tradition, are characterized by a high level of quality and are based on a sustainable philosophy, especially with regard to social aspects such as securing jobs for the local population.
- *Building the capacity of producers* through 1:1 consultations, workshops and peer learning through stakeholder networking. The focus of the consultations and trainings was on basics such as business principles, marketing and promotion (website and social media) and the quality system. The *networking* of local producers with tourism businesses, such as restaurants and hotels, in the destination served to get to know each other and to acquire knowledge about the available locally produced products.
- *Product placement* by the Lika Destination cluster, which in cooperation with the agricultural cooperative LIKA COOP opened a [*shop for all Lika quality producers*](#) in Plitvice Lakes National Park, the most visited tourist destination in Croatia, in June 2018. The cluster is also currently developing a quality mark for restaurants selling the local products to further strengthen the Lika brand and promote the region as a gastronomic destination.

Replicability potential: Very high (requires a leadership and an intense stakeholder collaboration).

Cost & funding source: Most of the work is based on volunteer work; Around 1,000 euros per year for promotional material or lectures funded mainly national, but also EU funding.

Success Factors & Barriers Regarding the Implementation

Success factors: Good network and communication system with all different stakeholder groups; Funding; The courage to start from scratch and persevere (even when people are sceptical); Awards that have helped other stakeholders to better understand the importance of the project.

Barriers: Lack of support for the project from the administrative side (that's why it's important to be persistent).

Results and Impacts

- 64 manufacturers are participating in the initiative and offer 174 products in 11 different categories.
- The Lika brand is now known both regionally and nationally, also through studies and articles by researchers and scientists. Other tourist destinations in Croatia are developing their regional quality system based on the “Lika quality” label.
- In 2020, Lika Destination was included in the GSTC list of TOP 100 most sustainable destinations in the world and in 2024, it was certified with [*Green Destination Bronze Award*](#).

Takeaways

- Local producers need to be supported in developing authentic local experiences, with small practical steps such as setting up a website and easy-to-use communication channels.
- DMOs can often more easily obtain permits such as sales permit or stall permit in local markets and public places, which are often more difficult for micro-enterprises. In this way, DMOs can open distribution channels for SMEs.
- Creating an authentic gastronomic destination can increase the attractiveness and unique positioning of the destination.

Useful Links

- [*Lika Smart Sustainable Destination*](#) | Lika Destination

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