

**Interreg  
Danube Region**



Co-funded by  
the European Union



# **Regional Action Plan Gorski kotar Croatia**

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>1. INTRODUCTION</b>	<b>4</b>
1.1. General information of the Partner	4
1.2. Overall and specific objectives of the Action Plan	4
<b>2. REGIONAL CONTEXT</b>	<b>5</b>
2.1.1. Natural and cultural assets	6
2.1.2. Forest coverage and management in Gorski kotar	7
2.2. Social and economic conditions in Gorski kotar	7
2.3. Woodworking in Croatia and Gorski kotar	7
2.4. Summary of the regional assessment	8
2.5 Challenges and opportunities	9
<b>3. STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>4. ACTIONABLE MEASURES</b>	<b>16</b>
4.1. <b>Acton 1</b> Create cultural heritage and nature route centred around forests and forest lore	<b>20</b>
4.1.1. Relevance of measure	20
4.1.2. Nature of the Action	20
4.1.3. Activities performed under the Action	22
4.1.4. Potential point(s) of Interest along the Danube Wood(s) Route	23
4.1.5. Stakeholders involved	24
4.1.6. Timeline for implementation	25
4.1.7 Indicative costs	25
4.2. <b>Acton 2</b> Organize Training on Storytelling and Forest Valorisation in Areal Guided Walks	<b>26</b>
4.2.1. Relevance of measure	26

4.2.2. Nature of the Action	27
4.2.3. Activities performed under the Action	28
4.2.4. Potential point(s) of Interest along the Danube Wood(s) Route	29
4.2.5. Stakeholders involved	29
4.2.6. Timeline for implementation	29
4.2.7 Indicative costs	29
5. IMPLEMENTATION PLAN AND MONITORING SYSTEM	30
5.1. Monitoring Framework	30
5.2. Evaluation Plan	31
5.3. Action Indicators	31
6. POTENTIAL FUNDING OPPORTUNITES.....	32
7. CONCLUSION	32

## LIST OF FIGURES

1. Figure 1: Challenges and opportunities identified
2. Figure 2: Development of the Regional Action Plan
3. Figure 3: Strategic framework of the Croatian Action Plan (RAP)
4. Figure 4: Actionable Measures addressing the identified challenges
5. Figure 5: Actionable measures building on Strategic Actions
6. Figure 6: Indicators for the implementation of actions

## 1. INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 General information of the Partner

PROJECT	Danube Wood(s) Route
PROJECT ORGANIZATION CONCERNED	Croatian Wood Cluster
COUNTRY	Croatia
NUTS2 REGION	Gorski kotar
CONTACT PERSON	Kristina Kranjčec, Irena Vujčić Šimunić
E-MAIL	<a href="mailto:kristina@drvniklaster.hr">kristina@drvniklaster.hr</a> <a href="mailto:info@drvniklaster.hr">info@drvniklaster.hr</a>

### 1.2. Overall and specific objectives of the Action Plan

The Danube Wood(s) Cultural Route Regional Action Plan of Croatia (RAP) is an integral component of the broader Danube Wood(s)Route initiative, aligning closely with the strategic directions defined by the Common Danube Wood Strategy. The primary aim of the RAP is to support the sustainable use of forest resources and the valorisation of wood-related cultural heritage by translating transnational goals into actions tailored to the needs and strengths of Gorski kotar area in Croatia.

A key objective of the RAP is to facilitate agreement among regional stakeholders on specific measures that will advance the broader goals of the Danube Wood(s) Route project. This includes collective ideas in relation to locations that hold cultural and natural significance, enhancing their visibility, and integrating them into structured, sustainable tourism.

One of the central aims of the Regional Action Plan (RAP) is to support consensus-building among regional stakeholders on concrete actions that contribute to the overarching objectives of the Danube Wood(s) Route project. These actions relate to identifying and promoting sites of both natural and cultural importance, improving their visibility, and integrating them into structured and sustainable tourism initiatives. In this way, the RAP directly supports the wider ambition of the project to safeguard and enhance the sustainable use of forest resources across the region.

The RAP is strategically aligned with the Danube Wood(s) Cultural Route Strategy and is designed to foster the development of sustainable tourism infrastructure and services. This includes the creation and improvement of eco-lodges, cultural heritage centres, and interpretive trails focused on wood-related traditions. Such efforts aim to showcase

the region's rich heritage while generating local economic benefits through ecotourism and wood-based industry development.

Furthermore, the RAP emphasizes environmental protection and cultural preservation by promoting the safeguarding of historical wooden architecture and advancing biodiversity conservation measures. These activities ensure that forest ecosystems are not only used sustainably but are also maintained in their ecological integrity for future generations.

Capacity-building at the local and regional level is another key component of the RAP. Through targeted training programs, knowledge exchange platforms, and coordinated stakeholder engagement, the RAP strengthens the operational foundations necessary for the long-term development and management of the Danube Wood(s) Cultural Route. These initiatives are intended to empower regional actors and ensure that their perspectives and priorities are reflected in the route's evolution.

Sustainability and innovation are also embedded within the RAP, particularly through the promotion of responsible forest management, forest certification schemes, and entrepreneurial support in the wood sector.

Educational efforts are integral to the RAP's implementation. By embedding forest-related heritage and sustainable forestry themes into formal education and vocational training, the plan contributes to long-term awareness and stewardship. These efforts are complemented by community-oriented workshops, awareness campaigns, and digital engagement tools, all aimed at deepening public understanding of the cultural and ecological value of the region's forests.

The Regional Action Plan serves as an essential mechanism for translating the strategic goals of the Danube Wood(s) Cultural Route into practical, place-based measures. Its focus on conservation, sustainable tourism, wood-based industry development, and education ensures a comprehensive approach to promoting the region's forest heritage. By facilitating collaboration among stakeholders and promoting innovative, sustainable practices, the RAP plays a critical role in the long-term valorisation and responsible use of the Danube region's rich natural and cultural forest resources.

## 2. Regional Analysis

The regional analysis of the RAP was carried out in order to find out what are the main challenges of Gorski kotar region in Croatia identifying the opportunities that can be taken up by actions elaborated later in Section 4.

## 2.1. Natural and Cultural Assets

This assessment highlights the exceptional ecological value of Gorski kotar's forests and mountain landscapes, while also emphasizing the region's deep-rooted cultural and timber-related heritage within the framework of the Danube Wood(s) Route project.

Gorski kotar ranks among Croatia's most intact forested areas, with expansive old-growth beech, fir, and spruce stands in Risnjak National Park and nature reserves such as Bijelestijene, and Samarskestijene. These forests form vital elements of the Dinaric–Alpine biodiversity corridor and provide critical ecosystem services, including climate regulation, water purification, carbon storage, and erosion control, in a region of historically low population density.

The region supports several large carnivore populations, including brown bear, wolf, and lynx, and is home to rare birds such as the Ural owl. Old-growth forests serve as refuges for numerous fungi, invertebrates, and forest-dependent epiphytes, highlighting the region's outstanding biodiversity.

Cultural heritage is rich and varied. There are many old traditional houses and mills that display variety of old wood tools and other items used in households and industries. There is a museum dedicated to Ivana Brlić-Mažuranić, a famous Croatian fairy tale writer, four times a Nobel prize nominee. Since timber has been a source of income in this region for centuries, there are old wood factories and old sawmills that used to be part of important Thonet industrial production, supplying Viennese cafes with furniture.

