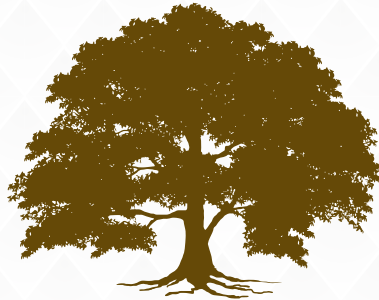


# CONTINENTAL CROATIA

Sustainability is Responsibility



In collaboration with

**Newsweek**

## WHY TOURISM MATTERS

### Guiding Croatia & the world's tourism's recovery for 2021



■ This crisis is an **opportunity to rethink the tourism sector** and its contribution to the people and planet; an opportunity to build back better towards a **more sustainable, inclusive and resilient tourism** sector that ensure the benefits of tourism are enjoyed widely and fairly. ■

**ZURAB POLOLIKASHVILI**  
*Secretary-General of the United Nations  
World Tourism Organization (UNWTO)*

## CONTINENTAL CROATIA

### Croatia's **best kept secret**



■ What sets **Continental Croatia** apart from other regions is its natural resources. It also has **huge potential to develop both the agricultural and food processing sectors**. The tech sector here is something that is also getting a lot of attention and has had positive results as well. Additionally in the region, we have a great chance to expand rural tourism. This kind of tourism offers a **completely different experience to that of coastal tourism** and is a strategic **opportunity for developing year-round tourism**, which is more sustainable. ■

**NATAŠA TRAMIŠAK**  
*Minister of Regional Development  
and EU Funds*





## A huge investment potential



Resilience will be the key for innovation, sustainability & responsibility in Croatia, the region & abroad

While it is lesser known that its counterparts, Continental Croatia is nevertheless a very strategic part of the country. Home to Zagreb, the capital, this city boasts more than 40% of Croatia's businesses and has the country's largest population. The regions north of Zagreb are also notable for their industrial zones and they have some of the highest income per capita in the entire country. Heading east, the counties that make up the region of Slavonia, (not to be confused with Slovenia), are where agriculture and farming are the main economic drivers.

During the past five years prior to the pandemic, in this region and elsewhere, most innovation initiatives aimed to increase company's profits, fend off competitors, or both. However, this current crisis has caused many organizations to set a new innovation target: resilience.

Covid-19 has helped global and local leaders to recognize the risks of enterprise and governmental inertia. In this new era, innovation will be a cornerstone of organizational resiliency and there were many examples seen all across the country: gyms that couldn't offer fitness classes outdoors were forced to close, local restaurants switched to

all take-away business and upgraded their software accordingly to survive. This kind of resilience-oriented innovation isn't as simple as upgrading an interface or building a faster processor and Croatian business leaders will need to continue to develop services and processes that are flexible enough to handle society-wide disruptions.

Technology and innovation will certainly be part of the solution. Almost every organization has now adapted to video conferencing tools and project management software. More advanced technologies, such as blockchain and artificial intelligence, will be used to secure contracts signed remotely and identify gaps in workers' performance.

### BEST WILL BEAT FIRST

Gradual evolution in both technology and markets are changing the way companies dominate. Croatia is a small country and as a rule its smaller companies cannot compete against global multinationals like Amazon, but innovation initiatives after the Covid-19 crisis are likely to prioritize quality ahead of speed. First-movers enjoy less of an advantage in times of rapid change so small countries and small players have a chance to find a niche in this manner. A good example of what occurred can be found in the take-away and curb-side pickup in restaurants. Every restaurant raced to implement take-away when Covid-19 hit, even small ones that before had never focused on this service. Now that the service is common, customers can now choose where to go because the innovation is no longer exclusive to just the bigger restaurants that existed prior. Customers now choose the place that offers the best curbside service, not necessarily the one that did it first or was the biggest as they may have done in the past.

### SUSTAINABILITY ON THE EU SCALE

According to the European Commission's department for Environment and Eco-Innovation,

Croatia is almost in the middle when compared to the other EU member states that are currently catching up with eco-innovation. Though all measured components are somewhat below EU average, Croatia's highest scores are seen in Eco-innovation activities, which are only 1% below EU average, and resource efficiency outcomes which are 11% below EU average.

Significant improvements have been made in Croatia concerning the transition from a linear to a circular economy in the last two years. However, Croatia needs to make additional efforts in order to make significant progress in this transition. An increasing number of companies focus on eco-production and sustainable development, as well as a growing number of projects and products based on eco-innovation, energy efficiency and recycling. Policies such as the Waste Management Plan which focuses on waste reduction and prevention, green public procurement and providing support for separate collection have showed positive results. Activities aimed at the implementation of national strategies regarding innovation and smart specialization, as well as financial resources from foreign funds and international organizations, gives a realistic hope for Croatia's circular economy future.

### SUPPORTING INNOVATION IN CROATIA THROUGH PARTNERSHIPS FOR SME'S

Innovation is an important factor in any countries' economic development. However, government spending for research and development can be limited. In Croatia collaboration with Switzerland provides promising small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) with support for the launch and development of innovative



new projects. Five SMEs have succeeded in obtaining funding from the European Eurostars programme through this program.

Eurostars targets research-driven SMEs that create innovative products, processes or services and the funding helps SMEs to access the financing they need to develop their products in cooperation with research or SME projects internationally and become more competitive. To be eligible for the Eurostar's program, projects must therefore involve partners in two or more participating countries.

When submitting Eurostar's applications, Croatian SMEs often face challenges as they do not have sufficient experience in developing projects and making a persuasive business case for their project. Supporting SMEs also prevents 'brain drain', the emigration of highly-qualified workers. Successful, innovative companies create career opportunities and attract motivated skilled workers. This is especially important in Croatia, which suffers from emigration.

Innosuisse advises and coaches its Croatian counterpart, the Croatian agency HAMAG-BICRO, which is responsible for promoting innovation and submitting applications in Croatia. This support is especially vital for Croatian companies wishing to attend broker events – trade fairs where companies and research enterprises from around Europe meet to discuss collaboration opportunities. These networking events are important since Eurostars requires applicant projects to involve companies from at least two countries. Considerable efforts on the Croatian side have raised awareness of the Eurostars project and both the number and success rate of applications have increased significantly.

### FLEXIBILITY FOR THE FUTURE IN THE REGION AND ELSEWHERE

The crisis has reminded companies in Continental Croatia, as well as local governments, that pivots are just as important as other functions. Shifting from in-office to remote work — an HR pivot — made it possible for many local companies to keep doing business at all. The problem isn't that Croatian companies and others around the globe can't change; it's that most don't plan for it. Executives may opt to rent rather than purchase company cars to mitigate the risk of future travel restrictions. Business leaders have, historically speaking, taken a narrow view of innovation but Covid-19's biggest silver lining might be that it's helping them confront these innovation challenges in new ways. After all, necessity is the mother of invention and new creations arise out of disruption. ●

**TONČI GLAVINA**  
State Secretary of Tourism  
Government of Croatia



## CROATIA A HEALTHY & SAFE DESTINATION, NOT TO BE MISSED

**It appears that Croatia has exceeded all expectations set by both the country itself and the UNWTO. How would you describe the coronavirus's effect on tourism both worldwide and in Croatia?**

If you want to sum up everything that we did in 2020, while we were in the midst of border closing and lockdown, we had already started working with our partners and markets. We knew that most likely long hold destinations would be severely impacted. We put our focus on our imminent markets especially our neighboring countries letting them know that it's a driving destination. And we have started negotiating with those countries in a bilateral way, with our epidemiologists alongside and came up with protocols and procedures. This process was spearheaded by our prime minister, who would correspond and negotiate if you will with the country leaders. After that we started to take on the operational side of things here at the ministry and we were directly making plans for "what are we going to do once we are open?" At the end of lockdown, we went into very direct and very successful campaigns to make sure we make sure we are very visible; that we are available, and open, and safe and it's easier to cross the borders. We developed new software in a partnership with the Ministry of the Interior, an app. You do is you enter in all your information and information of those you're travelling with: destination of where you're going,

contact numbers, addresses, and so forth and upon the arrival of the border, by car or in the airport, your passport or ID is scanned and the information that you filled out at home a few days earlier all merges together and you pass through. It looks like a regular passport control.

**Tourism is the backbone of your economy. What is your projection for the economic impact of Covid in the short and mid-term?**

We are keeping our highest priority on the health and safety of aspect of it which means we're going to maintain all the processes and protocols and everything necessary to minimize the risk of possible COVID-19. We will not forget our long-haul destinations, destinations where people can only arrive by plane. We are working on presenting Croatia as a destination with a beautiful natural and cultural heritage. The country is underdeveloped from an industry or inhabited stand point and has some tremendous tourism products such as gastronomy, food and wine, cycling tourism, nautical tourism, and active tourism in general. We believe that we are going to have a better distribution of guests throughout.

**Everything you said aims to bring confidence to the sector and you do think things through and you have many projects. How has this crisis impacted investment in tourism?**

From an economic standpoint, travel is cheaper than before and the ability to work while travelling or temporarily living in other countries exists. It brings us comfort to know that tourism is going to continue to be bold and people who choose to travel taking into consideration risk. Which is a very good message for investors. It proves to them that tourism is not as vulnerable as was always assumed. If you look, you're in a global pandemic, and every industry has been hit. What we have from an investor's standpoint, we have a lot of projects and construction that was happening when this thing hit us. All these projects are going to continue and finish because they have to. From a perspective of new investments, I think Croatia has some competitive advantages because it's still, from an accommodation standpoint, underdeveloped. Our competitors in big countries, like Mediterranean countries, do not have this competitive advantage right now as they are more developed and, in some cases, overdeveloped. ●

**How would you describe the impact of COVID-19 on world economies and the impact on the Croatian economy specifically?**

Looking from a world perspective I would say the world has definitely witnessed how fragile everything is. The same thing happened to Croatia. What the pandemic has shown us as a society is that in some key areas, a country should have a point of self-sustainability. It has also shown us when in need, Croatians are an innovative society and can adapt really quickly. We are not a very populated country, it puts us in a position to adapt quickly more so than bigger countries. As a result of this whole situation we have had to digitalize ourselves faster than before and improve our innovation and implement it to resolve the new issues that arose. Overall, 2020 was a year that I hope we as a society learned a lot and saw where our weaknesses are and what needs to be improved and it showed us that we can adapt and overcome.

**How attractive do you think Zagreb is as a Middle European city for investment and what sectors do you see as the biggest potential for this city to grow?**

Zagreb is the capital of Croatia and it has around 800,000 habitants. When you look at the city and its geopolitical position, you could say Zagreb is in the crossroads, diving south with east and also north with south. This makes it easy to travel to places like Budapest, Vienna, and Belgrade. It's also a crossroad with rail stations and is 150 kilometers away from the biggest port in Croatia, Port of Rijeka. I would say as a capital it is not only the political and administrative center of Croatia, but also education, science, culture, and economic activities. Almost one-third of Croatia's GDP is created in Zagreb and the concentration of businesses in Croatia is almost



**IVAN BARBARIĆ**  
Vice-President for Intl. Relations  
Croatian Chamber of Economy

40% of businesses in the country. There is a well-educated workforce, a multilingual speaking environment, and diversity across many sectors.

**How is the Croatian Chamber of Economy helping businesses become more visible in international markets? How can they help young innovative entrepreneurs be seen?**

When you look at Croatia you have to keep in mind that we have about 130,000 businesses in the country that are part of the Chamber of Economy, and only 15% of them export. Our economy is not big enough that we can satisfy the needs for only our demands, we need to export. In 2020, we began a global virtual project which is ongoing, Go Global Go Virtual, which are online B2B meetings between Croatian companies and our global partners. Over 1,000 companies from Croatia have joined, they are eager to export as well. The goal is to help facilitate exports.

**Many countries have an investment promotion agency and Croatia doesn't. Does the Croatian Chamber of Economy fill that role and help investors and provide them with information? Definitely. We try to serve as a one-stop shop for any kind of foreign investors and provide Information about regulations, laws, and current economic situations, any incentives on a national or local level. There's an online site [www.investincroatia.hr](http://www.investincroatia.hr) with a catalog of investments. There's a tailor made approach for investors. ●**

## CROATIAN CHAMBER OF ECONOMY HELPING COMPANIES TO GROW & EXPORT GLOBALLY



## SVJETLOST LEADING EYE CLINIC IN CROATIA



### Professor NIKICA GABRIĆ

Medical doctor & PhD  
Svjetlost Eye Clinic Zagreb

#### What was the impact of the pandemic on the clinic and its employees?

To say 2020 was easy would be a lie but medicine is unlike other businesses. You see in medicine there are two basic types of services, the kind you want - laser vision correction, face-lifting, liposuction and other cosmetic procedures; and procedures you need - cataract surgery, retinal detachment surgery, hip replacement and so on. The beauty of ophthalmology is twofold - first you can treat a vast majority of patients without other medical specialties and the other is there is a large dichotomy of services - want type services and need type services. We look at the economy and based on the economic outlook we change our marketing to adjust. In times of affluence we promote and focus more on the want type services as we create more value for our business in these procedures as they are more profitable, but in times of economic downturns we focus more on the services people need. These services usually have lower profit margins but in a global pandemic they keep the lights on. During COVID-19 in 2020 we managed to keep all our employees and remain within 10% of gross income from 2019.



