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Empowering Communities for Resilient Futures:

Bottom-Up Approaches to Sustainable Development in Croatia

Session 3: "Climate & policy strategies"

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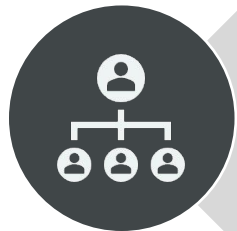
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i3.0 Strategic Partnership

for Community Innovation



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The i3.0 Strategic Partnership include **7 organizations** from 3 different countries (Croatia, Italy and South African Republic) **aiming to provide a 5-year plan** on empowering small communities in inner Croatia



The goal is to **develop local potentials and innovative sustainability models** that strengthen *climate resilience* and inform integrated *policy strategies*, ultimately improving quality of life in local communities.



4 main development directions:

(1) Technology, (2) Sustainable development, (3) Culture, (4)
Philanthropy

 **SUSTAINABLE
PLACES 2025**

SP25: "Climate & policy
strategies" Session

Why Croatia?



8 local communities participating in the Community Potential Programme

The program empowers Croatian local communities through sustainable, community-led development, with a strong focus on capacity-building, participatory governance, and local innovation for resilience.

Shared challenges:

- Depopulation and demographic decline
- Low awareness and engagement on climate topics
- Limited staff and expertise in sustainability
- Overtourism



Output: A step-by-step methodology commonly applied in the development of Local Development Strategies



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Linking Empowerment to Climate & Policy Strategies

Croatia currently faces **strong territorial imbalances:**

- **Coastal regions** are increasingly shaped by resource-intensive tourism and infrastructure development, resulting in environmental and socio-cultural impacts (*e.g., biodiversity loss, GHG emissions, gentrification, overtourism*).
- **Rural inland areas** suffer from *depopulation, economic stagnation, and limited access to public services*.

Key points:

- **Bottom-up processes** → foundation of local **climate resilience**
- **Empowered communities** → more adaptive and inclusive policies
- **Policy integration across different communities' aspects:**
Mobility, Tourism, Cross-generational exchange, youth empowerment, depopulation

Approach: A Bottom-Up Methodology

The **Community Potentials Program** introduces a bottom-up development model. Its core objective is to transform passive communities into proactive agents of change by identifying and activating their unique local resources.

- Preliminary results from **online questionnaires**
- Preliminary results from **on-site visits** (from June 28 to July 4, 2025) across the eight Croatian communities to gather baseline data on sustainability conditions in participating cities
- **Report on Status quo analysis** of eight local communities in Croatia complemented by virtuous and inspiring examples with possible recommendations on sustainable development strategies

Questionnaire on sustainability

2. Analysis of the status quo regarding the policies

2.5.1 For each topic of your expertise, indicate in the box below the name of the "soft-law" in place and the scale of implementation. Whenever possible provide a link or attach the related document.

* Topic

* Name of "soft law"

* Main contents

* Scale of implementation

If possible, provide the link to the relevant document(s)

Please upload the related document(s)

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2.5.2 For each topic of your expertise, indicate in the box below the name of the "soft-law" in place and the scale of implementation. Whenever possible provide a link or attach the related document.

Topic

Name of "soft law"

Main contents

Scale of implementation

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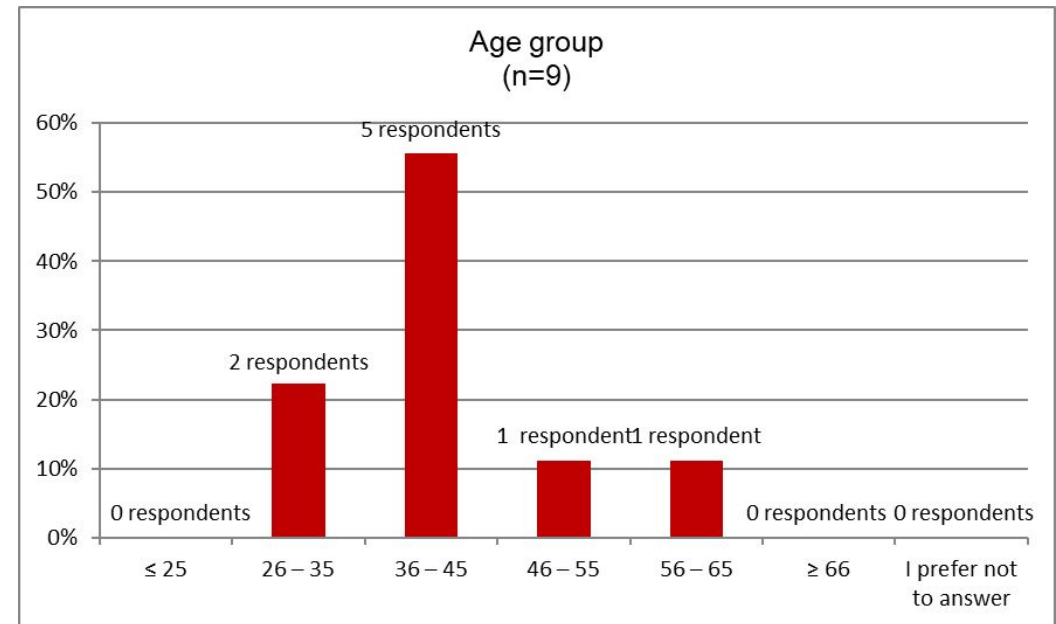
How local communities perceive themselves in the field of sustainability

The survey aimed to gain a deeper understanding of how sustainability is perceived and practiced within the eight communities, and a total of **19 responses** were collected.