Despite strong legal protections, Gorski kotar faces threats from climate change, such as drought, storms, and invasive pests, as well as unsustainable recreational practices. Human-wildlife conflicts occasionally arise due to bear and wolf presence. Declining rural populations have also led to a loss of traditional forestry knowledge and reduced maintenance capabilities.

Forestry in Gorski kotar operates under selective harvesting regimes, with high levels of PEFC certification. Yet there is a need to better integrate sustainable forestry with ecotourism, cultural interpretation, and small-scale wood-based craft industries.

Numerous trails and recreation zones facilitate ecotourism: in Lokve, the Lokvarsko lake and cave system; in Mrkopalj, alpine hiking and heritage sites like Fortica and Bijelestijene; and in Fužine and Čabar. Events such as the Frog Night in Lokve and forest-fruit festivals connect tourism with woodland resources and community traditions. Dark-sky experiences have cultural appeal and tourism potential, complementing heritage sites and nightly stargazing in wilderness settings.

## 2.1. Forest Coverage and Management in Gorski kotar

Forests are the dominant landscape feature in Gorski kotar, covering approximately 80% of the region. Most of these forests are state-owned and managed by Hrvatskešume (Croatian Forests), following principles of sustainable forest management certified by the FSC (Forest Stewardship Council). The annual increment of forest growth in the region exceeds the volume of timber harvested, ensuring the long-term sustainability of forest resources.

Forest management in Gorski kotar balances multiple objectives: timber production, biodiversity conservation, protection against natural hazards (such as landslides and floods), and the provision of recreational opportunities. Selective logging and close-to-nature silvicultural practices are widely applied, maintaining the ecological integrity and resilience of forest ecosystems.

Recent years have seen increased attention to forest restoration, especially after severe windstorms and bark beetle outbreaks. Reforestation efforts prioritize native species and the enhancement of natural regeneration, contributing to climate change adaptation and the preservation of genetic diversity.

## 2.2. Social and economic conditions in the region

Gorski kotar is sparsely populated, with many small towns and villages facing demographic challenges such as population decline and aging. The region's economy traditionally relies on forestry, wood processing, and agriculture, but tourism is becoming increasingly important. Nature-based tourism, including hiking, cycling, wildlife watching, and winter sports, leverages the region's pristine landscapes and healthy environment.

The woodworking tradition in Gorski kotar is centuries old, with local craftsmen producing furniture, wooden tools, and decorative objects. While industrialization and modern materials have reduced the prevalence of traditional crafts, wood processing remains a significant economic sector, with several sawmills and furniture manufacturers operating in the area.

Efforts to revitalize rural communities focus on promoting sustainable tourism, supporting local products, and improving infrastructure. EU and national programs provide funding for rural development, forest conservation, and the diversification of the regional economy.

## 2.3 Woodworking in Croatia and Gorski kotar

In the mid-19th century, with Croatia as part of the Habsburg Monarchy, forestry and wood processing emerged as a significant industrial sector. From the 1820s onward, the

Slavonian oak forests near Karlovac and Sisak saw rapid growth in stave fabrication and lumber milling. By the 1850s, log mills alongside the Sava and Drava rivers supplied burgeoning shipyards, fuelling a complementary shipbuilding industry. The 1830s' railway expansion supported the rise of large sawmill operations, including steam-powered mills like Filip Deutsch's in Turopolje (established 1911, with a capacity of 40,000 m<sup>3</sup> and 600 workers by the early 20th century). At that time, forestry–wood production was one of the key economic drivers alongside agriculture.

In recent decades, Croatia's wood industry has demonstrated its resilience and relevance. It marked a 10% increase in 2022. Labour input rose significantly (+23 %) in that same year. As of 2024, forestry operations produced approximately 5.2 million m<sup>3</sup> of roundwood—a 5 % increase over the previous year—composed of both coniferous and broadleaved species. In Croatia's broader bioeconomy, wood and wood-based products account for about 11 % of the sector's share, with wood processing alone employing nearly one in five workers in forestry industries. Export remains vital to wood processing survival. In the 2000s, Croatian wood exports doubled from 2003 to 2008, with around 65 % of products destined for international markets.

Gorski kotar, Croatia's heavily forested hinterland, has long been an important centre for both forestry and wood processing. Forests cover approximately 83 % of the region's territory. Since post–World War II industrialisation, the region has hosted numerous sawmills and wood-processing plants, although rural depopulation has constrained expanded job growth. Today, the area is recognized for its selective, PEFC-certified forestry, alongside small and medium-sized enterprises producing sawn timber, shingles, furniture elements, and artisanal wood products. Some traditional workshops continue woodcarving and shed-roof shingle production for cultural tourism. Local initiatives also emphasize eco-tourism, sustainable forestry, and wood-based crafts, aligning with the Danube Wood(s) Route objectives.

## 2.4. Summary of the regional assessment

Gorski kotar is one of the most valuable parts of Croatia in terms of forest area. Over 80% of the area is covered in wood, and almost all of them are owned by the state. They are also home to Croatian prominent species such as wolf, lynx and bear. Forest in Gorski kotar consist mainly of fir and ash.

Gorski kotar stands as a model of rich natural heritage, sustainable forest management, and cultural vitality. Addressing demographic and economic challenges while leveraging the region's assets for sustainable development is essential for its future prosperity.

Gorski kotar combines ecological richness with cultural depth but faces demographic and economic challenges. The RAP seeks to leverage its forest heritage for inclusive, sustainable development.



## 2.5 Challenges and Opportunities

No.	Challenges	Opportunities
1	Population decline. Gorski kotar is experiencing a steady population decline, with many young people migrating to urban centers in search of better education and employment opportunities. The remaining population is aging, leading to a shrinking workforce and a reduction in the region's social and economic vitality.	EU and national rural development programs offer funding for infrastructure, business development, and social innovation. Encourage young people and families to return or relocate through incentives. Support cooperatives, social enterprises, and community initiatives.
2	Dispersed settlements make many areas still lack reliable transportation links, digital connectivity, and modern utilities.	Promote rural revitalization through improved infrastructure, support for local entrepreneurship, and incentives for young people to stay or return. Integrate biodiversity conservation with sustainable land use.
3	Increasing climate-related threats (extreme weather, pests, invasive species) leading to tree die-offs and ecosystem degradation.	Implementation of proactive forest resilience strategies (e.g., early detection, adaptive management, genetic conservation).
4	Climate change	Gorski kotar can become a model region for climate adaptation and ecosystem restoration, drawing on its strong forestry tradition and scientific expertise. Implement landscape-scale conservation and connectivity projects.
5	Pest infestations	Monitor and manage invasive species and forest health risks.
6	Degradation of forest health and biodiversity.	Bridging gaps in underdeveloped regions by promoting environmentally friendly farming and developing a regional policy in collaboration with neighboring countries.
7	Conflicts between conservation and economic interests.	Adopt a holistic approach that balances economic, social, and environmental goals.