#### You founded Svjetlost 20 years ago. It was one of the first private clinics in Croatia.

#### What was the idea behind your decision to venture into the private health care sector in a country with heavy socialist heritage?

During medical school I was at the top of my class and had the great opportunity to visit Manchester for a semester. That was the first time I saw with my own eyes that their level of medicine is a lot better than in former Yugoslavia. It's not that our doctors were not good- surgical skill was on par or better in Yugoslavia but the techniques and technology available to these doctors were better. It's then I knew I wanted to bring this new technological wave to my home country. I had an epiphany - If I want to build a better eye care clinic I will have to build it myself. The first rule in my clinic was that the patient is the center of everything, we are here for them. The second rule was to bring the best standard of care. These two rules are still my main guides for business. I was the first doctor in former Yugoslavia to start Laser Vision Correction. The hardest part was getting other doctors to believe in my project so they came and saw the way I do things and slowly but surely I created a core team that was used to expand the business and achieve growth in every aspect.



#### Your business model is based on starting the satellite clinics in the region. What is your strategy for attracting more patients from abroad?

I started Svjetlost in Zagreb in 1998. After a few attempts in 2011 I started my own practices in Sarajevo and Banjaluka as at that time 30% of our patients in Zagreb came from Bosnia and Herzegovina, and other locations where we saw they were needed. Zagreb has the highest concentration of doctors and patients and we test new procedures and technologies. Once we master them in Zagreb we create standard-operating-procedures that are then distributed to satellite centers. These satellite centers have doctors that deal with day-to-day patient exams and simple surgery but surgical teams from Zagreb and Split visit regularly for complex cases. This system allowed us to cover a large geographical area and keep a consistent level of expertise and results. Right now across all our centers about 50% of patients are local to the area and 50% travel to our centers from other areas.

#### What is your opinion on the future of medical tourism in Croatia? Do you see a potential for developing it further in the near future?

For medical tourism to achieve any real growth it's not a question of individuals it's a question of branding. The brand of Croatia is not associated with medical services, and these branding needs to be a government effort. Another issue is pricing. If a patient is looking for a bargain they will go someplace cheaper like Turkey and Thailand and people with money don't want to travel to an "unbranded" location. Fortunately for us we managed to attract some world level celebrities so we are able to brand Svjetlost as a center of excellence.

#### How important are innovation and new technologies for your work?

Medicine is a spinning wheel. Every 5 to 8 years there are major revolutions in medicine and 23 years ago I was happy to have a device that was current standard care at the time. Then 15 years ago I wanted to have a device early in its lifecycle to master it before it becomes standard. Today companies are giving us prototypes to test out before they are put on the market. The paradigm shifted, from us looking at the world asking what's good

enough, to looking at leaders and innovators to see what's new to the world looking at us asking us what's new and what works.

#### What role does the clinic play in educating future generations of doctors in Croatia? What can be done in your opinion in order to slow down the exodus of young doctors?

Svjetlost was the first private clinic that could provide training for medical residents in this part of the world. However, Svjetlost is but a drop in the Croatian healthcare system's bucket. There will be a major issue across the entire western world with a lack of doctors and society will have to find a new way of motivating people to become doctors and stay in the countries where they finished their education.

#### What is your vision for the future of Svjetlost?

I feel the future of Svjetlost is bright. We have achieved supremacy in numbers and mastery in a new technology. If we were just stable for the next 10 years we would remain the single largest private ophthalmology business in this area of Europe. But we are always looking to push it forward. As a short term goal we want to invest in new technology and education. Our long term goal is to spread out and try some other medical specialties that are compatible with our way of doing business.

#### As a prominent personality in Croatian social, political and academic life in Croatia, where do you see your country in 10 years' time?

We are still transforming our society from socialism to market capitalism and this has proven to be a large burden. There should be a political consensus on key issues like healthcare, demographics, education and public services as our governments don't last long enough to finish a transformation before a new team swoops in and starts again. However, joining the EU we have made strides and we are a lot better now than even five years ago. I hope that future political powers in Croatia will find the courage to make hard decisions and stick with them so we can leave our children a prosperous country. ●

## FACTS

### One

OF THE 1ST PRIVATE  
CROATIAN CLINICS

### 50%

LOCAL PATIENTS

### Leader

IN TECHNOLOGY &  
SERVICES



## An **innovative** local company has gone **global**



Even large multinationals like Google are turning to this Varaždin-based business to help create more sustainable & affordable energy across Europe & the globe.

There is more to solar energy than just putting modules and panels on buildings and Solvis, a Croatian manufacturer of solar panels, understands all about this. Known for both their standard modules and innovative consumer modules, Solvis offers a range of solar solutions. Founded in 2008, the company went global in 2009, and since then has provided solar panels for businesses throughout Croatia and the world - from India, to Silicon Valley, and beyond.

The innovation of Solvis has helped Croatia reach and surpass the 20% goal that was set by the EU for renewable energy. Not only did Croatia reach the goal they even came in with a gross final energy of 28.5% from renewables. In 2020, Solvis was contracted by HEP, the state owned power utility in Croatia to provide 20,330 solar panels for a new energy plant on the island of Cres. The new 6.5 MW SE solar energy plant is designed to supply sufficient energy that will last the entire “beach tourism” season. Importantly, the installation of these panels will not impede

the passage of small animals nor grazing sheep in the area where the plant is being built and they have also created modules for buildings and infrastructure across Croatia including Dalmatia, Istria, Northwestern Croatia, and Slavonia.

On top of helping to make factories, manufacturers, businesses, and homes more energy efficient in Croatia, large multinationals are turning to this Varaždin-based business to help create more sustainable and affordable energy across Europe and the globe. Experts from both the tech giant Google as well as their Swiss partners have been helping Solvis develop special solar panels for over two years now, and Google has ordered the manufacture of 120,000 panels for two of their data centers in California.

The company has ten models in its portfolio, as well as many other additional products. Solvis has come a long way since its first two-square-meter solar panel which had a power of 200 watts to the capacity of its current equivalent is 500 watts that is also ten times more

affordable. Currently, 80% of Solvis’s production is exported, and demand has doubled its annual capacity. The panels are not only made and sold to businesses, they are also common for households trying to live a greener life, and in some cases, are even subsidized by the government. Most homeowners typically install four to six kilowatts on their roofs, and the investment of the panels usually pays for itself within six to eight years.

With over 300 employees, Solvis produces 2,800 modules per day, more than one million modules a year, and with countries beginning to work on the goals they have for the European Green Deal, it is expected that demand will grow and Solvis will equip more countries and businesses than ever before as renewable energy enters the mainstream.

Knowing this, Solvis has set out to create more creative ways to produce solar energy and has even come up with their very innovative “solar tree”. The solar tree is made of a steel structure with a “canopy” of 18 solar leaves of 810 W that glow at night. The bench around the trunk can seat up to 12 people and there are connections for charging all kinds of gadgets, from cell phones, laptops to even electric bicycles! On the solar tree trunk there is an information board that provides information about solar energy, the specific project, and how renewable energy can improve the quality of life in smart cities.

Creating smart cities starts with using new products that are more intelligent and pollute less. Solvis has expanded from the solar trees to make solar palm trees, benches, umbrellas, and deck chairs. These allow futuristic seating in cities, as well as producing light, energy and at the same time, educating the people using them about the importance of renewables. Stylish and sleek, these products can be used in urban and rural locations, airports, shopping centers, parks, town squares, tourist facilities, amusement parks and more. On top of the charging ports and LED lights there



is an opportunity to add features such as video surveillance, mobile hotspots, and an SOS phone.

The benefits of these urban, ecological, public furniture concepts in action are that they help reduce carbon emissions, save space by going vertical, and their placement in both public and private spaces will help drastically reduce the amount of land needed for solar parks.

Customer-oriented, Solvis promises to provide products of utmost quality and reliability to every client. Highly trained workers operate with state of the art technology to produce their photovoltaic modules, which in layman’s terms are solar panels. Solvis is committed to the future and even their motto is representative of this attitude, “As long as the sun shines we will continue to build and create innovative products.” Although there are challenges to be faced, the fact of the matter is that solar energy will only become more popular as it is needed everywhere. This will no doubt help to make this already very successful solar energy company continue to grow and as it does so benefiting itself, Croatia and even the earth. ●



Solvis is a **global company with a local attitude**: a Croatian **manufacturer of photovoltaic modules**, the result of highly qualified workers and state-of-the-art equipment with first-class raw materials.

Since 2009, focused on the production of an **environmentally friendly** & accessible source of energy, thus taking responsibility for the well-being of the planet Earth.

*Living with the sun*





# TOURISM SAFETY CROATIA RISES TO THE CHALLENGE FOR 2021



Photo: Goran Stanz/Pixsell

## KRISTJAN STANIČIĆ

Director  
Croatian Tourism Board

to stay that way for some time in the future. Croatia had a good response to these challenges. A couple of reasons were key. First of all, the Croatian government implemented measures rather early on in the crisis in order to minimize the impact on tourism and the economy as a whole. It was able to balance the interests of the economy with the health of its citizens. Restrictions were eventually lifted as we approached the summer season. This enabled the tourism sector to welcome a moderate level of tourist traffic in the summer.

At that time, Croatia was one of the safest countries in the world and possibly the safest tourist destination in the Mediterranean. We had an insignificant number of infected people compared to other Mediterranean countries and for certain periods there were also zero new infections. Additionally, the Government provided financial aid packages that helped keep liquidity in companies and bolstered employment in the tourism sector and other sectors of the economy. The second important element was that there existed strategic communications between the public and tourism sector. I can say from my own experience that we in the Tourism Board communicated daily with the Government and handed out instructions from the Ministry of Tourism, Ministry of Health, and Ministry of Interior. We also provided a conduit for information back and forth between these entities to private stake holders in the tourism sector as well. Together we established well balanced measures that achieved 50% of the traffic compared to 2019, which had been a record year in arrivals for us.

**The UNWTO predicted arrivals to be around 30% of last year's numbers; however you exceeded their projections.**

Exactly. The projections of the UNWTO were somewhere around 30%, we projected 30% to 35%, but in reality we reached over 50% of the previous year's traffic. I think this builds

our reputation for next year this experience in 2020 will certainly help us prepare for 2021.

### What are the priorities for 2021?

I would separate it into two areas. The first area would be to maintain the level of tourist activity until year's end through continued visibility in the tourism market. Another part of our activity would be to focus on our domestic market. We have several important projects aimed here. Our priority will therefore be on European countries, just like this year; however we will still promote and keep ourselves visible globally. We have to also be active in European markets that are not accessible by car, such as UK, Scandinavia, Northern Germany, because they are extremely important for some of our destinations, such as Southern Dalmatia, Dubrovnik and Split. And we should also focus on our visibility in faraway markets such as the Us, China, Korea, Japan, and Australia etc. and we will also do most of our promotions primarily through digital channels of communication. And the second area is to prepare 2021, based on the experiences in 2020, with a focus on promotion in our source markets focusing on health and safety. We think Croatia has a lot of competitive advantages here. And these are the countries and regions where we will invest more in our promotional campaigns. Apart from promotional activities, we will also actively participate in preparing the season in the health and safety area. We will continue to ensure together with the private sector that important measures are maintained, such as disinfection, social distance, testing and all other regulations needed to suspend or slow down the spread of the infection. Parallel with these short term goals, we need to think about long term sustainable development. COVID obliged us to have to use a more intensive analysis in order to create a new strategy for the development of Croatian tourism vis a vis sustainable development. In a narrow sense, it means protecting destinations and resources while avoiding the problem of over-tourism. This is what we witnessed on a global scale in the pre-COVID years. The third aspect of this long term development has to be an economic one. Everyone involved in tourism needs to find

an economic benefit. This economic aspect also has to be sustainable for a long period. We are not interested in short term investments with quick returns at the expense of value. The final and fourth aspect is the social one, meaning that everyone who is involved in tourism and lives from the tourism industry has to reap some sort of social benefit.

### Has COVID opened up any doors for improvements?

Yes, I can see that precisely this COVID situation has become an opportunity to focus in the direction of developing continental tourism. We have a number of micro destinations which are also very attractive with their natural beauty, and maybe unlike some of the larger destinations, offer what seems to be a priority today, authenticity. They have a feeling of privacy, intimacy and connection with nature. This provides a chance to escape from the masses and experience an active holiday with nature, gastronomy, wine, and cultural tourism.

### Where do you see the biggest potential for investment in the tourism sector?

The market today demands diversification of the product and I see a lot of potential in developing health tourism, thermal baths. Resorts. There is a lot of potential in the continental part of Croatia too. Also, the expansion of public facilities, such as building more cycling lanes, aqua parks, fun parks etc... We should also mention the opportunities in nautical tourism. Croatia ranks at the top in the world's yacht charter scene and there is a lot of room to develop more marina berths and the overall modernization of the marinas.