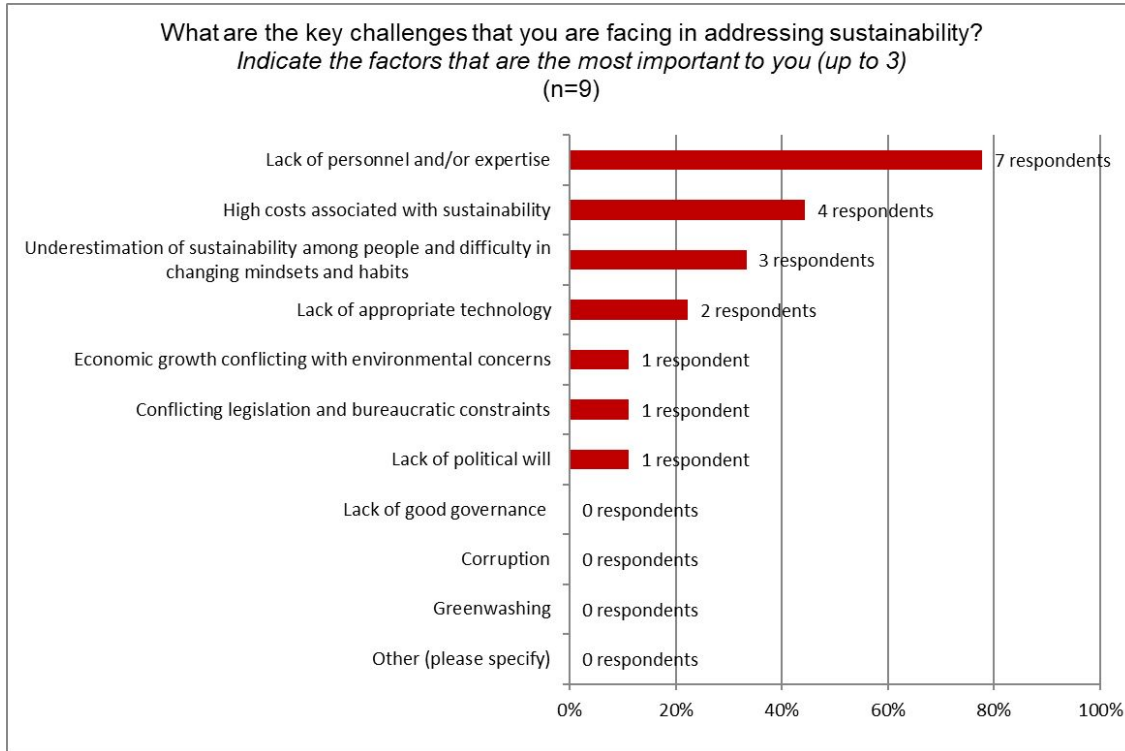


The insights collected serve as a foundation for **tailored policy recommendations** designed to help participating cities strengthen their sustainable development strategies.

Output: **A step-by-step methodology** in the development of Local Development Strategies



What Holds Back Local Sustainability?



Takeaway:

Capacity gaps and behavioural change are the main barriers to effective local climate strategies.



Key Drivers for Sustainability



Takeaway:

Financial incentives and civic engagement are essential for policy implementation.

Local Insights: From Participation to Policy

28 June and 4 July 2025 field study visits to seven of the eight Croatian communities



The purpose of this study trip was to gain an in-depth understanding of the development potential of each city and to reflect on the main challenges currently affecting their local communities.

Through a combination of **on-site observations**, **meetings** with local authorities and stakeholders, and guided discussions, the team was able to capture a comprehensive picture of the ambitions, constraints, and emerging opportunities characterizing each municipality.