8	Low visitor numbers compared to potential.	Position Gorski kotar as a destination for sustainable living, eco-tourism, and quality local products.
9	Seasonal fluctuations and concentration of tourism in a few hotspots.	Position Gorski kotar as a destination for sustainable living, eco-tourism, and quality local products.
10	Costly and complex infrastructure development.	Involve local communities, businesses, NGOs, and public institutions in planning and implementation.
11	Limited cooperation between tourism offerings and timber industry.	Integrate forestry and tourism: Pair sustainable harvesting with visitor education (e.g. guided forestry tours, woodworking workshops).
12	Lack of investments of national institutions or private investors.	Secure funding: Tap EU and regional funds for reforestation, bioeconomy, and forest-based tourism.
13	Lack of comprehensive digital marketing of forest-based tourism products	Market local products: Expand certifications for timber, honey, game, mushrooms; create tourism packages featuring “from forest to table.”  Develop comprehensive digital marketing of forest-based tourism products.
14	The region risks being overshadowed by Croatia’s more famous coastal areas.	The region’s pristine nature, clear lakes, and historical sites offer strong potential for eco- and cultural tourism.
15	Unsustainable resource use	Strengthening enforcement of forestry and wildlife regulations, promote sustainable harvesting certifications (e.g., FSC), and support alternative livelihoods to reduce pressure on wild resources. Local authorities regulate mushroom and plant collection, although illegal harvesting remains a concern. Community engagement and eco-tourism development provide alternative income sources

16	Habitat fragmentation and infrastructure development	Adopt integrated spatial planning that includes ecological corridors and wildlife crossings to maintain landscape connectivity. Limit infrastructure expansion in sensitive habitats and promote green infrastructure. EU-funded projects promote cross-border ecological networks and habitat connectivity in mountainous regions including Gorski kotar.
17	Tourism infrastructure expansion	Develop sustainable tourism strategies that limit visitor numbers in sensitive areas, promote eco-friendly infrastructure, and engage local communities in tourism management.  Local tourism strategies emphasize nature-based and cultural tourism with environmental safeguards.  Protected areas like Risnjak National Park have visitor management plans to minimize impacts.
18	Land abandonment	Promote rural revitalization through improved infrastructure, support for local entrepreneurship, and incentives for young people to stay or return. Integrate biodiversity conservation with sustainable land use. Regional development programs funded by the EU and Croatian government target rural areas including Gorski kotar. Projects supporting eco-tourism, local crafts, and sustainable agriculture are underway. Efforts to improve digital connectivity and public services aim to reduce outmigration.
19	Marketing and visibility	Launch a targeted digital marketing campaign that highlights wood-themed experiences, using videos, blogs, and social media.  Collaborate with influencers, local celebrities, eco-tourism platforms, and Croatian tourism agencies.
20	Competition	Focus on unique selling points, such as Gorski kotar's Croatian heritage, traditional wooden architecture, and untouched wilderness. Establish cross-border collaborations for regional tourism routes. Emphasize personalized, small-scale experiences over mass tourism to appeal to niche markets.
21	Aging population and workforce	Introduce apprenticeship programs to preserve traditional woodcraft.  Partner with vocational schools and universities to promote forestry and sustainable tourism careers.  Develop and offer grants or incentives for young families and entrepreneurs to stay or relocate to Gorski kotar.

22	Forest health risks	Cooperate with forestry experts and environmental NGOs to monitor forest health and adopt climate-resilient forestry practices. Create visitor education programs about responsible forest use and conservation. Diversify tourism by including non-forest-based activities (e.g., local gastronomy, historical routes).
23	Overregulation and bureaucracy	Provide workshops for local entrepreneurs on navigating regulations and accessing funding opportunities. Encourage municipalities to develop pro-tourism policies and strategic plans aligned with sustainable development goals.
24	Insufficient young professionals entering the forestry sector, aging workforce.	Creation of targeted policies and incentives to support youth involvement and rural employment in forestry.
25	Inadequate rural infrastructure limits forestry industry development.	Investment in rural infrastructure (transportation, internet) to boost local economic potential and forest-related industries.
26	Wildlife overpopulation causing forest damage.	Integrated wildlife and forest management policies combining ecological and economic perspectives.

*Figure 1: Challenges and opportunities identified*

### 3. Strategic framework

The Danube Wood(s) RAPs have a well-defined methodological approach with the following stages:

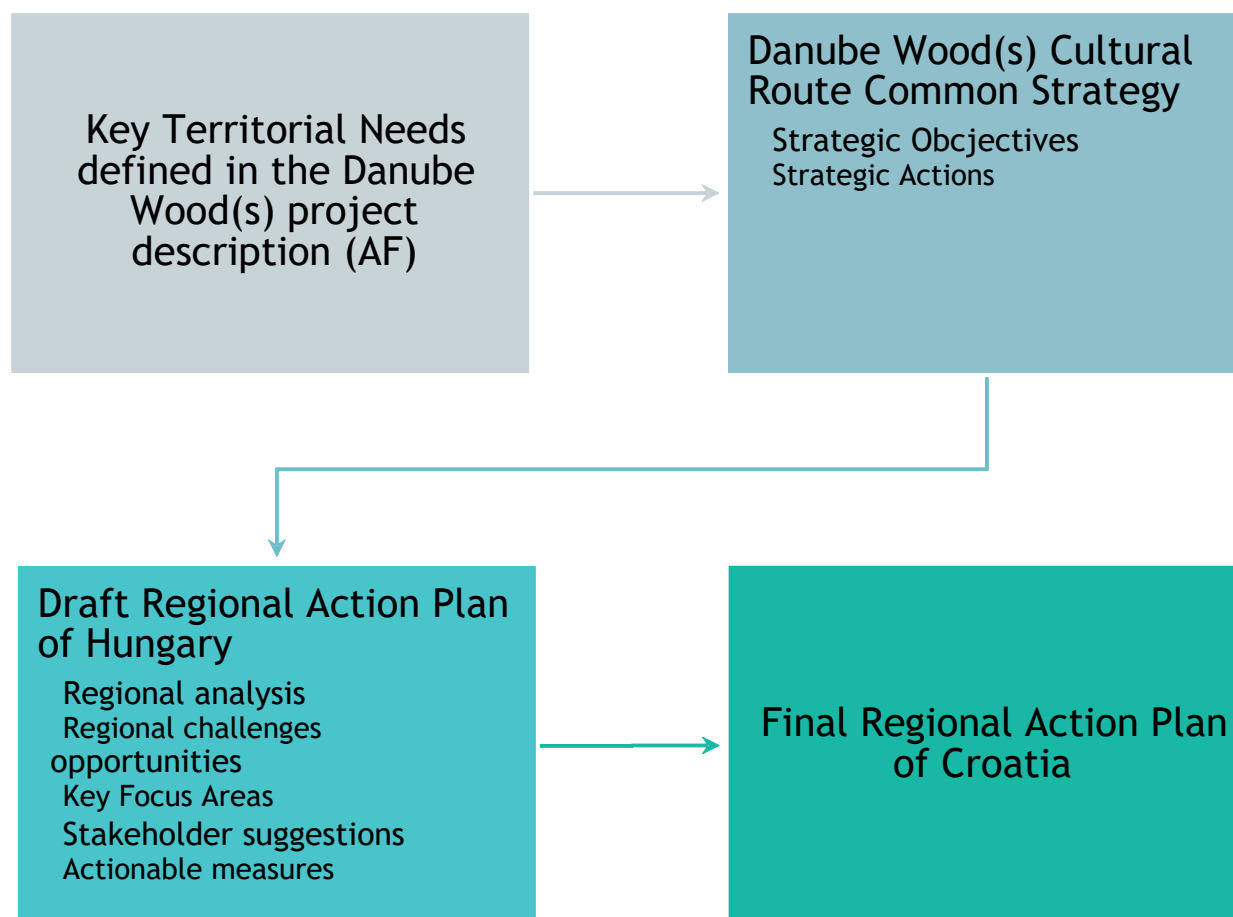


Figure 3: Development of the Regional Action Plan

To be clear on the basis of Actionable measures, the following table explains the connection of objectives between the objectives Danube Wood(s) project, the Danube Wood(s) Route Strategy, and the RAP. The RAP Key Focus Areas have to be in line with Strategic Actions and Objectives. Actionable measures are grouped under the RAP Key Focus Areas.