### What would be your message of confidence to our readers?

The first message everyone would be to "stay safe" and for each and one of us to be responsible and make sure that we behave in ways which minimize infection rates. The next message would be – Come to Croatia. Croatia proved this year to be the safest Mediterranean destination; it showed that it can handle the current situation and that Croatia has all that is needed to once again be the hit destination in Europe. And my final message would be – we are the closest, safest, most beautiful and truly the best destination. ●



## FACTS

**+2,715 hours**  
OF SUNSHINE A YEAR

**+10% of land:**  
8 NATIONAL PARKS  
11 NATURE PARKS  
2 NATURE RESERVES

**2500 years ago**  
THE GREEKS BROUGHT  
WINE TO CROATIA



## SLAVONIA THE EASTERN CROSSROADS

### FACTS

**10**  
MAJOR ECONOMIC  
PROJECTS UNDERWAY

**4**  
RENOWNED WINERIES

**4th**  
BIGGEST TOWN



### IVAN ANUŠIĆ

*Prefect*

Osijek-Baranja County

#### Can you please give a brief overview of your county?

Osijek-Baranja County is the largest county in Eastern Croatia and Croatia's second largest by size. The capital of the county is the city of Osijek, the fourth biggest town in Croatia, and also its greatest treasure. It is the cultural, educational and economic center as well as the leading city of Eastern Croatia for many reasons. It also boasts the only university in this part of the country, Josip Juraj Strossmayer University with 18,500 students and you can also find the only national theatre in the east of the country, as well as the only clinical hospital. An important asset is the connectivity of Osijek, not only with the rest of Croatia, but also to the rest of Europe. The airport is about to embark on a reconstruction which will be funded by the EU and there is also the (5C) corridor currently being completed, which will link us with Hungary. We also border Bosnia & Herzegovina and once they complete a new road, we will also be strategically connected directly to the Port of Ploče in the Adriatic. We are a hub to the East and the West of Europe. We also have a network of railway tracks, which is also quite strategic here, but we need to partially reconstruct it. Finally, we to mention the last traffic corridor, which is the river Drava. At the moment, passenger cruise ships are being organized and only 20km away from

the delta to the Danube there is a cruise dock that has been built recently. The port is also very active in terms of goods. So there are 4 key corridors at this moment and we are using all of them to boost our development. So you know, Slavonia is a flat and very fertile region and agriculture is the primary economic activity. We are the county with the biggest agricultural land production in Croatia. Additionally, we are also trying to develop a successful IT sector and I am proud to say that our county is the leader here in Croatia and we have many start-ups that are providing their services to a number of large international firms. Another sector that we started to develop intensively since I became the Prefect is rural tourism. It is important to mention that Slavonia has a long tradition of gastro and eno-tourism. Gastronomy is one of our strengths. It is a combination of authentic Croatian Slavonian cuisine with Hungarian influence in Baranja and Serbian influence here in Osijek. We have 4 different vineyards which are at this moment gaining international exposure and awards. Two years ago, a wine maker from Dalj won a prestigious Decanter award. Also, our wine maker Belje is the biggest wine maker and exporter in Croatia.

#### What are your projects for the future to boost economic development?

Looking at trends, we have been thinking about projects which should be the continuation of tradition. Croatia is a small country, but its people still live very "regionally". The differences between the regions are striking. This is why, together with the new Minister of EU funds and regional development, we created ten projects which are now part of the master plan for developing Slavonija, Baranja and Srijem.

- **Building a Business Park** (with fair space)  
The position of Osijek between Budapest, Sarajevo, Zagreb and Belgrade has a huge potential for hosting trade fairs.

- **Industrial park with sports incubator** – The first of its kind in Croatia. It is a brownfield investment in an old industrial complex in downtown Osijek. The area is 5.8 acres large and we plan to revitalize existing structures in order to create a sports complex where professionals will work with children and young athletes so that their potential is maximized. This complex is next to a university campus, which is also currently being built. We will therefore create an area where science will meet sports and therefore enhance the quality of life and the future of next generations.
- **Geothermal potential** – There are 7 known geothermal sources which have not yet been fully explored in this area. The results of the exploration study we ordered will be ready in 6 months. We will then see how we can use the energy sources for production of not only green energy, but for health tourism and agriculture.
- **Regional fruits & vegetables distribution centre** – 16 million USD, this project is planned to be finished in 2 years' time and will welcome producers from our county and will offer them support to help them be more competitive in both European and Croatian markets.
- **New clinical hospital in Osijek** – At the moment there are 3,200 people employed in this hospital and the new center is going to cost around 330 million USD.
- **Airport** – We are planning its modernization and will increase its capacity with a big investment from the EU.

#### What would be your message to the potential investors to Slavonia? Why invest here?

Some incentives for the investors are: proximity to traffic corridors which are key to logistical centers, the proximity of borders with non EU



countries, number of students who are ready to be employed in IT sector, cheaper labor costs, affordable land etc.

#### What makes Slavonia a desirable place to live in and to visit?

I've travelled abroad a lot and I can say with confidence that Slavonia has a great quality of life. People are friendly, there is virtually no crime, and the pace of life is slower than in the rest of the country. Slavonians are well known for their hospitality. The culture and traditions we have been building here over the last few centuries are different from all other regions. People here are also multicultural. Everyone who came here to live managed to assimilate to our discreet and non-aggressive mentality. Slavonia is at its best in autumn when the fruits of the earth rip at that time and the color of leaves is stunning. A big potential for tourism are our castles from the times of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. They are in Valpovo, Osijek, Našice etc. Very little is known about them, but they are some of the most beautiful castles in this part of Europe and then there is the Danube and Drava delta, which is a very special green and lush area. We are also a religious centre. The City of Đakovo is the seat of the Đakovo-Osijek archbishop. There is also the oldest State stud farm in Europe, 508 years old. It has been visited recently by Prince Charles and Camilla Parker and the Đakovo Lipicaner horses

there are just stunning. In these times of pandemic, Slavonia offers an authentic experience. Nature here is truly something special, same for our traditions, wineries and culture. We want to open up as a touristic area and we have presented Slavonia already to, among others, Chinese and Japanese markets. We want to invite investors in tourism industry, in geothermal sources and in agricultural production. ●







## A real treat just within reach



**L**ocated in the east of Croatia, Osijek-Baranja Region is an unexpected journey into a unique and surprising region, right in the backyard of Europe. HeadOnEast (of) Croatia is a destination not only close and accessible to reach, but also where one can be pampered by the best hosts in Croatia.

This is a mostly undiscovered region that contains an abundance of nature and scenery. Here, you can find some of the last intact swamps in Europe, vast wheat fields, vineyards, and centuries-old oak forests. The region is surrounded by two great Pannonian rivers, the Drava, and the mighty Danube.

Nestled in the town of Đakovo, there is a picturesque countryside home with Lipizzaner horses. The horses here perform with singers and dancers in the “Đakovački vezovi” parade, a cultural and folkloric performance that has taken place for more than half a century. The locals sing “Bećarac”, a traditional Slavonian musical ensemble, and dancers use sabers from a ritual dance of a Gorjani village. They are also known as “Ljelje” and are under UNESCO as a part of intangible cultural heritage. Đakovo is also home to the Cathedral of Saint Peter, one of the most famous sacral buildings in Croatia.

Osijek is the center of Slavonia and Baranja. Ideal for families as here they are known for their hospitality. There are truly numerous reasons that make this city special. Not too big, nor too small, Osijek is rich with social and cultural events. The city is open and full of natural beauty and since ancient times, the area of the Pannonian Basin has been a hotspot of civilization.

A majority of large historic Croatian vineyards and wine producers are based in Slavonia and Baranja and it is home to the largest wine cellar and vineyard in Croatia, as well as the biggest barrel in use. This region is paradise for connoisseurs, who come for its variety of good wines. Also, the entire region of Slavonia and Baranja has been steadily gaining in reputation over the past decade for its quality production not only Croatia but across Europe.

The short journey from farm to fork is one of the primary reasons for the attractive colors, aromas, and flavors of the cuisine in Slavonia and Baranja. The local culinary tradition consists of venison, different fish delicacies (fish soup known as “Fiš” carp on a stick), stews such as “paprika” and “čobanac”. Additionally, the area is famous for farmer’s cuisine such as delicious bean soups as well as pasta dishes. Homemade processed meat such as “Kulin”, “Kulenova Seka”, sausages, pork rinds, and bacon are especially renowned. Those who prefer vegetarian delicacies should visit the local town markets. Osijek is the largest, where fresh produce is delivered from nearby villages from spring until late autumn.

Only ten kilometers from Osijek, in the far southeast of Baranja, there is a green oasis - the Nature Park Kopački rit, the oldest park in Croatia (1976). Swamps, damp lawns, river sleeves, meanders and sandbars make it one of the most beautiful areas and one of the last pristine European wetlands. The area of the Rit is the largest nursery and hatchery of fish in the Danube region, and consequently is a particularly important ornithological reserve. Every year 140 nesting bird species arrive and many linger during seasonal intercontinental migrations. For the many birds there, fish is the number one specialty!

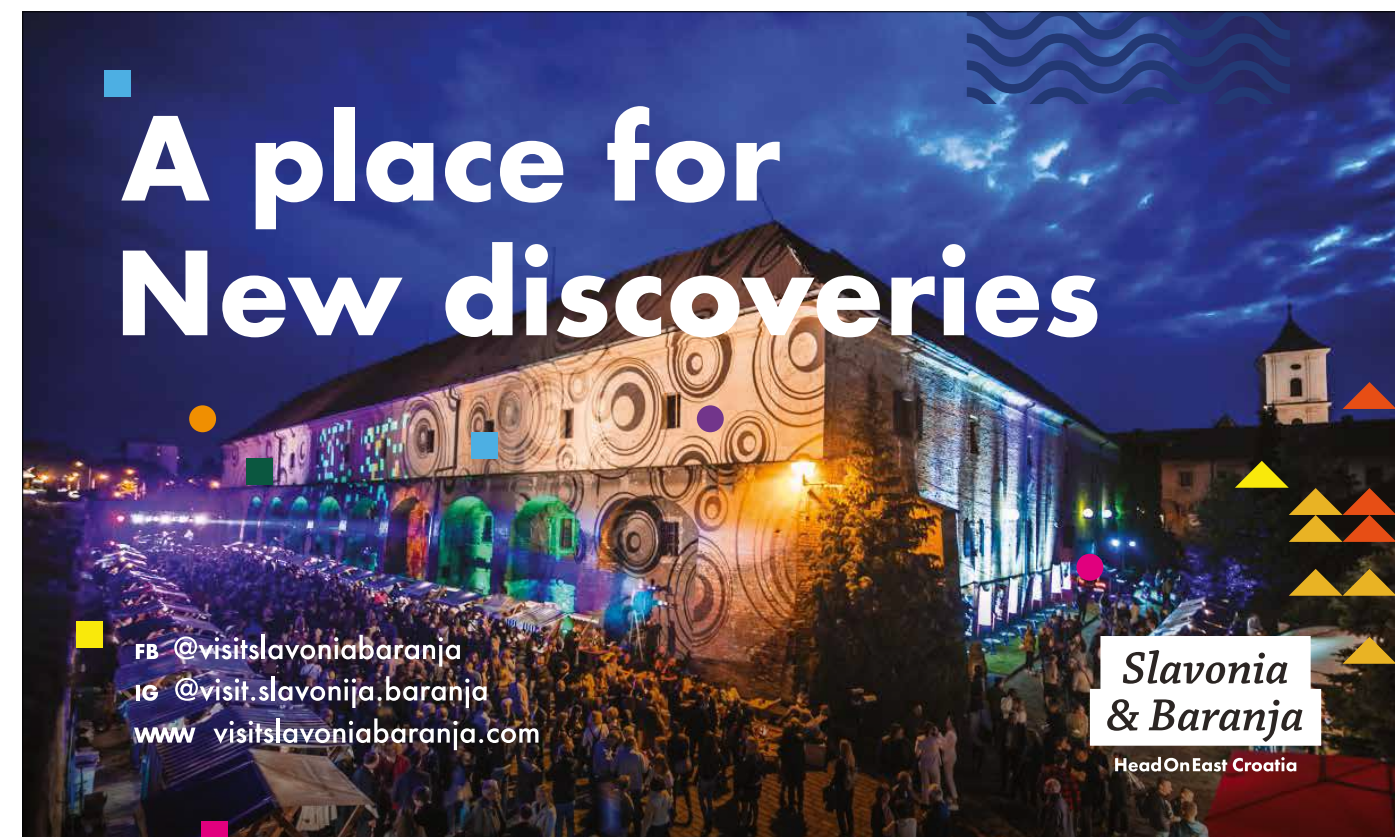
Slavonia and Baranja is filled with intact nature, peaceful corners, and rustic ambiances, yet remains very well-connected. Osijek, the center of the region is connected by a highway, a railroad, and an airport to the rest of Croatia and Europe. Also, there are three big international airports nearby - Zagreb, Belgrade, and Budapest are all at a distance of around two hours.

For sports, the region is intertwined with roads that cyclists and cyclo-tourists use to travel to their favorite destinations: nature parks, picnics, or Saturday lunches in the countryside and is bordered by two EuroVelo routes, no. 6 (Atlantic-Black Sea) and no. 13 (Iron Curtain Trail).