Proposals for sustainable development



Community	Main intervention area
Zadar	Culture and innovation as development drivers
Pag	Countering depopulation and diversifying the local economy
Drniš	Food, festivals, and youth engagement
Šibenik	Building resilience through sustainable action
Duga Resa	Embracing slow and green tourism
Slunj	Agritourism and the Fight against Stagnation
Karlovac	Youth and the green transition
Biograd na Moru	Missing information



Insight from Zoona Magnifique, Bolzano, Italy



Name of Initiative: Zoona Magnifique

Location: Bolzano, Italy

Covered topics: Youth engagement, creative hubs, requalification of abandoned area, citizen participation, connection between people of different backgrounds and ages

Links/website: <https://afzack.com/zoona-xmess>

A valuable reference in this context is the Zoona initiative in Bolzano, Italy (<https://afzack.com/zoona-xmess>). In this project, an abandoned industrial warehouse was transformed into a vibrant community hub, the result of a shared vision between citizens and provincial authorities. What began as an empty, underused space has become a symbol of creative regeneration, built on the principles of inclusivity, participation, and affordability.

The Zoona project was intentionally open to everyone. Citizens, associations, and informal groups were invited to propose activities, from art exhibitions, community markets, and performances to workshops, concerts, and skateboarding sessions, all offered at accessible prices to encourage broad participation. Importantly, the repurposing process itself was collective: local residents cleaned, designed, and reimagined the space together, even constructing a symbolic lighthouse to represent the project's guiding vision, a beacon of creativity and community spirit. Today, Zoona serves as a cross-generational and multicultural meeting point, bridging Bolzano's German- and Italian-speaking communities through art, music, sport, and collaboration.

For Zadar, the Zoona model demonstrates how unused or neglected spaces can be reimagined as engines of cultural and social vitality. By adopting a similar participatory and inclusive approach, the city could begin to address its shortage of creative opportunities for young people, while also leveraging its strong cultural identity as a UNESCO Creative City. The development of one or more creative hubs, shaped through collective action and supported by local and European funding, could provide fertile ground for cultural entrepreneurship, innovative reinterpretations of heritage, and cross-sector collaboration.

Such spaces would not only enrich the city's cultural landscape, but also attract residents, artists, and visitors, contributing to Zadar's ambition to become a more dynamic, inclusive, and

Zadar: Culture and innovation as development drivers

The city's trajectory can be strengthened by adopting a culture-led regeneration model that not only preserves its heritage but also transforms it into a driver of innovation and community well-being.

- Reuse **empty or underutilized spaces**
- Empower **young people & entrepreneurs**
- Blend **culture, tourism, gastronomy & music**
- Promote **cross-sector collaboration**
- Enrich **year-round cultural life** and **social cohesion**

Insight from Gallo Rosso initiative (South Tyrol, Italy)



Name of Initiative: Gallo Rosso

Location: South Tyrol, Italy

Covered topics: Promoting sustainable agriculture, short local supply chains, circular economy practices, and food authenticity

Links/website: <https://www.gallorosso.it/it/>

Gallo Rosso is a well-established network of certified farm stays (*masi*) across South Tyrol. It offers authentic, farm-based hospitality rooted in the region's agricultural heritage and Alpine culture. The network unites hundreds of farms under a shared brand and quality label, ensuring guests experience genuine rural life, local food, and traditional craftsmanship. Each participating farm meets strict certification standards, guaranteeing high-quality accommodation, integration with agricultural activities, and strong ties to local products.

Beyond lodging, Gallo Rosso promotes diversified experiences such as cooking classes, farm tours, tastings, craft workshops, and farm shops. Its seasonal programming (spring, summer, autumn, winter) ensures year-round appeal, while its motto "Arrive as guests, leave as friends", reflects the importance of personal relationships and hospitality culture. In addition, Gallo Rosso runs a cooking school, organizes local product promotions, and supports farm entrepreneurship through marketing, education, and visibility. This integrated system helps strengthen rural economies, preserve traditional practices, and attract visitors seeking authentic, slow, and nature-based tourism.

The experience of Gallo Rosso offers *Slunj* a concrete roadmap for transforming its agritourism ambitions into a structured, high-quality system rooted in authenticity and collaboration. One of the first lessons lies in the importance of clear certification and quality standards. In South Tyrol, Gallo Rosso ensures that every participating farm adheres to precise criteria regarding accommodation, agricultural integration, and hospitality. This approach has built visitor trust and turned the brand into a guarantee of excellence. *Slunj* could follow a similar path by developing its own local quality label, signaling to guests that every certified experience meets defined standards of authenticity, sustainability, and service.

Slunj: Agritourism and the Fight against Stagnation

Slunj's is one of the "Best Villages in the World" offers a valuable branding opportunity. However, to transform this recognition into long-term development, the town must back its image with authentic, high-quality, and locally rooted experiences.

- Create a **Slunj Quality Label**
- Establish a **Local Food Hub**
- Promote **shared marketing, training, and storytelling** under a unified brand
- Reinforce **local value chains** linking food production, hospitality & retail

Lessons Learned & Policy Takeaways

Key messages:

- Participation drives **integration of climate & policy strategies**
- Empowerment builds **social and institutional resilience**
- Soft-law tools and best practice exchange → enablers of innovation
- Local capacity building is essential for EU policy alignment



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Thank you for your attention

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