Standard, pre-defined Key Focus Area of the RAP:

- Preservation and Conservation Initiatives — Actions to conserve forest areas and wood-based cultural heritage, like habitat restoration, reforestation, and the promotion of traditional woodcrafts.
- Economic and Tourism Development — Building an infrastructure to support tourism products that promote cultural and natural assets related to wood, including workshops, cultural routes, and eco-tourism initiatives.
- Educational and Awareness Campaigns — Increasing local and stakeholder awareness about the importance of sustainable forest management and wood-based heritage.

**New arrangement of RAP Key Focus Areas corresponding to the regional challenges:**

- Protection of Local Forests – Integrated actions aimed at protecting natural forest ecosystems and safeguarding the cultural legacy of wood through habitat restoration, biodiversity conservation, and the revitalization of traditional crafts and wooden architecture.
- Elevation of Forest-Based Ecotourism – Development and promotion of sustainable, nature-based tourism offerings that highlight forest landscapes and wood-related cultural heritage, while supporting rural economies and raising environmental awareness through experiential travel and educational engagement.
- Sustainable Forest Management and Forest-Based Economic Growth – Fostering an innovative and climate-resilient forestry sector that balances ecological sustainability with economic viability through responsible resource use, carbon market integration, and the advancement of green technologies in wood-based industries.
- Promoting Education and Awareness for Responsible Forest Practices and Wood Heritage – Strengthening public and professional knowledge of sustainable forest management and wood culture through targeted educational programs, community involvement, cross-sector collaboration, and accessible knowledge-sharing platforms.

Strategic Objectives (project and strategic objectives)	Danube Wood Cultural Route Strategic Actions	RAP Key Focus Area
<b>Key Territorial Need:</b> Valorising cultural heritage related to wood through stakeholder engagement and knowledge-sharing.  <b>Danube Wood Cultural Route Strategy Objective 1:</b> Preserve and/or Restore Biodiversity and Natural Resources	1. Promote sustainable forestry 2. Educate on importance of preserving biodiversity 3. Preserve national resources 4. Monitor wildlife 5. Preserve forest ecosystems	<b>Protection of Local Forests</b>
<b>Key Territorial Need:</b> Supporting rural economies through forest-linked tourism and local product development.  <b>Danube Wood Cultural Route Strategy Objective 2:</b> Develop a sustainable forest-based economy.	6. Increase accessibility to forests 7. Encourage regional timber products 8. Promote local timber industry 9. Develop visitor centres 10. Develop visitor walking trails	<b>Sustainable Forest Management and Forest-Based Economic Growth</b>
<b>Key Territorial Need:</b> Promoting sustainable forest management and innovation in the forest-based economy. <b>Danube Wood Cultural Route Objective 3:</b> Strat to valorise cultural heritage related to wood	11. Promote local and traditional craftsmanship 12. Map routes among local heritage sites 13. Develop cultural tourism 14. Create tourism packages combining routes and workshops 15. Promote local festivals	<b>Elevation of Forest-Based Ecotourism</b>
<b>Key Territorial Need:</b> Enhancing environmental literacy and intergenerational knowledge	16. Promote local products 17. Promote eco-tourism 18. Enhance local infrastructure 19. Promote and educate on sustainable forest management	<b>Sustainable Forest Management and Forest-Based Economic Growth</b>

transmission. <b>Danube Wood Cultural Route</b> <b>Strategy Objective 4:</b> Develop Sustainable Tourism		
<b>Danube Wood Cultural Route</b> <b>Strategy Objective 5:</b> Raise awareness and build community engagement	20. Educational Programmes 21. Collaboration with local and national educational organizations 22. Community workshops 23. Develop digital platforms and multimedia content to promote the sustainable use of wood	<b>Promoting Education and Awareness for Responsible Forest Practices and Wood Heritage</b>

Figure 3: Strategic framework of the Croatian Action Plan (RAP)

## 4. Actionable measures

The following table showcases the identified actionable measures Croatia.

No.	Actionable Measures	RAP Key Focus Area
1	Protection of forest areas in Gorski kotar	Protection of Local Forests
	a) Promote ecological and energy sustainability. Striving to achieve greater energy independence.	
	b) Valorise the entire area around Risnjak National Park	
2	Biodiversity and Habitat Protection in Forest-Pasture Zones	
	c) Maintain open pastures and forest edges through seasonal grazing, preventing overgrowth and supporting rare species.	
	d) Support research on biodiversity linked to traditional land-use in katun systems.	
	e) Prevent overuse and degradation of ecologically sensitive forest-pasture mosaics.	



3	Revitalization of Wood-Related Traditional Knowledge	
	f) Organize training on wood-based decorative skills, carving, symbolic motifs, and sustainable wooden crafts.	
	g) Include women and youth in knowledge transmission processes and heritage interpretation.	
	h) Develop wood heritage-related souvenirs and products linked to local identity and markets.	
4	Nature-Based and Cultural Tourism Development	<b>Elevation of Forest-Based Ecotourism</b>
	i) Develop forest-themed cultural itineraries, including katun stays, trail interpretation, and culinary storytelling.	
	j) Encourage community-based tourism packages tied to forest crafts and cultural events.	
	k) Implement interpretative signage and storytelling stations at forest heritage locations in Sungerski lug, Lividraga, and Japlenški vrh.	
5	Infrastructure and Interpretation for Forest Heritage	
	l) Invest in minimal-impact visitor infrastructure (info points, rest stops, water sources) along forest routes in Sungerski lug, Lividraga, and Japlenški vrh.	
	m) Encourage sustainable mobility options (e-bikes, trails) in mountain areas.	
	n) Create micro-museums or exhibits in refurbished katun huts or local schools.	
6	Forest-Based Economy and Innovation	<b>Sustainable Forest Management and Forest-Based Economic Growth</b>
	o) Pilot innovative uses of local wood for eco-friendly construction and artisanal products.	
	p) Link forest product value chains with rural tourism and regional branding.	
	q) Explore carbon-sequestration schemes through forest stewardship.	
7	Community Awareness and Engagement	<b>Promoting Education</b>

	r) Organize seasonal fairs, events, and storytelling workshops cantered around forest heritage.	<b>and Awareness for Responsible Forest Practices and Wood Heritage</b>
	s) Support intergenerational dialogue and mentoring on traditional practices.	
	t) Promote forest guardianship through citizen monitoring and youth ranger programs.	
8	Education and Forest Culture	
	u) Integrate forest heritage into school curricula, including field classes and seasonal camps.	
	v) Develop cross-border youth exchanges on forest and cultural topics.	
	w) Fund participatory research and oral history collection among elders.	
9	Professional Capacity Building and Knowledge Exchange	
	x) Provide targeted training for rural tourism actors on forest-linked heritage.	
	y) Facilitate cooperation between universities, CSOs, and public authorities.	
	z) Develop Croatia's contribution to the Danube Wood(s)Route as a shared knowledge platform.	