The Director of Tourism, Ivana Jurić, sums up the region by saying, “Surely, the biggest value of Slavonia and Baranja are its inhabitants who bestow upon their guests the most precious gift, that of genuine hospitality. Kindness and generosity are a part of every encounter. The authentic experience here begins with an abundant table and continues to very considerate



recommendations for spending your time and enjoying the region. Your hosts will become and remain your friends. In return, visitors experience the local flavors, scents, and colors. They cannot help but delight from the slow rhythm of savoring local cuisine and revel in a region that blends traditional culture and modern life. We are an active destination where you can learn new skills while visiting: ceramics, local dish preparation, wine tasting, horse-back riding, art therapy, organic farming and much more!” ●



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**Slavonia  
& Baranja**

HeadOnEast Croatia





## Setting the standard for **quality care**

More affordable than many European countries while on par or surpassing their counterparts in innovation

There are over 50 countries in the world, predominantly developing countries such as Thailand, India, Singapore, Malaysia, Cuba, Tunisia, Turkey, Lithuania, Poland, Hungary, as well as many others that have identified medical tourism as a national industry and thoroughly adapted their health care systems to be able to receive international consumers. However, it must be noted that medical accreditation, certification and other service quality measures vary widely among countries. Apart from the health care system adjustment, all mentioned countries had to go through significant reforms of supporting administrative and legal systems, but also a considerable improvement of custom-made tourism services for medical tourists from abroad.

Croatia - especially the capital Zagreb - has slowly and quietly been gaining popularity as a high quality medical tourism destination, a large part thanks to Svjetlost. Started 23 years ago in Zagreb, this eye clinic has serviced clients in over 100 countries, from the Dominican Republic to

Swaziland - although most of their international markets are in Slovenia, Italy, Germany, Austria, UK, Switzerland, and Scandinavia. With six centers spread across former Yugoslavia, Svjetlost dominates the ophthalmological market in Central, Eastern Europe and is regarded as having some of the most advanced technologies and facilities in their field.

The clinic is 100% self-financed, receiving all its income from private clients, and is rapidly expanding. Currently, there are six centers- Split, Sarajevo, Banja Luka, Budva in Montenegro and a franchise in Skopje, North Macedonia. These six centers together employ 70 ophthalmologists, and more than 100 other employees and specialists. The quality of care, experience of surgeons, and modern technology available is equal or better than anything in Western Europe but come in at a cost that is typically 2-3 times cheaper. Over 99% of procedures can be done quickly and as an out-patient procedure, leaving the patients to explore the city they're visiting between follow up appointments - merging treatment with tourism.

An important distinction between Svjetlost and other companies is its regional makeup. Doctors and interns from other parts of Europe are flocking to join the Svjetlost team, which allows the clinic to attract the brightest regional talent in a time where young people are emigrating more than ever. Svjetlost was the first private-owned university clinic in Croatia, starting to work with Croatian universities in 2010, when the Special Hospital for Ophthalmology Svjetlost became the Department of Ophthalmology at the School of Medicine of the University of Rijeka. The clinic's continued collaboration has enabled further implementation of scientific research and training of young doctors in Croatia and in the region. The center in Zagreb consists of 6 fully equipped operating rooms, 8 departments, including a cutting edge diagnostic and outpatient units.

In addition to laser vision correction, cataract surgery and corneal transplants, Svjetlost also performs vitrectomy - the most complex ophthalmic surgery, glaucoma surgery, strabismus surgery, plastic surgery of eyelids and styes, prosthetic cosmetic surgery of implanting silicone spheres, and more.

Overall, Svjetlost checks all the boxes to make it a great medical tourism product: accessibility, with their six locations and flexibility to fit a patient's schedule; tourism, with Croatia



growing more popular every day, yet still maintaining its beauty and isolation. Not to mention the price, being more affordable than many western European countries while still being on par or surpassing their Western counterparts in innovation; and, most importantly, quality of care..

As a testament to Svjetlost quality some world-class patients have visited the clinic, such as: the first wife of Donald J. Trump Ms. Ivana Trump, Hollywood actors Tim Roth, Armand Assante, Franco Nero and many other celebrities and business and political leaders. Svjetlost is currently a center of excellence and education for 4 major industry companies and is developing it's international reputation vis a vis the clients and its expertise. ●

## CELEBRITIES HAVE CHOSEN

**svjetlost**  
klinika

[www.svjetlost.hr/en](http://www.svjetlost.hr/en)  
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**ZAGREB | SPLIT | SARAJEVO | BANJA LUKA | BUDVA | SKOPJE**



## SOLVIS THE SOLAR PANEL COMPANY WITH AMAZING GROWTH



**STJEPAN TALAN**  
CEO & Founder  
SOLVIS

many private homes and many service industry properties use solar panels. It is important that the industry became commercially active. The state subsidies created growth in the market and it became profitable while at the same time the price of the equipment dropped. The demand for electricity is not stable, however the prices are continually growing. I didn't want to give up and we tried to find a niche in "what others do, we don't do". We didn't want to make an effort in vain if the market demand was already met. However, we wanted to be adjustable and we took over the tailor-made demands in the area of special solar panels. One of such large projects we took on was an installation in a Copenhagen port. The whole façade of the building is made of 12000 pieces of solar panels. After that there were several other projects in the north of Europe, Norway, Netherlands and also in Canada.

### How much of sustainable industrial production potential is Croatia actually utilising?

Not as much as needed. And awareness and possibilities need to be created. The awareness of importance of investing in a sustainable economy is missing. It will come, but it seems we always join the trends a bit later than others. Since we started our business, we have always had fully booked capacity for the following two years and we never used much marketing. We didn't need it really. We are the only company of this type in the region. We are mixing aesthetics, functionality, architecture and sustainability. Solvis's strategy is creating standard solar panels and special panels. In order to accelerate the Croatian solar market, which is slow due to bureaucracy, we started a third niche industry which is producing our own products. So now there are plans of building solar energy plants. We are talking about 300 MW capacity per year. This is all a part of the Energetic Transition Strategy in Croatia.

### You spent many years working as a pharmacist. How did you decide to make such a radical shift in your career? How did it affect your personal and professional life?

With the changes that took place in the nineties in Croatia, I immediately decided to start a private business. And since I was a pharmacist by profession, I naturally chose pharmaceuticals and founded a company in this sector. I had the opportunity to capitalize on my first entrepreneurship project and I sold it to a German company, but I remained as a manager for 5 more years. However, since I am not a manager by nature, but rather an entrepreneur, I resigned from that job and started a new project in a completely different area of business – in solar energy. It was a big challenge. I wanted to start something that had the opportunity to grow in the future, that was sustainable and profitable. So it was not too hard to decide. My initial idea was to produce solar panels for Croatia and the region. However, the big financial crisis started and at the same time the so-called solar crisis in Europe started too. We took our time to start off and become profitable. It took us about 5-6 years. At the time Croatia was not part of the EU and the whole region struggled to get their projects to become profitable. Then from 2015 to 2016 it started to be unstoppable. I believed that things would get better. We learned and we overcame challenges. Finally, the market was created and

### What is your five year ambition for Solvis?

Our strategy is to grow 30% a year. We are planning a stable growth of 30-50% per year. You can only achieve this sort of growth when the market is right. We have a business plan from 2021 to 2025 which shows such growth. Technology is advancing at a very fast pace, which is why we change the technology completely every three years. The efficacy of solar cells is growing and we buy most of those in China. Their prices are falling which enables more growth for us. We use the latest materials and technologies and this enables us to be labelled as Premium European Product both in European and US markets. For the last three years we have been developing a project with Google and we are equipping 2 of their data centres in California which are going to have domes covered by more than 100,000 solar panels completely produced by Solvis.

### How is this job with Google going to impact your reputation and how do you build your reputation?

Any reputation is being built by having a premium product and by being consistent. If you export as much as we do, it is a proof that your product is being sought after and it is the proof of quality. The future is going to be the integration of solar panels either on roofs or on facades. So this project is just the beginning and an inspiration for all our future projects. We will also continue to build our reputation in Croatia. We contribute to our local community by employing 370 people. Only 2 years ago we had only 120 employees and we find it quite easy to find a qualified workforce here in Croatia. We



have quite a stable base of engineers and managers and our last employment batch was due to expanding our capacity. Employing 150 people is significant for this county. The economic zone at the entrance of the city of Varaždin is a place with great potential. If we could find a bit more initiative from the authorities, it would be even better. Since 2008, we have been the second investor in this zone, Calzedonia and also us. This is how it has been for the past 12 years. We have found good solar glass in Lipik, here in Croatia. But the factory shut down after a year or two. So we had to turn to importing it from India, Turkey, Germany and other countries. We used to buy aluminium from the Šibenik TLM company, but then it closed as well and we had to turn to imports. And then they say – Buy Croatian. Ok. But how can we buy Croatian if there is no one to buy from? Fortunately we can still buy Croatian cables.

### How would you describe the business climate in Croatia and the business culture? What would you say to those who are coming to work and live in Croatia?

There is no problem in Zagreb. Everyone finds Zagreb to be great. In Croatia there are definitely more positive things than negative. Croatia is not economically strong as it could be and it cannot provide the same level as the developed world can, but there is still a lot of charm here. When I went to Netherlands I also loved it. The situation is reversing in the sense that the industrialized world is now no longer polluted. Now it is the developing world that is more polluted. We need more initiative and more organization in order to cut the red tape, administration and bureaucracy here but there is a lot of potential, not only in the country but with the workers themselves. ●

## FACTS

**+300**  
EMPLOYEES

**2800**  
MODULES PER DAY

**1 000 000**  
MODULES PER YEAR

**330 MW**  
CAPACITY



## MEĐIMURJE ONE OF 10 BEST EUROPEAN REGIONS FOR INVESTMENT



### MATIJA POSAVEC

Prefect  
Međimurje County

realized it was our chance to increase tourism. Eno-gastronomy, history, and natural beauty opened our eyes and we realized that we need to invest in this industry more than ever before. We want to create a value adding tourism product for people to be able to experience what we have here and to create awareness that tourism is no longer only the sun and the sea. Tourism is also eno-gastronomy, natural beauty, activities, and much more. We have over 700 km of bicycle routes. We collaborate in this area a lot with Austria and Slovenia, connecting these countries with cycling routes. On a 50 km route you can ride through Austria, Slovenia, Hungary and Croatia. This is an advantage of our geographical position and has been recognised by European Commission. We are triple laureate of the European Destination of Excellence award. Last year the national tourism board recognised Međimurje as the most successful destination of continental tourism in Croatia. We are also one of the very few regions who are members of UNWTO.

**Sustainability in demographics is as important as the environment. What is your county doing in order to incentivize young people to either stay and live here or to return upon completing their studies abroad?**

As a priority, we are building our county as a region where a high quality of life can be



achieved. Where you have everything in one hand and on the other hand, everything is within a short reach. People are moving out of some other continental counties and even some countries in the EU. We can't stop that process. But our advantage is that our border with Austria is only 36 km away. It takes an hour and 15 minutes' drive by car to Graz, the second largest city in Austria. People are going to leave for work to Austria for several times the salary they can earn here, however, they come back over the weekend and they bring the work ethic, knowledge, and funds back to Međimurje. You can see this Austrian mentality in our surroundings, the exteriors of people's homes and their gardens. Also, this proximity to the border is an incentive for people to be self-sufficient and to put their financial future in their own hands. It makes them proactive. When we look at today's economy in Međimurje, we see that it is one of the counties which exports double the amount than it imports. This shows the strength of our exports which is mostly focused on the EU markets. Međimurje makes 4% of total Croatian exports and 2.2% of total Croatian imports. Our economy used to be dominated by the textile industry. Today the lead is taken by the metal processing industries. We also created a technology-innovation centre where there are 60 incubated companies. One of those companies is making software for Porsche.

**How important is preservation of eco resources to you and what are you doing in order to increase the awareness about the importance of environmental protection to the citizens in Međimurje?**

As members of the EU, we are obliged and responsible to comply with EU standards in waste management. Our goal was to reach 50% of waste separation by the year 2020 and to reach 70% by 2030. In Međimurje we reached 50% about 6 years ago and today we are already at 70%. We are at the same level as Scandinavia and Germany. This speaks for itself when it comes to awareness the people of Međimurje have in regard to their eco-environment. We really do care about our environment. We turn our natural resources into opportunities. We don't have industries that create a lot of pollution, we don't build any objects in the nature parks, we even



rejected an idea of building the hydroelectric plant on the river Mura, which is a relatively fast river. The relationship with nature is very strong here and this is visible in our results. We are building our policies for the future in this direction and are motivated by European standards, not Croatian average standards in this area.

**Finally, this is your second term, which is about to finish. Which achievements are you most proud of in these two terms? What would you like to be remembered for?**

As we say, it is difficult to be a prophet in your own village and it is hard to talk about oneself however, I can say the following: We managed to transform the county to be transparent, efficient and a fast service center for our citizens. We now issue almost all permits the same day, many things are now digital, and our citizens know that they can turn to us for whatever they may need, obviously within the limitations of our possibilities and our authority. As for capital projects, we have renovated 20 elementary and secondary schools, we built 2 new schools, we built 6 sports halls, we invested over 200 million Kuna in the health care systems here through new departments and new primary health care. We completely reformed the health care system here by putting the primary and secondary care centres under one umbrella. In culture, the long awaited and very much wanted renovation of the Zrinski old town has finally seen the light of the day and is open to tourists now. Overall, looking back, we stand really tall in the light of challenges we face every day. We were led by the strategy that all the funds that are poured into the county budget from the people are returned back to the people and that the capital investments, such as building infrastructure, are funded by the EU funds.