Figure 4: Actionable Measures addressing the identified challenges

Strategic Actions	Actionable Measures
1. Promote conservation of historical structures, traditional crafts, and forest-based cultural sites.	a) Organize training on wood-based tourism, and sustainable tourism regarding forests and forest trails. b) Include women and youth in knowledge transmission processes and heritage interpretation. c) Develop wood heritage-related souvenirs and products linked to local identity and markets.
2. Support reforestation and biodiversity conservation efforts to maintain forest ecosystems.	d) Maintain open pastures and forest edges through seasonal grazing, preventing overgrowth and supporting rare species. e) Support research on biodiversity linked to traditional land-use. f) Prevent overuse and degradation of ecologically sensitive forest-pasture mosaics.
3. Promote existing wood heritage centers, exhibitions, and museums to showcase traditional	g) Promote micro-museums and locations such as or exhibits in refurbished old houses such as Rački house and ZrinskiKaštel

Strategic Actions	Actionable Measures
woodworking techniques and tools.	
4. Develop transnational partnerships for joint heritage conservation projects.	h) Facilitate cooperation between universities, CSOs, and public authorities. i) Develop Croatia's contribution to the Danube Wood(s)Route as a shared knowledge platform.
5. Design and implement the Danube Wood Cultural Route, mapping heritage sites and defining tourist itineraries.	j) Develop forest-themed cultural itineraries, trail interpretation, and culinary storytelling.
6. Develop visitor infrastructure such as eco-lodges, information centers, and thematic walking trails.	k) Invest in minimal-impact visitor infrastructure (info points, rest stops, water sources) along forest routes. n) Encourage sustainable mobility options (e-bikes, trails) in mountain areas.
7. Create tourism packages combining forest-based experiences, cultural visits, and traditional woodworking workshops.	l) Encourage community-based tourism packages tied to forest crafts and cultural events.
8. Promote wood-themed cultural festivals and community events to attract visitors and promote local craftsmanship.	m) Promote seasonal fairs, events, and storytelling workshops centered around forest heritage.
9. Promote sustainable forestry certification and responsible forest management practices.	n) Pilot innovative uses of local wood for eco-friendly construction and artisanal products.
10. Encourage local entrepreneurship in wood-based industries, including eco-friendly furniture, bio-based materials, and traditional crafts.	o) Link forest product value chains with rural tourism and regional branding.
11. Support carbon trading and financial incentives for sustainable forest management.	p) Explore carbon-sequestration schemes through forest stewardship.
12. Foster research and innovation in wood-based construction.	q) Pilot innovative uses of local wood for eco-friendly construction and artisanal products.
13. Introduce wood heritage and sustainable forestry education in schools and vocational training.	r) Integrate forest heritage into school curricula, including field classes and seasonal camps. s) Develop cross-border youth exchanges on forest and cultural topics. t) Fund participatory research and oral history collection among elders.
14. Organize community workshops and public awareness campaigns on biodiversity conservation and cultural heritage.	u) Support intergenerational dialogue and mentoring traditional practices. v) Promote forest guardianship through citizen monitoring and youth ranger programs.
15. Develop digital platforms and multimedia content to promote the sustainable use of wood and traditional crafts.	w) Provide targeted training for rural tourism actors on forest-linked heritage.
16. Establish knowledge-sharing networks connecting academia,	x) Facilitate cooperation between universities, CSOs, and public authorities.

Strategic Actions	Actionable Measures
forestry professionals, and policymakers to integrate research into practical forestry solutions.	y) Develop Montenegro's contribution to the Danube Wood(s)Route as a shared knowledge platform.

Figure 5: Actionable measures building on Strategic Actions

#### 4.1. Action 1 – Create cultural heritage and nature route centred around forests and forest lore

##### 4.1.1 Relevance of the measure

The Gorski kotar region offers a unique intersection of rich forest heritage, traditional woodworking skills, and untouched nature. Despite this potential, the wood-based heritage remains underrepresented in the tourism offer. Even though there are many hiking trails in this area, what is lacking are guides that could bring closer the magic of the forest to the visitors. There are many traditional stories from this area that are connected to timber species and wildlife and all of them could be incorporated into existing trails. This action aims to deepen the tourist offer and broaden it offering guided tours that will combine storytelling and hiking.

Developing further existing nature trails will expand current number of hiking and walking trails in this area. By establishing an accessible database of hiking and walking trails along with online platform for educational and promotional purposes, the project will support the long-term sustainability of Risnjak National Park and protected forest areas in the region.

This action directly addresses the identified need to better integrate local forestry, timber heritage, and eco-tourism in the Gorski kotar region. It builds on existing strengths (rich woodcraft traditions and fir and ash forests) while addressing weaknesses such as low visibility and limited infrastructure. It also links to regional identity, sustainable rural development, and the objectives of the Danube Wood(s) Route.

A crucial aspect of this action is integrating the initiative into the Danube Wood(s) Cultural Route framework. Establishing a lasting European cultural route across several Danube-adjacent countries requires the participation of regional and national stakeholders, including local governments, cultural institutions, forestry organizations, and businesses.

##### 4.1.2. Nature of the action

The action proposes the establishment of a thematic visitor route that connects key locations linked to the region's timber heritage. This route will integrate old-growth forest sites, nature parks, Risnjak National Park, and traditional local houses, as well as

existing forest education areas. It will combine cultural interpretation with nature-based experiences, offering tourists and school groups engaging opportunities to explore the relationship between forest use and regional ways of life. Planned activities include hands-on workshops, guided tours, and storytelling sessions.

Forestry and timber production have long shaped the development of Gorski kotar. For centuries, local communities relied on forests and timber-related livelihoods. The area remains predominantly rural, with forestry and tourism as its main economic sectors. Timber production, which began to expand significantly in the 19th century, as in much of Europe, continues to play a central role, with current efforts focused on ensuring its long-term sustainability.

Over the past two decades, tourism in Gorski kotar has grown rapidly. Owing to its location along major transit routes to the coast, many visitors choose the region as a stopping point during summer travel. Increasingly, tourists also seek the cooler mountain environment as an alternative to coastal destinations. A key objective moving forward is to guide this growth through sustainable practices, ensuring that tourism development supports both environmental protection and local community well-being.

In alignment with the objectives of the Croatian Danube Strategy, the action also envisages the development of guided tours along existing trails that highlight local legends while providing educational content on regional wildlife and diverse flora. These guided experiences will be concentrated at the most frequently visited sites, including Golubinjak Forest, Risnjak National Park, and Japlenški vrh. Integrating these elements into the broader visitor route will enhance its educational value and strengthen the connection between natural heritage and local cultural narratives.

Golubinjak Forest Park, located near the town of Lokve in Gorski kotar, is a protected area covering about 51–53 hectares of pristine coniferous woodland. Declared a park-forest in 1955, it represents one of the most enchanting natural corners of Croatia's mountainous region. The park is characterized by vast clearings surrounded by towering fir and spruce trees, some of which are centuries old. The most famous among them is the "Queen of the Forest", a majestic fir tree estimated to be over 250 years old and reaching 42 meters in height. Visitors can explore a network of trails that lead to fascinating karst formations such as the Ledena špilja (Ice Cave), where snow and ice persist even during summer, and the Paklenavrata (Hell's Gate), a dramatic rock opening. Other highlights include the Medvedji breg (Bear's Lair) and the natural amphitheater formed by surrounding cliffs. Wildlife thrives here, with birdsong providing a constant soundtrack and butterflies like the admiral adding color to the forest. The park also offers recreational facilities including picnic areas, sports grounds, and a children's playground, making it suitable for families as well as nature enthusiasts. Golubinjak is often described as "Gorski kotar in miniature," since it condenses the

region's geological, botanical, and cultural richness into a single accessible site. The combination of clean mountain air, aromatic conifer needles, and tranquil scenery makes Golubinjak a place of both ecological importance and restorative power. It is a living classroom of karst phenomena and forest ecology, inviting visitors to reconnect with nature while learning about the delicate balance of mountain ecosystems.

Japlenškivrh, situated directly above the town of Delnice, is a forest park spanning 173 hectares and protected since 1953. Rising to an altitude of 842 meters, it is a beloved recreational area for locals and visitors alike. The park is accessible from Delnice, beginning near the Lovačkidom (Hunting Lodge), where a fenced enclosure houses a herd of fallow deer, offering a rare chance to observe these graceful animals up close. The walking trail around Japlenškivrh is about three kilometers long, gently circling the hill and providing panoramic views of Delnice and its surroundings. Along the way, visitors encounter educational boards installed by the Public Institution "Priroda," which explain the diverse flora and fauna of the area. Seasonal changes bring unique experiences: spring carpets of wildflowers, summer fragrances of cyclamen, autumn's abundance of mushrooms, and winter's wildlife tracks in the snow. A notable landmark is the historic ski jump, built in 1947, which once hosted competitions and now stands as a cultural reminder of Delnice's sporting tradition. The forest itself is dominated by beech and fir, creating a dense canopy that shelters numerous bird species and small mammals. Japlenškivrh is not only a natural retreat but also a cultural landscape shaped by human interaction with the mountain environment. Its proximity to Delnice makes it an easily accessible green oasis, ideal for short hikes, educational excursions, and family outings. The park embodies the harmony between urban life and wilderness, showing how a community can preserve and cherish its natural heritage while making it available for everyday enjoyment. For many, Japlenškivrh is the heart of Delnice's identity, a place where nature, tradition, and recreation meet.

Risnjak National Park, established in 1953, is one of Croatia's most significant protected areas, covering 63.5 square kilometers in the mountainous region of Gorski kotar. Named after the lynx ("ris" in Croatian), the park is a sanctuary for large carnivores including the Eurasian lynx, brown bear, and gray wolf, making it one of the few places in Europe where all three coexist. The park's landscape is dominated by two rugged massifs: Risnjak (1,528 m) and Snježnik (1,506 m), separated by only three kilometers and often referred to as "mountain twins." Dense forests of beech, fir, and spruce blanket the slopes, earning Risnjak the reputation of a "forest kingdom." At its lowest point lies the source of the Kupa River, considered one of Croatia's most beautiful springs, where turquoise waters emerge from karst depths. Wildlife observation programs allow visitors to witness deer during their mating season, agile chamois navigating cliffs, and the elusive lynx in its natural habitat. The park is also home to diverse birdlife, reptiles, and countless invertebrates, reflecting its ecological richness.

Hiking trails of varying difficulty lead to panoramic viewpoints, offering breathtaking vistas of the Dinaric Alps and, on clear days, even the Adriatic Sea. Risnjak is not only a refuge for biodiversity but also a cultural landscape, with traditional mountain villages like Crni Lug serving as gateways to exploration. Educational initiatives emphasize responsible tourism and coexistence with wildlife. For nature lovers, Risnjak represents the essence of Croatia's wilderness: untamed, majestic, and profoundly alive. It is a place where visitors can experience the raw beauty of karst ecosystems, the thrill of encountering large predators, and the serenity of alpine forests, all within a protected environment that safeguards this natural heritage for future generations.

Golubinjak offers karst wonders and family recreation, Japlenškirh blends urban proximity with wildlife encounters, and Risnjak National Park showcases Croatia's wilderness with its "big three" predators and alpine landscapes. Together, they form the ecological and cultural backbone of Gorski kotar.

The action involves listing all the sites, their current use and their potential. Next phase is describing possible walks and tours within each location. This was all described in Danube Woods Nature Strategy.

The next set of activities will involve outreaching the local communities and tourist boardstocommunicate strategies for creating this route. We will ask their help in creating materials for guided tours along with organising training sessions for local heritage experts, tourism professionals and creative facilitators. It will include practical demonstrations, peer exchange sessions and small exhibitions of decorated spaces.

#### 4.1.3 Activities performed under the Action

As a part of this action and to ensure broad accessibility an interactive platform will be created and made more available to the public. This platform will likely be managed by the Danube Wood(s) Project partners, local municipalities, or regional tourism boards and it will serve as a dynamic resource for visitors, researchers and cultural institutions.

Descriptions of the locations, interesting tales connected to the sites and people who lived there will be presented through digital storytelling formats. The action supports the creation of thematic tourist trails that immerse visitors in history and beautiful scenery of Gorski kotar offering eco-cultural experiences through several program types. These include walking tours around proposed sites that combine walks and visits with educational insights. The platform and related activities will further explore cultural roles of wood in various industries, and everyday lives.

Local communities and stakeholders play an active role in storytelling initiatives and oral history programs designed to preserve and communicate traditions of the area and importance of wood and timber in people's lives.

The successful implementation of the Thematic visitor route will require a combination of preparatory, organizational, and promotional activities. These will be carried out in close coordination with local stakeholders and will focus on ensuring both authenticity and accessibility of the experience. The planned activities are:

- 1) Mapping and site selection: A detailed mapping process will be conducted to identify important local sites connected to biodiversity, forest interpretation spots, and architectural heritage sites. This step will ensure that the route highlights diverse and meaningful locations with a strong connection to the woodcraft and forest traditions of the region.
- 2) Training and capacity building: Selected local guides, educators, students and artisans will participate in training sessions focused on communication, visitor interaction, and sustainable tourism practices. This will improve the quality and consistency of visitor experiences along the route.
- 3) Promotional and branding campaign: A targeted communication campaign will be launched to promote the route to ecotourists, cultural travellers, and schools. The campaign will include regional media outreach, collaboration with tourism boards, and digital marketing strategies.
- 4) Educational integration: Partnerships with schools and youth programs will be established to incorporate the route into educational excursions. This will help cultivate environmental awareness and appreciation of traditional crafts among younger generations.

#### 4.1.4 Potential Danube Wood(s) Cultural Route points involved

The route will connect a range of tangible and intangible heritage sites that collectively represent the depth of Gorski kotar's wood-based identity. The selected points of interest will offer visitors a varied and immersive experience combining cultural heritage, active learning, and nature interpretation.

Forest and Wildlife Route connecting protected forest areas and trails in Risnjak National Park along with less familiar nature sites. Sites involved are Golubinjak Forest, Japlenškirh, Risnjak National Park, Lividraga, Sungerski lug, Kamačnik spring, Large Carnivore Centre, Cro Medo-Photo hunt.

Visitors can explore the ancient woods of Gorski kotar, hug the highest tree in Croatia in Golubinjak Forest, explore biodiversity in Risnjak National Park, enjoy the scenic route in Kamačnik along the river Kupa through many marked trails with interpretive panels explaining key points along every route, offering explanations and tales connected to specific area. The route will also spotlight sustainable forestry and wildlife conservation efforts.