**Final message to investors?**

Why invest in Međimurje? Come and see the diploma of Financial Times, which twice listed Međimurje among ten best European regions for investment. ●

### FACTS

**4%**

OF CROATIAN  
EXPORTS

**+200 million Kuna**

INVESTED IN  
HEALTH CARE

**+700 km**

OF BIKE ROUTES





## The **Garden** of Croatia

Croatia's  
awe inspiring  
northern  
region boasts  
astounding  
nature as well  
as history and  
culture for  
visitors.

**T**ucked away in the northeastern corner of Croatia, Međimurje is a county bordered by two rivers, the Mura and the Drava. The Mura flows along the northern border, with Slovenia on the other side, and eastern border, with Hungary across the river. Surrounded by water, Međimurje is known as The Garden of Croatia. It is the most densely populated region of Croatia aside from the capital, Zagreb.

Fishermen, cyclists, bird watchers, photographers, and wellness lovers are popular tourists who enjoy the diversity of Međimurje's landscapes. Hills, vineyards, plains, and water cover this area and include diverse and rare flora and fauna. Near the alpine foothills, the northwestern region of this county, known as the highlands, there is fertile ground perfect for growing grapes. The southeastern region, the lowlands, is known for plains and agriculture.

The highlands provide over 30 wine cellars and vineyards along "Wine Road" which is 30 kilometers long. Sauvignon, authentic Puspel, Gewurztraminer, and Chardonnay are popular among white wines, while Pinot

Noir and Cabernet Sauvignon are the highest produced red wines. These are often served alongside homemade bread and local salami and cheeses. These wines, rich with pleasant tannins, pair perfectly with the award-winning local cuisine, including *pretepena juha*, a thick cream soup, and *meso 'z tiblice*, cooked cured meat packed in a wooden barrel.

With all the natural landscapes in Međimurje, it's no surprise that a lot of the Mura-Drava-Danube Transboundary UNESCO Biosphere Reserve separated by flood prevention dikes is known as The Amazon of Europe. Thirteen clustered areas cover Croatia, Hungary, and Austria, and consist of over 60 habitat types and 20,000 water birds some of which are endangered. Butterfly Plavac is one of the endangered animals found in this area and the government has strong laws to protect their well-being, along with all other endangered animals. Many trails run through this area, making it easy to navigate, although tours are offered as well.

A unique attraction in Međimurje is gold prospecting. There is gold in the sand of both



the Drava and the Mura, and gold panning is as active as ever in the sandbars of these rivers! To fully appreciate the power of the rivers, a popular place it visits is the mill on the Mura. Located at the northernmost part of Croatia, in the village of Žabnik, visitors watch and listen to the old wooden mill. The millstone still works, grinding flour slowly pushed by the river's currents. Along the miller's path, there are information stops explaining the history of the river and there's even a ferry to carry you from bank to bank as well as small wooden boats to fish in.

Not all attractions in Međimurje have to do with nature. In the center of the county seat Čakovec is Zrinski Castle. Known to be one of the biggest fortifications in this region, the main palace is now used as a museum called the "Treasury of Međimurje". A special feature is the Ecomuseum of Međimurje, which includes a dozen multimedia interpretation centers of cultural and natural heritage and is used in the summer as an outdoor theater during the summer months.

Međimurje also boasts over 200 recreational clubs for different sports and outdoor activities. Some of the available recreations include activities such as walking, fishing, kayaking, riding, parachuting and flying small aircraft, including unpowered gliders and powered hang gliders. The highlight in the region for any tourist consists of Terme Sveti Martin, the best Croatian spa and the European Healthness center.

This county has a unique culture in comparison to other parts of Croatia. The locals love to honor their heritage and there is a festival called Porcijunkulovo, held at the end of July and beginning of August every year and is celebrated on the streets

in the center of Čakovec. For the development of sustainable tourism, Međimurje has been awarded three times the European Destination of Excellence (EDEN), and in 2019 it was declared the best tourist destination in continental Croatia. ●

*Enterprise, orderliness, quality, trust  
and tradition are the values of Međimurje  
recognized by global institutions*





# PRIMA FURNITURE WHERE EACH NEW PRODUCT IS AN INNOVATION



**SLAVEN ANDRIĆ**  
Director  
PRIMA Furniture

brushing up on our strategy, which could later also be applied to Western markets.

## Unfortunately, we cannot avoid mentioning the pandemic. To what extent did it influence your business this last year?

No economy was ready for this and PRIMA had its challenges as well, even though we adjusted quickly when it comes to worker's safety. The Government subsidies were also at their optimum. Our goal is to keep our workers, so we never really decreased the number of employees. On the contrary, the PRIMA family grew and continues expanding its forces. We were most focused on not having any layoffs or decreases in salaries. We wanted to stand up for our employees as a company. We have the same goal today as well; we want to continue to support them. One of the effects of the pandemic that we have seen was that people were interested in improving their homes, living and work-from-home spaces. We think it was good that people started doing these personal investments and renovating their homes, unlike in 2008 when during the financial crisis the furniture industry suffered a lot. People understood that having an office at home is crucial for their productivity and we were certainly ready for this shift. Even though production had stopped or may have slowed down for a while, we never let our employees down. We quickly adopted new marketing strategies and we started to sell more online. Then we reinitiated our production and came up with a new communication strategy including branding. Considering the circumstances, I must say we are doing quite well.

## What would you say is the secret of the success of PRIMA?

We have an excellent relationship with our local community and the regional administration



of our county. The secret of our success is our employees. Our teams have great working process and communication, and we have highly qualified people. We invest in their education extensively. If you have a happy and content employee, an organization focused on processes and not the administration, then there is no fear of failure. Our employees have always come first. Sourcing our commodities in Croatia gives us an advantage in the market as well. Additionally, our owner has always had good insight for the business. Some of our forecasts are being made 5 to 7 years ahead of time which is very helpful. Our owner is a visionary which is one of the key things to our business. The loyalty to our company amongst our workers is very high. We don't divide work and our normal lives. Work is very much a part of normal life too. We like to help out our employees and we want them to feel like that they are enjoying their lives and to feel at home and relaxed but inspired while working in PRIMA.

## What about innovation and sustainable development? How important are these two aspects for your company?

Each new product is an innovation. We have a design team who develops new products almost daily. We have our own retail and export teams as well. We also work on creating new materials together with our suppliers; we are actively involved in the process of choosing the materials for the new products. We are not afraid of bringing any novelties to the market.

Our designers bring certain innovation that we later also bring to the market. When it comes to sustainable development, we are very conscious of the importance of preserving the environment. We see this trend everywhere and there is an increasing segment in the market of buyers who are looking for only sustainably sourced products. For example, we are investing in solar energy in our factory in Garešnički Brestovac. We are also installing solar panels on all our buildings. This investment is worth around 1.5 million euros. With this investment, the goal is to decrease the expenditure of our solar energy use to about 70%. It is just one of the capital investments that have been projected for this year. This investment will be included into all of our production halls. Also, in our factory for mattress production, we use only natural materials like latex, cotton, or cashmere. We take into consideration our customer needs and we value their feedback. By doing so, we are designing products which are now the most appreciated and accepted in the market.

## What are your current strategic plans and where do you see the company in 5 years?

Our goal is continuous progress from the current point. For some time now, we have been thinking about expanding our retail concept to Western markets. Everything we do today in exports, we do for reputable department stores. We are currently in a medium to premium range for exports. We see this as good training, especially since our exports have become significant recently. We are looking into Austria and Slovenia with great interest when it comes to retail. In the next 5 years, we will surely focus more on expanding the production capacity and consequently expanding our retail network. PRIMA produces, delivers, and assembles their own products. We are unique in the market and we are convinced that in +25 years, with the hard work, the quality and devotion to the vision, we can achieve great results anywhere in the world. ●



## FACTS

**+25**  
YEARS IN THE  
MARKET

**+2,000**  
EMPLOYEES

**67**  
SALES POINTS

## From what we understand, PRIMA is a family business founded in 1995 in Bjelovar, we would love to hear about the origins. Can you please give us a short introduction to PRIMA furniture?

Yes, PRIMA is owned by the Radić family. We started as a production company in Bjelovar. Today we have been present in the market for over 25 years. In the markets of the former Yugoslavian countries, we surely hold the position of the number one furniture company. Currently, PRIMA employs over 2,000 people. As a vertically integrated company, we are involved in developing products from their creation, design, production, all the way up to the final retail sales. Currently, we have 59 sales locations in Croatia and 8 in Macedonia. Any excess of capacity that we may have, we use as exports in various markets such as: Germany, Austria, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, and Switzerland.

## Why did the company decide to invest in Macedonia?

We invested in market research and we had identified that in Macedonia there was a market gap. There was a lack of well-organized chains of furniture stores. Therefore, we decided to integrate ourselves. Bosnia and Serbia have quite a few producers of furniture of their own and those local producers can keep their prices very low. We used the Macedonian market as a sort of a training ground for





## Devotion to **furniture**

A reliable strategic partner and a leading supplier and manufacturer at the forefront of styles, technologies, & trends.

**P**RIMA is currently the largest furniture company in the region of ex-Yugoslavian countries and has been present in the market for the past 25 years. Since the family company's modest beginnings in Bjelovar, it has grown into a group of companies that includes 59 retail showrooms in Croatia, 8 in Macedonia, and 6 factories that employ more than 2000 people.

Continuous investments in technology are helping to increase their online sales both in and outside of Croatia.

The wide variety of designs, colors, and textures offered has helped make their products desirable across Europe. PRIMA group believes in vertical integration and is involved from product creation and development to sales both domestically and in the international market to other EU countries. Their mission is to stay a reliable strategic partner and the leading supplier and manufacturer who is always ahead with styles, manufacturing technologies, and trends.

Currently, PRIMA is specialized for the Croatian market because they offer products that have been developed by their design team and produced in their factories and made from top quality raw materials. Each buyer, domestic or international, becomes an owner of a Croatian-made product with guaranteed longevity and quality. Through their range of products, the company is attracting new customers as well as maintaining loyal ones. The PRIMA Group's mission is to present its design and to show that Croatian furniture is desirable, of the highest quality, and modern.

PRIMA was founded by the Radić family in 1995 a large part of their business activity is still within Bjelovarsko-Bilogorska County. As Croatia's largest furniture production company, the furniture was made available and deliverable to every corner of Croatia.

A major part of the company's strategy for many years has been presenting their new collections of furniture to existing business partners and new companies at international expositions.

Being present at all major furniture trade fairs, they have been able to reach their current export partners. PRIMA's export activities have accelerated their internal developments of the products but also have imposed a very high level of quality for the company to maintain a presence in this highly demanding market. They are proud to say that their export buyers are some of the largest retail networks in Europe and several times a year these retailers are choosing PRIMA furniture collections that are aligning with the latest trends in the markets. Currently, they export furniture to Germany, Austria, France, Great Britain, Switzerland, Sweden, Norway, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Slovenia, and Bulgaria.

The PRIMA factory in Garešnički Brestovac is currently investing in solar panels which are going to reduce the expenditure of electric energy by 70% in this plant. This is only the first of many investments they are planning to implement in the coming years to their buildings, which will all be fitted with solar panels and other renewable energy projects.

Being aware of the growing demand for ecologically sourced products and raw materials, PRIMA puts a great effort in designing such products and always puts attention to detail when choosing the right materials. They rely on natural materials, most notably in the recent years being their mattresses, both the inside and on the outer lining, which is made of antiallergic and antibacterial materials.

With more people working from home than ever, PRIMA has been innovating every step of the way to help people set up home offices and renovate their houses to make more space for the work-life balance happening within each home. Focusing heavily on expanding in the next five years, PRIMA is looking to expand into having showrooms in Austria and Slovenia. As each product is handled carefully from research and development to production, to assembly, the devotion to furniture PRIMA shows can be seen across the market as a company to keep an eye on. ●



## Welcome Croatian furniture into your home!

**NEW collection 2020**

BA RI modular sofa, COCO maison home decoration

- Original design and manufacturing
- Free professional consultancy and home measurement
- Free solutions for your personal living space
- The largest supplier and furniture manufacturer in Croatia

Quality materials, modular elements with adjustable seat depths and heights, carefully selected fabrics in a wide range of colors, and COCO maison home decoration, combine functionality and aesthetics and guarantee comfort. Visit us and find your **PRIMA inspiration** to create the perfect place to relax and enjoy that suits your desires, habits, and space.

PRIMA - creating for the family

www.prima-namjestaj.hr





Photo: M. Štiefhauser / TZ Vukovar

BCE, the settlement was known for farmers, hunters, cattle breeders, and copper smelters.

Just 2 kilometers outside of the city lies Adica Forest Park where one can go to enjoy nature and the local rivers. Both the Danube and the Vuka are paradises for fishermen and rowers and the Vuka is often used for ice skating in the winter. As part of a special forest vegetation reserve, people of Vukovar enjoy swimming in the Danube, located only five minutes by boat from the center.

Vukovar has also become known as an art center. Constantly evolving, the city paints the promenade along the river in an anamorphic 3D art style, as well as the streets and facades in the center. Many people consider this to be an open-air art gallery, putting it on the map with other art towns throughout Europe and the world.