#### 4.1.5. Stakeholders involved

- 1) Local tourist board and municipalities are happy to be included in and provide assistance. (Delnice, Fužine, Vrata, Čabar, Skrad, Lokve Municipality)
- 2) Regional tourism boards and cultural centers whose task is to integrate the route into broader tourism offers and provide promotional support.
- 3) Local NGOs and heritage associations supporting preservation, training, and public engagement around cultural wood heritage and forest-related traditions.
- 4) Risnjak National Park

Active involvement of these groups will foster a networked approach to cultural tourism and wood-based interpretation in Gorski kotar.

#### 4.1.6. Timeframe

- Preparation 4 months (database, stakeholder engagement, platform creation)
- Implementation 3 months (site visits, guided tours, and workshops).
- Maintenance and promotion: Ongoing (platform updates, collaboration with European cultural route initiatives).

#### 4.1.7. Indicative costs

- Development of database and online platform – the platform is already being created for the Danube Wood(s) Route Project.
- Tour and workshops logistics: 3,000 EUR
- Educational materials production and expert fees: 2,000 EUR
- Marketing and outreach: 500 EUR

Total estimated cost: 5,500 EUR

#### 4.1.8. Output and result indicators

- Number of locations for nature trails: 8
- Number of participants in guided tours and workshops: 80
- Online platform reach (visitors per year): 500

### 4.2 Organize Training on Storytelling and Forest Valorisation in Areal Guided Walks

#### 4.2.1 Nature of the action

This workshop would offer significant value for the Gorski kotar region, particularly in the context of its long-standing forest traditions, growing tourism sector, and ongoing efforts to promote sustainable development. As a region historically shaped by forestry and timber production, Gorski kotar holds a rich environmental and cultural heritage that is not yet fully interpreted or presented to visitors in a structured, engaging way. This workshop would help bridge that gap by equipping local stakeholders with the knowledge and skills needed to transform natural landscapes and cultural narratives into high-quality visitor experiences.

Storytelling represents a powerful tool for enhancing the appeal of guided walks. When guides know how to integrate local legends, traditional knowledge, and historical facts into their interpretation, they enrich the visitor experience and foster a deeper emotional connection with the natural environment. Gorski kotar is abundant in stories linked to its forests, wildlife, wooden craftsmanship, and mountain villages. A structured training programme would help participants identify relevant stories, shape them into engaging narratives, and adapt them to diverse audiences, including families, school groups, nature enthusiasts, and international guests. This strengthens the region's visibility and helps differentiate it from other mountain destinations.

Forest valorisation is equally important, as it focuses on recognising and presenting the ecological, cultural, and economic value of forests. Participants in the workshop would learn how to showcase the importance of sustainable forestry, biodiversity, and traditional timber-related practices. Given that forestry remains one of the dominant local industries, linking economic aspects with interpretative content can help raise public awareness and encourage responsible behaviour among visitors. Guided walks that highlight unique habitats, old-growth forests, or local timber traditions have the potential to support conservation goals while offering educational benefits.

The training would also support regional tourism development by improving the professionalism and quality of guided services. As Gorski kotar sees continued growth in nature-based tourism, the demand for knowledgeable and well-trained guides increases. High-quality interpretation not only enhances visitor satisfaction but also encourages longer stays and repeat visits, contributing to the local economy. The workshop would further align with national and EU strategies promoting sustainable tourism, environmental education, and the valorisation of natural and cultural heritage.

Another key benefit lies in strengthening cooperation between local stakeholders, including protected area managers, tourism boards, cultural associations, and small businesses. Bringing them together in a shared learning environment creates opportunities for joint initiatives, thematic routes, and coordinated promotional activities. This type of collaboration can significantly enhance the region's capacity to design integrated tourism products, such as thematic forest trails or educational programmes for schools.

Overall, the workshop will contribute to building a more knowledgeable, confident, and innovative network of guides and educators capable of presenting Gorski kotar's forests and traditions in an engaging and responsible way. By combining storytelling with forest valorisation, the training supports both heritage preservation and sustainable tourism, ultimately strengthening the region's identity and long-term development potential.

#### 4.2.3 Activities performed under the Action

As a part of the Regional Action Plan, five key activities are planned.

##### 1. Programme Planning and Selection of Expert Trainers

The first phase involves defining the objectives of the training, structuring the two-day programme, and outlining all thematic modules. This includes developing the methodology, preparing learning outcomes, and coordinating the involvement of experts from local museums, schools, tourist boards, and national parks. Logistical planning is also completed at this stage, including venue arrangements, scheduling, and preparation of necessary teaching materials.

##### 2. Mobilisation of Participants and Local Stakeholders

This activity focuses on informing and engaging youth groups, tourist guides, hiking guides, and staff from museums and parks. Promotional outreach is conducted through schools, tourism offices, community organisations, and digital platforms to ensure a diverse group of participants. In parallel, coordination with local stakeholders is established to provide logistical support, training spaces, and institutional backing.

##### 3. Implementation of Thematic Workshops

Over two days, 4–5 workshops are delivered, combining theory, practical exercises, and field activities. The workshops include:

- Interpretation of traditional forest heritage, including legends and customs;
  - Storytelling techniques for guiding and narrative development;
  - Integration of mindfulness approaches into forest-based activities;
  - Examples of good practice from local museums, schools, and tourism agencies;
  - Group work to design small pilot activities for guided walks.
- This ensures an experiential and interactive learning environment.

##### 4. Development of Practical Materials and Micro-Guides

Following the workshops, participants work with trainers to produce short interpretive materials or “micro-guides”. These materials may include local stories, site descriptions, suggested mindfulness exercises, and educational elements. They serve as concrete outputs of the action and can be integrated into future guided tours, school activities, and museum programmes. This contributes to establishing shared standards of interpretation across the region.

##### 5. Evaluation and Recommendations for Further Development

The final activity includes gathering feedback from participants, trainers, and partner institutions. A comprehensive assessment of the training's effectiveness is conducted,

including the degree to which objectives were met and areas for improvement. A final evaluation report is prepared, outlining recommendations for future workshops, options for programme expansion, and guidelines for integrating newly acquired knowledge into regional tourism and educational initiatives.

#### 4.2.4 Potential Danube Wood(s) Cultural Route points involved

Participants in the training will be introduced to innovative approaches for designing guided tours across the hiking destinations of Gorski kotar. They will also gain insight into effective business models used in the region, helping them understand how to create engaging, sustainable, and market-ready visitor experiences.

By learning storytelling techniques, heritage interpretation, and mindfulness-based guidance, participants will be able to offer more engaging and meaningful tours. This enriches the visitor experience, encourages longer stays, and increases the attractiveness of natural sites such as Risnjak National Park, Golubinjak Forest Park, and Japlenški vrh.

The workshop equips guides and local stakeholders with knowledge of sustainable business models and nature-friendly visitor management. This supports the development of responsible tourism that protects ecosystems, reduces environmental impact, and aligns with long-term conservation goals—making the region's natural parks more resilient and appealing to eco-conscious travellers.

#### 4.1.5. Stakeholders involved

Lynx and Fox Tourist Agency

Tourist Board of town Delnice (Gorski kotar)

“Priroda” – a public institution in Rijeka

Hrvatske šume – public institution in charge of forests management in Croatia

Ars Nature – a tourist agency

Natural History Museum in Rijeka

Dubašnica d.o.o. – a regional komunal company

#### 4.1.6. Timeframe

- Preparation 1 month (reaching out to key note speakers, finding an appropriate site for the workshop, public promotion)
- Implementation 2 days (training containing 4-5 workshops, evaluation).

#### 4.2.7. Indicative costs

- workshops logistics (location and refreshments): 1000 EUR

- Educational materials production 50 EUR

expert fees: up to 700 EUR

- Marketing and outreach: 200 EUR

Total estimated cost: up to 2000 EUR

## 5. IMPLEMENTATION AND MONITORING SYSTEM

### 1. Preparatory Phase Monitoring

During the planning stage, monitoring focuses on ensuring that all organisational tasks are completed on time and according to the defined standards. Key elements include:

- Workplan checklist: Confirmation of finalised agenda, selection of trainers, preparation of materials, and booking of venues.
- Stakeholder coordination log: Documentation of communication with museums, schools, tourist agencies, and youth organisations to ensure their involvement.
- Participant registration tracking: Monitoring the number and profile of participants to guarantee a balanced group (youth, guides, museum staff, national park staff).

Tools: Internal planning sheets, email logs, registration forms.

### 2. Implementation Phase Monitoring

During the workshop, monitoring aims to assess the quality of delivery, participant engagement, and achievement of session objectives.

Indicators include:

- Attendance records: Daily participant lists to verify active involvement.
- Session observation sheets: Trainers and organisers assess participant interaction, clarity of presentations, and effectiveness of practical exercises.
- Real-time feedback tools: Short anonymous surveys or reflection cards completed after each thematic workshop to capture impressions and suggestions.

**Tools:** Sign-in sheets, observation templates, short digital or paper feedback forms.

### 3. Output Monitoring

This stage tracks tangible products created during and immediately after the workshop.

Key outputs:

- Micro-guides and interpretive materials developed by participants.
- Documentation of best practices presented by museums, parks, and tourism agencies.
- Summary reports from trainers detailing workshop content, methods used, and participant progress.

Tools: Compiled digital materials, shared folders, trainer reports.

### 4. Outcome Evaluation

After the workshop, the evaluation assesses its medium-term impact on participants' skills and local tourism practices.

Indicators include:

- Application of skills: Number of participants who adopt new storytelling techniques, mindfulness elements, or redesigned tour formats in their work.
- Stakeholder feedback: Insights from institutions (parks, museums, tourism boards) on whether the workshop improved the quality of guided experiences.

Tools: Follow-up questionnaires, short interviews with stakeholders, monitoring of implemented tours.

### 5. Final Assessment and Reporting

The last phase includes preparing a comprehensive evaluation report summarising:

- Achievement of objectives, outputs, and indicators
- Participant satisfaction and learning outcomes
- Strengths, challenges, and recommendations for future workshops
- Suggestions for integrating training content into long-term regional tourism strategies

The report is shared with partners and local institutions to support continuous improvement and ensure the workshop contributes to sustainable tourism development in Gorski kotar.

### 5.1. Monitoring framework

To ensure the effectiveness of sustainable forest management and cultural heritage protection, it is essential to develop a comprehensive monitoring system. Appropriate indicators and metrics help objectively assess the progress and efficiency of Actionable measures.

### 5.2. Evaluation plan

To ensure the effectiveness of actions, a well-developed evaluation plan is essential, enabling the regular review and fine-tuning of outcomes:

- Prepare annual reports on the progress of strategic objectives
- Hold regular consultations with stakeholders to evaluate results and determine necessary adjustments.
- Involve independent experts to ensure the credibility of evaluations.
- Conduct impact assessments to analyze long term sustainability and economic effect.

### 5.3. Action indicators

The table below shows the measurable indicators for the implementation of the actions:

Measure (number)	Indicator		How (method)	Who (PP or other acronym)
	Measurement unit	Value		
Action 1	Number of workshops and forums held	2	A 10-15-page summary on each workshop.	HDK
Action 1	Number of participants at events	up to 20	Record of participants.	HDK
Action 1	Number of guided tours conducted	2	Organise guided tours with the help of stakeholders (i.e. Natural Parks, forest parks). A 5-10-page summary on each guided tour.	HDK
Action 1	Number of museums and visiting centers	2	Demonstrate tours and write a 5-page document on the two	HDK

			techniques.	
Action 1	Number of participants in guided tours and workshops	50	Invite schools and other local communities to the events. Make a record of participants.	HDK
Action 1	Online platform reach	500	Besides the project website, use social media platforms and the disseminative capabilities of the stakeholders involved, to promote the platform. Make a record of website visitors.	HDK

*Figure 6: Indicators for the implementation of actions*

## 6. Potential funding opportunities

- Municipalities, state funds, sponsorships of local companies, different EU projects

## 7. Conclusion

The development of a thematic visitor route in Gorski kotar represents a strategic step toward strengthening the region's cultural identity, enhancing sustainable tourism, and ensuring long-term stewardship of its forest landscapes. Rooted in the principles of the Danube Wood(s) Cultural And Nature Route initiative, this Action Plan demonstrates how heritage, ecology, and community engagement can be effectively integrated to create meaningful visitor experiences while supporting local development. By connecting old-growth forest sites, natural parks, traditional wooden architecture, and forest-education areas, the route provides a cohesive framework for interpreting the deep interdependence between the people of Gorski kotar and their surrounding woodlands.

Through guided tours, storytelling, workshops, and hands-on learning opportunities, the thematic route enhances the visibility of Gorski kotar's unique natural and cultural resources. Sites such as Golubinjak Forest, Japlenškirh, and Risnjak National Park form the backbone of this network, each offering distinct ecological features and cultural narratives. Their integration supports a diversified and balanced visitor experience, where recreational activities are complemented by educational insights into biodiversity, sustainable forestry, and traditional craftsmanship. This approach strengthens the



region's capacity to attract ecotourists, school groups, and cultural travelers seeking authentic, knowledge-based tourism.

The Action Plan aligns with broader regional and national priorities, including the Croatian Danube Strategy, which emphasizes the importance of using guided experiences to connect cultural stories with environmental education. By incorporating local legends, wildlife interpretation, and flora identification into existing trails, the initiative deepens the cultural value of nature-based tourism and reinforces the relationship between forests and local identity. The result is a tourism product that reflects the specific character of Gorski kotar while contributing to the wider objectives of sustainable regional development.

Successful implementation of the route depends on close collaboration with municipalities, tourism boards, cultural institutions, NGOs, and the management of protected areas. Their involvement ensures the authenticity of the content, strengthens community ownership, and supports long-term maintenance. Training programs, capacity-building activities, and participatory planning processes will equip local guides, educators, and artisans with the skills needed to deliver high-quality visitor experiences. This investment in local knowledge and expertise contributes to preserving traditional crafts, revitalizing rural communities, and fostering pride in regional heritage.

By linking conservation, education, and tourism, the Thematic visitor route offers a forward-looking model for sustainable development in Gorski kotar. It recognizes the importance of safeguarding forest ecosystems while enabling local communities to benefit economically and socially from their heritage. The combination of well-designed infrastructure, community participation, and responsible promotion positions Gorski kotar as a leading example of eco-cultural tourism within the Danube region. The Action Plan sets the groundwork for long-term cooperation, innovation, and resilience, ensuring that the forests and cultural traditions of Gorski kotar remain vital assets for future generations.