Held on the Danube itself, the Vukovar film festival is unique in many ways, not only that it's on the river, but also that there are many different sites to watch award-winning films, all of which



Photo: M. Štiefhauser / TZ Vukovar

come from the Danube region, along with workshops and concerts. One of the most integral events at the festival is The Beauty of Diversity event, which flaunts a variety of multi-ethnic cuisines.

Seeing the city from the Danube River is a unique experience in Vukovar with a waterbus that offers tours of the area including numerous islands where you can visit or even stay.

Overall, Vukovar is a must-see. For nature lovers, cycling, kayaking, swimming, and forest walks abound. For the modern traveler, art, cafés, and charm will be easily enjoyed in this small town filled with character. ●

## A city full of **history** and **culture**

In Eastern Croatia, on the junction of the Danube and Vuka rivers, the town of Vukovar is the largest river port of Croatia and has re-defined itself as a symbol of independence.

Logistically also well connected, Vukovar's port connects Croatia to important parts of Europe such as Vienna and Budapest upstream, and as far as Romania downstream. It is also an important export-import city. It was most famous in recent history for the siege during the war, but since then has been re-built and is a symbol of Croatian independence.

A historic town, the center is known for its Baroque style and some buildings still stand from the 1700s, most famously the Eltz Manor, the Franciscan monastery, St. Philip and the Jacob Church. The area is now protected as an Urban Historical Complex and in the city center you will find the Grand Hotel, which is the most famous piece of monumental historical architecture in the city, built at the end of the 19th century.

A short walk from the center, you'll find the Eltz Manor, an 18th century baroque palace which is also on the 20 Croatian Kuna banknotes. Today it is home today to the Vukovar City Museum. The museum boasts extensive tours and is known as one of the most interesting city museums in Europe. This beautiful and historic monastery originally began construction in 1723 and recent renovations and additions to the Franciscan Complex include a large museum with several floors, a treasury of artistic heritage, an old masters' picture gallery, and a library of rare books.

On the bank of the Danube near Vukovar is the Vučedol archeological site, also known as the Troy of the Danube. The archeological value of the finds in this area were so important that an entire Eneolithic culture was named after it. Thought to have had its golden age between 3000 and 2200

## The Jewel of the East



### VUKOVAR-SRIJEM COUNTY CENTURIES OF WINE BLEND WITH LIVING HISTORY IN CROATIA'S MOST HOSPITABLE REGION

Gastronomy, active sports, culture & wine, provide something for everyone in this region. Even archeologists delight in Vučedol, the largest and most important Indo-European center of its time. And avid wine lovers can revel in Ilok, a quaint, beautiful medieval town, perched on a hill overlooking the Danube. Whether biking or enjoying local cuisine, Vukovar-Srijem is always welcoming.

[www.visitvukovar-srijem.com](http://www.visitvukovar-srijem.com)

IMAGES (L to R): Miroslav Štiefhauser / Danijel Soldo / Igor Šeler (izvor HTZ) / Sanja Mijac



## BROD-POSAVINA COUNTY

### ECOLOGICAL PRODUCTION OF FOOD IS THE FUTURE



#### DANIJEL MARUŠIĆ

*Prefect*  
Brod-Posavina County

and the river Sava is also passable in this area. There is also a port, which is of special interest to the state and it is currently in an economic upswing at the moment. In the future we would like to build the channel Sava-Danube which would start in our county and it would shorten the passage way. The port Brod is also a business zone, and is open to investors. The Government gave assurances for certain loans, however over 66% of funding is from European Union. The value of this investment is somewhat more than 100 million Kuna.

In its northern part, the county consists of more hills than in the south, which are more low lands that are good for agricultural cultivation, farming etc. We also have a very developed forestry and wood industry in Oriovac. Here you will also find excellent white and red wines which are already well known throughout the country. This area has an ideal climate for wine production. Hunting tourism is one of the areas which are in development along with many locations such as Muški Binar, Bara Dvorina, Gajna, which are all well-known destinations for tourism, fishing, hunting and we also have plenty of lovely cycling routes.

#### How has COVID-19 affected the region and your economy? What impact have you seen?

As far as the pandemic is concerned, it has very much impacted our economy, tourism and the people who work in agricultural sector as well as small land owners and medium sized enterprises. Despite this, we are investing a lot

in our local health institutions and we are also taking collective actions in the community by minimizing all events, concerts and all other non-essential expenditure. We have a public tender where we granted 2 million Kuna to our small entrepreneurs and another 2 million Kuna to agriculture and farming entrepreneurs. We bought a PCR test machine worth 812 million Kuna and we also gave 1,200,000 Kuna for two ER vehicles and received mobile RTG machines for fighting the pandemic. We have always paid special attention to our environment because we are very much connected to the river Sava which runs through the county. We had a pollution problem because of the refinery that is located here and we wanted to reduce the emissions of the pollution gasses. Also, in the community we renovated 10 schools to reduce emissions and some of these schools have even reduced emissions up to 65%. All hospital buildings in Slavonski brod have also been energetically renewed, which is investment of about 120 million Kuna. In Nova Gradiška 80 million Kuna has been invested in energy renewal. Should our refinery continue to work, we would like them to change to gas which would reduce gas emissions and we even had an international cooperation in this field in a partner program with our colleagues in Tuzla in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Ecological production of food in our county is our future. Eco agricultural production cannot be massive, but it can be selective and of course is very healthy. I am confident that many of our small enterprises are turning to eco production and I am glad that people are recognizing this change.

#### How would you describe the migrations of Croatians out of the country and out of your county, is it an issue here?

Yes, we noticed quite a lot of migrations from the county. The only way we can prevent this in the future is by strengthening our economy and investing in education of our young population. We offer scholarships to 100 students with the total amount of 880,000 Kuna and for next year we will increase this to 120 students. We are very lacking in our medical staff so we are going to also provide important scholarships to 36 medical students. We grant them a 1,500 Kuna scholarship which amounts to 560,000 Kuna that we give in order for them to graduate and return to work in our hospital, which is one of the largest general hospitals in Croatia. Also, we signed a contract with Croatian railways so that the students can have free transport. Students mostly use trains for transport, so we wanted to somehow reward them and give them benefits for staying here.

#### It seems you have a lot of reasons to invest in the region, low costs, educated workforce, what message would you send out to our readers?

My message to investors would be to come and invest in our county and we will do everything in our power to simplify the investment processes, to create a positive business climate. What makes us unique is a our geographical position, good connectivity, great business zones with a lot of big and important businesses. We



already have a lot of foreign investment here. For example we are planning to build business zones next to the highway near the towns of Okucan and Vrpolje. There are 4 million people living in Croatia; however 40 million people pass through this county every year so that means the fluctuation of people is great here.

#### What about the tourism sector? What do you offer here for visitors?

For example, we have the lovely Stara Kapela, which is the only village that remains as it was a hundred years ago. This is the first village in Croatia which functions as an “open-air hotel”. This means that the whole village is a hotel with beautiful old and small accommodation units, small wine shops, Slavonian cuisine, which is ecological and well known. We have a ranch called Ramarin where one can ride horses. As much as the protected natural beauty is concerned, there is Prašnik, a protected forest, basically in this whole mountainous part of Psunj there are many natural beauty spots. There are really plenty of things to see and I think it is exactly this pandemic that will be our greatest opportunity because people are searching to travel where there are fewer people.

#### What is next in line for you?

I will most probably run for another term as a Prefect. I have been the Prefect since 2009. What makes me the most happy and proud is when I pass by some buildings and think that I took part in building them as well as many sports halls, schools and especially becoming the University City during my term. A lot of people contributed to it, but I am happy I was part of that mechanism. Also, many renewals of the hospital and clinics make me proud that they have been completed. Soon we will renew all the schools in the county. There are a lot of things that make me proud. I like working with people and I am glad if I managed to contribute to a better life of the citizens in Brod-Posavina County. ●

#### How would you describe your region to the rest of the world and how would you distinguish it from other regions in Croatia?

I am happy to introduce this beautiful County to you which is located two hours' drive to the east of Zagreb. It inhabits around 155,000 people, 2 cities and around 26 smaller municipalities. The seat of the county is the town of Slavonski Brod which is home to 55,000 people. The majority of its southern border is touching Bosnia and Herzegovina and we share about 188km of the border mostly along the river Sava, which unites us, rather than divides us. We also have many projects with our neighbors from Bosnia and Herzegovina. Our County is located in an extremely good position; 200 kilometers from important centers such as Zagreb, Budapest, Sarajevo and Belgrade. We have an international highway which is the Zagreb-Beograd running through the country. Additionally, there is an international railway track



#### FACTS

##### +200 km

FROM ZAGREB,  
BUDAPEST, BELGRADE

**Developed** FORESTRY  
& WOOD INDUSTRY

**+40 million** PEOPLE  
PASS THROUGH COUNTY



## VUKOVAR STRATEGIC PROJECTS IN THE COUNTRY SET THE STAGE FOR GROWTH



**BOŽO GALIC**  
Prefect  
Vukovar-Srijem County

### What are the advantages of this county for the investors when they look at other regions in Croatia?

Our county has a very good geostrategic position. We have the highway Zagreb-Lipovac (Belgrade) running through our county and then we have the railway from Zagreb to Belgrade. Also, the river Danube passes here and we also have the only river port in Croatia, the Port Vukovar. The proximity of the Osijek airport is also important for us because it contributes to overall connectivity of the region. We offer exemption from communal charges to all potential investors and we co-finance the administrative expenses for registering a company. Along with that we also subsidize interest on business loans. Since we have created this very positive business environment, I have seen an important growth factor in each of the counties. It is important that we continually invest in its development, especially now in the times of pandemic. Small and medium enterprises are one of the main engines of economic development and a good source of employment. There are numerous other incentives that we give to all those who are interested in investing in our county as we see our role as vital in encouraging investors to come to Vukovar-Srijem region and we are very open to investment.

### What are some of the strategic projects that you are currently focused on for the development of the county?

17,74 billion Kuna has been allocated to all Slavonian Counties of Croatia through the Slavonia, Baranja and Srijem project. Out of those funds, almost 20% has been allocated to Vukovar-Srijem County, which is roughly 3.52 billion Kuna. Through the first stage of this developmental agreement, there are 7 projects that are being developed in our region and together they are worth 216 million Kuna. I'd like to mention some of them below.



- An agricultural centre for storage of fruits and vegetables, a wood technological centre of Slavonian Oak.
  - A construction project for the building the road and sidewalks in the King Zvonimir Street in Cerna.
  - The building of an infrastructural system in Zagrađe business zone.
  - The reconstruction of the Franjevc monastery in Ilok.
- There are also many projects from the second part of the developmental agreement in the pipeline, which are worth mentioning. This second part of the agreement secured a total of 800 billion Kuna for our County.
- The building of the regional centre for digitalization and development.
  - The exploration and development of the geothermal potential in the region.
  - The transport-logistical centre of our County.
  - The building of an auto-park Lipovac.
  - The renovation of Kuhen-Belassi castle in Nuštar.
  - The Panonian centre for application of digital technology in agriculture.

### How important is sustainable development, preservation of environment and new technologies for your region?

Our environment is an inseparable part of our economic growth and of our country as well as the region. It is an imperative for all of us to preserve our bio diversity, to increase the natural capital resources and to stop pollution. Also, preserving the environment is our obligation towards future generations. This is why the priority of our policies are in the area of sustainable development. In this sense we will prioritize measures that aim to contribute to nature protection and environmental preservation which consequently contributes to an overall quality of life, the safety of our citizens, economic growth and development of new technologies and will be environmentally friendly. Protection and development of natural

resources will emphasise the revitalisation of biodiversity and ecosystem in a sustainable manner with the focus on water and land habitat. Developing the system of tracing the state of the environment will also enable the reduction in pollution. We are also working on raising awareness among people about the importance of protected areas, flora, fauna and we encourage all activities in protected areas which will raise this awareness. I would also like to mention our efforts in promotion of the energetic transformation towards renewable energy sources, increasing the energetic self-sufficiency, decarbonisation, research and development as well as application of new technologies in this area.

### How are you coping with the growing number of people leaving the region and the country? What measures can you implement in order to support those who decide to stay and build their future here?

Well, this is a problem that many European countries are facing. We are doing all we can in order to encourage our people to stay. Let me just name a few of the measures we brought in order to help and support our citizens. For example, we have projects such as co-financing the transport of our students, co-financing buying a house or a flat for young people and young families who decide to build their home in our county. We also run a program called, "A meal for everyone," which has a goal to have one free meal in school for all kids whose families are socially and financially challenged. All of these helps our people know they have a support with local authority.

### How would you describe Eastern Slavonia to our readers? What is special about Eastern Slavonia as a tourist destination?

Well, continental part of Croatia, as well as obviously Slavonia as a part of it, is at the beginning of its serious tourism development era. We started to note more seriously some trends in tourism in the past 10 years. The interests and the habits of the travellers have changed in recent times. They are now looking for more authentic experiences and they are searching for places whose culture and environment has been protected. This is where we see our strengths and our potential. This is why we think that authenticity and preservation are the most important basis for developing a sustainable tourism which will be in the interest of our citizens in the County. ●



## FACTS

**10**  
BUSINESS ZONES  
READY FOR INVESTORS

**40km**  
TO OSIJEK AIRPORT

**Home** TO  
PORT VUKOVAR



## KARLOVAC THE HEART OF CROATIA AWAITS



### MARTINA FURDEK-HAJDIN

Deputy Prefect  
Karlovac County

approx. 120,000 inhabitants. The population density of our county is lower than that of the rest of Croatia. Unfortunately, there are areas in the southeast part of our county where it is even below 10 inhabitants per m2 and this is an issue that we have been facing since the Homeland war. Our administrative center of the county is the city of Karlovac. There are four other towns along Karlovac, and those are Ozalj, Ogulin, Slunj and Duga Resa and we have 17 municipalities. The processing industry is the base of our economy. It has been traditionally the main economic sector here. When it comes to the food processing industry, beer, meat and dairy have maintained the main bulk of production. And it even survived the transition from socialism to capitalism; however it's been through massive transformations. Some giant companies have evolved into smaller companies. Our economic zones have also survived these transitions especially those in food processing, metal processing and production of machinery and turbines. Also the printing sector is an important industry. I would also like to point out the construction sector, trade and logistics are also important parts of the local economy and have a lot of potential for growth. Also, tourism started booming for us after the war and we are the second most visited continental county after Zagreb. We owe this position to Plitvice lakes, as 10% of their territory is within our county borders and many tourists come here because of these incredible lakes. Seasonality and short stays dominate our tourism and this is something we would like to work on in the future. This is why we created a strategy of tourism development for Karlovac County until the year 2025. Our county boasts a lot of natural beauty with our four main rivers and many other smaller ones. The main rivers in our county are Mrežnica, Dobra, Kupa and Korana. Each city has its own river and they cross in the city of Karlovac. This is quite unique. I would also like to mention our cultural heritage and the project called "Touch Civilization", which

is an opportunity for tourists to enjoy the culture and history of the old cities. The historical Noble family Frankopan plays a main role in this project. This story and its interwoven parts are the base for a really positive project that helps to connect nine of our municipalities and the city of Karlovac.

Our neighboring county, Ličko-Senjska County has a similar project. It is called the "The routes of the Frankopans". We would like to see these two projects merged and even become national.

#### Some counties offer different incentives for investors. How can investors rely on your help? What makes your approach unique?

Unfortunately, Karlovac County, along with Ličko-senjska County, historically has been the slowest administration and bureaucracy country when it came to issuing building permits and legalisations etc. This is why in 2017, we worked on this problem and we reduced the number of people in different offices. Now, efficiency has been raised three times per person. When you offer investors the notion that you care about their investment, this changes things and we want to make our country more efficient and more open for investment. As much as our finances are concerned, we have been one of the poorest counties when it comes to people's average salaries. This is why our subsidies were not that generous. However, in the 2020 budget we made room for the refinancing program of these subsidies due to pandemic. We maintained continuity of the subsidies and we renamed them. We formed a team which included the Chamber of Commerce, Chamber of Crafts, a Development Agency and a Department of economy to primarily provide information related to COVID measures in order to unify information sources. Investors could not find relevant information in one place previously. Thus we solved this issue. We created a number of measures to help businesses push through this crisis. The most affected sector in this crisis was micro-business sector. These are the entities with fewer than 10 employees. Their interest rates were decreased to 1.5% maximum due to our co-financing plans. We also increased subsidies in agriculture. What we do not have is infrastructure in agriculture, which would enable us to service this industry and enhance the quality of final products. We are missing drying facilities, cooling facilities, slaughter houses etc. The private sector did now show interest in investing in this infrastructure yet because of the small volume of production. This pandemic has given us insight and an opportunity



to pay more attention to this and to rethink our priorities. The whole of Croatia has become more aware of how much we depend on food imports.

#### What would your message be to tourists travelling to Karlovac County?

Our slogan is "In Medias Res". We wanted to point out that you cannot be in Croatia without passing through our county. And when you do pass, you should stay a bit. There are many reasons to stay. Many people say they have never been in Karlovac even though they often passed through it. We want to send a message that we are here, we are active, and we want to be an active player in positive change. When I left my city and saw other parts of the world, I changed my mind about my home and was much more positive about it. We need to understand that the grass is not greener on the other side than it is in our own neighborhood. It is the greenest right here. Karlovac really has a lot to offer and we are proud to do so. ●

### FACTS

**3,622 m²**  
SIZE OF THE COUNTY

**4 main rivers**  
TRAVERSE THE CITY

**129,000**  
INHABITANTS





## The town of **four rivers**

Strategically located at the crossroads of Croatia, Karlovac is welcoming tourists & businesses alike. A hospitable county, with an extremely high standard of living.

In the heart of Croatia, between the highlands and the lowlands, lies Karlovac County. Filled with rivers, springs, mountains, and forests, Karlovac is a perfect destination for all seasons and is easily accessible between Zagreb and Rijeka.

With roads connecting Europe to the Adriatic Sea, many people use the county to travel between the sea and the other parts of the country. It has good infrastructure yet remaining pristine, so there is a multitude of history and nature that can be explored in Karlovac. The region includes medieval towns and national parks full of centuries-old trees and incomparable waterfalls, all connected by over 700 miles of bike trails.

The county seat, the city of Karlovac, is located in the narrowest part of Croatia. It is known as the City of Parks, or Town of Four Rivers, due to the abundance of picturesque nature that you find inside the city limits. It was originally built as a fortress by the Austrians in 1579 to reinforce their southern defenses against the Ottoman Empire; however the only signs left are its castle and moats. It was designated as a renaissance

city and in the shape of a six-pointed star. The northwestern part of the star accommodates a semicircular baroque-style square with an early baroque palace and military headquarters.

The city of Karlovac boasts one of the most well-kept feudal buildings in the country with the Dubovac Castle, named after the oak forest that used to surround it. Built high on a hill, above the rest of the city, the castle offers views of the Kozjaca Forest and the Kupa River. Inside you'll find a museum, with exhibitions in the singular tower that soars over the city and surrounding areas.

A popular Croatian beer, Karlovačko, is made in Karlovac, making it one of the larger industries in the city, and locals sometimes joke about how this beer is actually their fifth river! At the end of August every year, the city celebrates "beer days" with various types of Croatian and international beer, gastronomy, and live music.

It's a very green city and has been named best city in the country for cyclists, with trails all around the city and the parks. There is also a lot of aquatic activity-swimming on the

beaches of the Korana River-rowing and kayaking on the Kupa etc. Also walking by the moats that surround the star shaped center is popular and there's no lack of water in the entire area! Karlovac also has an interesting aquarium built into trenches along the side of the Korana, the top and the exterior is covered with an earthen embankment. Inside the aquarium, you can see the rivers' ecosystems, flora and fauna, and learn about the geological past of this area and the rivers around it.

The county seat is not the only city or place to visit in the county of Karlovac. Duga Resa is a great example of another town with an abundance of fresh water. Set on the banks of the Mrežnica River, at the foot of Vinica Hill, you'll find a peaceful town filled with rivers, rapids, and waterfalls. It's perfect for cycling, fishing, canoeing, and rafting. The structure of the town is built like that of a typical industrial town in the 1900s, making it a charming escape from modern life. In an area rich with limestone and travertine dams, Duga Resa prides itself on having many beaches and swimming areas. Nature in this area is untouched and radiates life, leaving much room for rest and relaxation.

Another great town to visit is Ogulin. Known as "The Homeland of Fairy Tales", this charming town is an important railway junction, making it easy to access. Ogulin is home to Đula's Abyss, a river abyss 40 meters deep. There is also Lake Sabljaci which is a reservoir created from the River Zagorska Mrežnica, it is known as the pearl of Ogulin and is one of the largest lakes in the country.

Exploring further, you'll come across the town of Ozalj. Built in the baroque style and is a town of great beauty. Ozalj is home to Croatia's oldest hydroelectric power plant; built in 1908, it is now considered a protected cultural monument and still produces hydroelectricity to this day. The ancient



castle of Ozalj tells the story of the River Kupa, providing wonderful visits.

At the famous park of Plitvice Lakes, you'll find caves, wood, water, and more. There are three routes, which offer three days of adventure and awe-inspiring landscapes. The 520 meters of the Barać Caves is a one-of-a kind experience for explorers everywhere. Plitvice Lakes are the most visited national park in Croatia, with their 16 lakes, waterfalls, hiking and education trails.

Cyclists, nature lovers, and history fans are guaranteed to love this county, with its rich biodiversity and centuries-old towns and with easy access to trains, busses, and biking trails, getting around in Karlovac is easy and relaxing. Visitors can take in the green forests and clear freshwater and still enjoy its forts, castles, chapels, churches. ●

### THE MIDDLE IS WHERE ITS AT!

Seated on the crossroads of 4 rivers, Karlovac is Central Croatia's hidden gem. It boasts 16th century palaces in addition to an incredibly rich cultural heritage. Home to the largest beer festival in Croatia, this event as well as its local cuisine is not to be missed. Flora and fauna thrive in this glorious natural setting and active tourism abounds with fishing, kayaking, and horseback riding through the many rivers and forests.



## POZEGA-SLAVONIA A SOLID BASE FOR ECOLOGICAL AGRICULTURE

### FACTS

**810**

YEARS SINCE  
FOUNDING

**+1100 km**

OF MAPPED  
BIKING ROUTES

**5** CITIES

**5** MOUNTAINS

**5** RIVERS



### ALOJZ TOMAŠEVIĆ

*Prefect*

Pozega-Slavonia County

#### Can you give us a description of your County?

Last year we marked the 810th year of Pozega-Slavonia County or the “Golden Valley”, as the ancient Romans called it – Vallis Aurea. The area that we are speaking about now is one of 5 Slavonian counties and we are in the very center of Slavonia. Our county is made of 5 beautiful rivers, 5 cities and 5 mountains. Worth mentioning is the Mountain Papuk that is 960m high. Also, there is Psunj mountain which illustrates an interesting story about the development of tourism here. For our visitors and inhabitants, we offer clean air and an escape to nature. For tourism in the region and county we have many cities, a few are Pakrac and Lipik, which have been named “Cities of Enjoyment”, and were founded back in the times of Maria Theresa. Pozega the capital of this county and can be considered a Croatian Nashville. The air here in our oak forests cannot be described. It is incredible. We want to capitalize on all this and develop tourism activities by building new venues which could be 4 and 5 star. In this county, there are already over 1100 km of mapped biking routes. We have over 5,200 family owned small agricultural businesses and we have a fantastic example of the successful company Agronom. We want to continue to develop this niche and build on developing tourism hand in hand with businesses.

So you know, I am the fifth Prefect in the history

of this county. Around 50% of the territory is forest and this is the only county that makes a surplus in the import-export ratio. This area also boasts a successful wood processing industry and Spin Valis, based here, is one of the most successful furniture companies in the whole region. Then there are companies in the metal industry, such as Plamen and Color Emajl, which export 90% of their production. These companies employ around 500-600 people and the whole county has a population of approximately 75,000.

It is important to have a strong base upon which we have built the economy of the county. There is also the food processing company, Zvečevo and they will soon commemorate 100 years since their foundation. They are a household name to many Croatian citizens, and even abroad, when it comes to confectionary products. In relation, we will soon promote the opening of the chocolate museum, which is very exciting. To name a few more successful stories, we have to mention Kutjevo and the project of Svijet Grasevina- which is a very successful project of connecting 3 cities – Pleternica, Pakrac and Kutjevo. This project costs around 200 million Euros that were given by EU. Every municipality and every city in the county has a very strong cultural heritage.



For tourism, we also have a lot of geothermal potential sources that are constantly being discovered. Additionally, we anticipate the use of thermal waters of more than 160 degrees as fuel source, as well as tapping into compressed hydrogen. As you know, the homeland war started on the 1st of March here in our county and while the wounds of last war are still fresh, we have managed to continue the economic recovery.

#### Is living in the time of a pandemic an opportunity for places like Slavonia as people are looking to escape big cities? What opportunities do you see here?

I have always been the first to find the advantages in every disadvantage. This is our chance. We have 2 strategic projects, a fast connection to the main Zagreb-Lipovac highway as well as building an accumulation lake in the middle of the county. This accumulation lake will be actively involved in tourism. There will be 3 km<sup>2</sup> of water surface on the accumulation lake and this is going to be a significant project for us. As per the beauty of this region, I can guarantee that whoever comes and spends the weekend in Papuk Mountains, falls in love with it. Our people, Slavonians, are well known as kind people and great hosts.

#### Are you happy with your past two terms as Prefect and are you satisfied with the amount of EU funds you were able to acquire for the county?

We are one of the smaller counties and so far economically we were not as successful as had hoped. This is why we turned to requesting some of the European funds. I am extremely proud of PANORA, our development agency with its 15 young people who work tirelessly to prepare projects. It is because of them that cities of Lipik and Pozega were among the top 10 recipient cities of EU funds. And our county is in the 4th position in Croatia. We knew that the construction sector was one where growth would be the fastest; therefore we managed to renew schools, hospitals and added new incentives to stop young people from leaving. We also raised the salaries in the construction sector from 50% to 100%.

#### Sustainable development means sustainable human resources. What tools do you use in order to keep young people in Pozega and Slavonia?

I served in the army for 23 years and I have learnt that the state cannot solve all the problems. Having food and having good health is obviously an important base to start from but young people shouldn't be afraid of challenges. There is a mentality here that the state should give you something. If you hold a master's degree in economics, you can't say “I didn't get any help”, instead you need to think what you can do for growth in society. However, we do co-finance interests on loans for young people. For investments, we can offer young entrepreneurs a great base for ecological agriculture and our county has very little pollution. The most difficult task we have here is to organize people to do things together and work towards a common goal. The line,

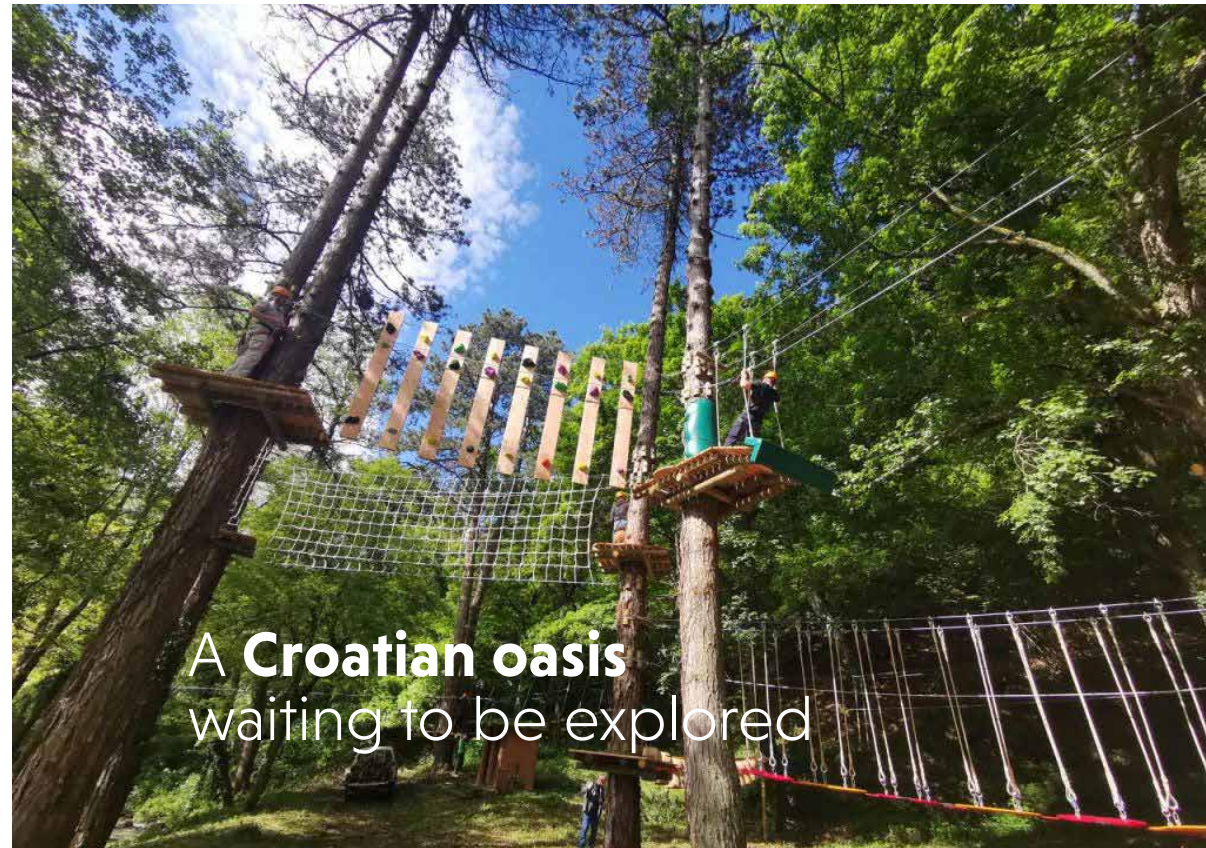


“nothing pays off whatever you start” doesn't work here. Mutual planning is needed and when you have a common goal then an added value is produced. For example; agriculture is not just growing corn or wheat. An added value product needs to be created. There are large fields that are irrigated here with more than 800 hectares of land that have rich soil and a lot of potential. We also have our industrial base. No one is stopping us from developing anything. We are all starting to realize that it is the quality, not the quantity that will bring us the economic growth. We should go back to nature, to ourselves, to a clean life. I was educated in the United States and in Canada and someone once said – go and collect knowledge and then bring it back to your own doorstep. And I am happy to see this trend here as many young people started to return. When you balance the benefits and the losses of living away from your home, many times coming back is the best answer. I invite young people not to give up and as an army man, I often say, “We never gave up during the war.” Now it is up to young people to finish what we have started. The opportunities are here, come and explore them, everyone is welcome.

#### How would you describe people who live here to someone who has never been to Pozega?

By making a decision to come to Slavonia and the Golden Valley one decides to immerse oneself in the cultural heritage and beautiful nature. Slavonia is clear water, the Slavonian oak, a “šokica” song and a “Baja” with his Lipizaner horses. I am proud that people always leave Slavonia with their hearts filled with pleasure and no one has ever left Slavonia without leaving their heart behind. Nor has anyone left here nor hungry or thirsty. We give our farewells to everyone with our arms wide open and by saying “Come back soon!”. ●





A region filled with history, rural tourism and deep cultural connection to natural and healthy, regional cuisine.

**D**ifferent from the plains that cover most of the Slavonian region of Croatia, the county of Pozega-Slavonia is filled with mountains, forests, hills, and vineyards. The most defining feature of this county is the Pozega Valley, surrounded by rolling hills and low mountains offering spectacular views. Breathtaking nature, active vacation ideas, and the famous Slavonian hospitality make this county truly one of a kind, with its four season activities.

The county seat is the largest town in the valley, Pozega, a market town styled in the Baroque fashion. The town is known as the pearl of the "Golden Valley", situated in the heart of the Pozega Valley, and dates back to the 13th century. Some archaeological finds have shown that there was life here in prehistoric times as well. The town center has a museum where you can see the interesting past of this area, as

well as centuries-old churches, and typical market areas - not to mention the Holy Trinity Square, a Baroque square and the heart of the town.

The city, valley, and county had great importance throughout the Middle Ages and experienced a renaissance in the 18th century, increasing its economic power, cultural importance, and societal value. It earned the name "Slavonian Athens" in the 19th century when many cultural societies were founded and a large number of these societies continue to this day.

The Golden Valley, as this area was known to the Romans, is adorned with hills and vineyards. The microclimate of the area, as well as the fertile soil make viticulture possible, growing unique fruits and making for exceptional wine famous in Croatia and throughout the region. More than 30 wineries stretch over three wine roads, called Slavonski puti. To go with the wine, there is a deep cultural connection to

food. The Pozega wine kebab is one of the staples of this county, made of the finest pork and beef, marinated, strung on a spit and wrapped in a pork or veal belly, accompanied by dried bacon and red onions. A typical dish, its most popular season is in March during the celebration of the anniversary of Grgurevo, which was the expulsion of the Turks from the hills of Pozega.

A former Jesuit residence, the restored Turković Castle is one of the most beautiful monuments in all of Slavonia. It was built on the remains of a Cistercian abbey, and has a wine cellar from 1232, one of the oldest cellars in Croatia, where, according to tradition, Empress Maria Theresa lived in 1741. A special feature of this cellar is almost 800 years of uninterrupted wine production.

The Papuk National park, located both in Pozega-Slavonia County and Virovitica-Podravina County, is the first park in Croatia to be named a UNESCO Geopark, and there are multiple areas in the park with higher levels of protection due to their importance and rarity including the geological nature monument Rupnica, the Forest Park Jankovac, and the special reserve of forest vegetation Sekulinačke planine. The national park is one of the biggest, at 336 square kilometers. This park, which used to be the bottom of the Pannonian sea, boasts mountains of various mountains and rangers. The highest mountain, also named Papuk, is the tallest in all of Croatia at 953 meters.

Velika, a village on the southern slopes of Papuk, is the main starting point for the Papuk Mountain in Pozega-Slavonia County. It is located 12 km north of Pozega at an altitude of 273 m and is part of the Nature Park and Geopark Papuk. The old town of Velička rises above and walking, hiking, cycling or running, and rock climbing are popular activities in the area. Here there are unique attractions and sights, such as: untouched nature, excellent gastronomy, fish specialties such as fish stew, perfectly aged wines and authentic hospitality from the people who live here.



Unsurprisingly, this park sees a lot of active tourism. With hundreds of kilometers of cycling paths spread over plains, hills, valleys, and forested areas, cycling tourism is important to the county's economic activity. There are also guided bike tours that provide insight into the park, the valley, and the county in whole, including some routes on the wine road. ●

## THE GOLDEN VALLEY IS OPEN

Awaiting Investment & Tourism

WITH A YOUNG & WELL EDUCATED WORKFORCE, A TRADITION IN FOOD-PROCESSING & COMPETITIVE COSTS; THE REGION IS READY FOR INVESTMENT!

FOR TOURISM, THE REGION BOASTS A FANTASTIC CULTURAL BLEND OF CUISINE WITH TURKISH & HUNGARIAN INFLUENCES, NOT TO MENTION, DELICIOUS LOCAL WINES, AND ACTIVE TOURISM.

THE GOLDEN VALLEY OF CROATIA IS NOT TO BE MISSED!

**POZEGA-SLAVONIA COUNTY**  
www.pszupanija.hr





## Filled with **vineyards, wetlands & Baroque** architecture

A county steeped in tradition with a multi-cultural past awaits those willing to get off the beaten path.

In the southeastern corner of Croatia in region of Slavonia, the county Brod-Posavina lies on the Sava River across from Bosnia-Herzegovina. Tracing back to the Neolithic Era, this area has been inhabited by many people and cultures. This county has adopted the very typical Northern Croatian culture of being open, welcoming, and laid-back.

The county seat, Slavonski Brod, is the larger of the two big cities in Brod-Posavina. It is home to more than a third of the county's inhabitants, as well as being the administrative and cultural center. In the town you'll find the Brod Fortress, constructed in the baroque style between 1715 and 1780. Never seeing much action, this is one of the best preserved fortresses in all of Europe and one of the largest standing fortresses from the Austro-Hungarian Empire. The fortress is currently used as city administration offices for cultural learning, such as musical and classical grammar classes.

The city also boasts a Franciscan monastery, built in the 18th century in the Baroque style, similar to the nearby fortress. It's exceptional architecture makes it a tourist attraction, with

the intricate painting of the inside and beautiful grounds in the church yard. The cloister, which is the most representative cloister of Baroque monastery architecture, is one of the most stunning buildings of Baroque architecture in Slavonia. The town square, one of the biggest in the country, is home to many cultural events and overlooks the Sava River. The square is also filled with bookstores, cafes, galleries shops, and nightclubs, making it a center for entertainment.

The other city in Brod-Posavina is Nova Gradiška, situated in the western part of the county. A town usually overlooked by tourists, there are hidden gems all over the city including St. Peter's Church, the church museum, and an 18th-century castle. The castle, located in a municipality next to the city, was built atop a medieval fortress dating back to 1372. The fortress was restored by the noble Marković family when they bought the land in 1756. Slowly it was transformed from a fortress to a noble castle. The Marković coat of arms is still seen in and around the castle to remind people of the heavy restorations it went under after centuries of lying in ruin. Despite the various reconstructions, the castle retains its

medieval Renaissance appearance, complete with a quadrangular floor plan, an inner courtyard, and round towers at the corners.

Outside the two cities, there are multiple municipalities and towns, each with their unique history. A great example is the village Stara Kapela, popular with rural and ethno tourists. The historical roots of this village date back in 1275, although it is hard to notice because the nature surrounding the village has been virtually untouched. With 20 kilometers of hiking and biking trails that were created in the hills and around the town, it is complete with rest stops and educational information that include over 120 marked plant species.

Excellent soil and a favorable climate make this county rich in vineyards. There are many wine trails available where you will find small, family-run wine cellars. This county's topography encompasses the Dilj, Papuk, and Požega mountains, the lowlands that cover most of the county, and the valleys along the Sava. Forests, wetlands, cultivated areas (such as vineyards, orchards, and other arable land), and artificial water systems including reservoirs and ponds. Water and wetlands are important ecological systems with rich biodiversity, while forests cover nearly 30% of the whole



county. The wetlands have a wide variety of waterfowl, and there are currently two ornithological reserves in the county. Due to the high amount of water found in the county, it is no surprise that fishing is an important part of the economy.

One of the most beautiful river beaches in Croatia is located just 3 km outside of the city center of Slavonski Brod, the Poloj. Although there are many facilities available such as catering, playgrounds, and public barbecues, the forests that surround the sandy shore let you know you are still in nature. There is a 2.5 km cycling and jogging path connecting the city to Poloj and there are rafts you can rent to enjoy being on the water.

To get to really know this county, guests visiting Slavonski Brod will be provided an opportunity to actively participate in Living History Programs with soldiers, horsemen and other people dressed in typical 18th century working or civilian costumes. These activities, fun for both tourists and locals alike, gives a feeling of the deep roots this county has to its multicultural past. ●



### RESOURCES ABOUND FOR BOTH INVESTMENT AND TOURISM

Brod-Posavina is very keen on investments and welcoming to its visitors. With its strong manufacturing base and warm, hospitable inhabitants, it is the eastern region not to be missed!



**BROD-POSAVINA  
COUNTY**

[www.bpz.hr](http://www.bpz.hr)





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