

## INTERVIEW WITH JOANNA CHMARA

Her story along the Trans Dinarica cycling route

*„I started cycle touring in 2018, and since then, my bike and I have visited places like Ukraine, Kyrgyzstan, Norway, Italy, Switzerland, and of course, the Balkans. I write about my adventures and share tips on cycle travel on my blog [WobblyRide.com](https://wobblyride.com).“*



Trans Dinarica Route –© Joanna Chmara


### **Q1: What motivated you to choose the Trans Dinarica route, and what were your expectations before starting the journey?**

I had already travelled through the Balkans by bicycle before, and I fell in love with the region immediately. So naturally, when I heard about the Trans Dinarica project, I was extremely excited.

During my previous trips to the Balkans, finding the best routes to cycle was challenging. Sometimes, locals gave me some great recommendations, but a lot of my route planning was simply guessing. A few times, I ended up on roads that were too busy and unpleasant to ride on, or a barely rideable gravel track through the mountains.

Trans Dinarica made everything simpler. I could just download the GPX files and follow the track, without worrying if a road was passable or too busy. It was also way easier to find the most spectacular places.





**Q2: Can you describe a standout moment or place along the route that truly captured the spirit of the Balkans?**

The day when I cycled from Kolašin to Žabljak was the quintessence of the Balkan experience. It started with a climb, surrounded by majestic mountains and with no people in sight. But I wasn't lonely - two little dogs kept me company for a few kilometres, all the way to the pass.

In the afternoon, an intense storm hit. A kind man saw me riding in the pouring rain and invited me for a coffee and lunch. We sat in his kitchen, together with some workers who were renovating his house (one from Bosnia, one from Albania, and one from Montenegro). The air was thick with cigarette smoke. They were super chatty and friendly.

I was fed plenty of bread with local cheese and home-grown tomatoes, and of course, offered rakija. I guess it doesn't get more Balkan than that!

**Q3: How would you describe the diversity of landscapes, cultures, and experiences you encountered across different countries on the route?**

For me, diversity is the biggest strength of Trans Dinarica. On one day, you can go from idyllic, bustling coastal vibes to raw and rugged mountain peaks.

I also love how the cultures intertwine. The whole region is like one great colorful mosaic - there are so many various groups, with distinct traditions, beliefs, and stories. There is also so much history along the way: Ottoman bridges, Orthodox monasteries, ancient ruins, and the communist-era bunkers in Albania. It all makes riding along Trans Dinarica extremely fascinating and stimulating.





Trans Dinarica Route –© Joanna Chmara

**Q4: What were the biggest challenges you faced while cycling the Trans Dinarica, and how did they shape your overall experience?**

The biggest challenge was certainly the climbs. The Dinaric Mountains are brutal, and biking the Trans Dinarica, especially with panniers, is not a walk in the park.

Another thing is the unpredictable and ever-changing weather. You might start your day sweating in 35 degrees in the valley, and a few hours later freeze on a rainy descent in the mountains.

For me, pushing through the challenges and adversities is an inseparable part of a real adventure. Some people call it Type 2 Fun. Biking through remote mountains in the pouring rain, with your fingers freezing, is not particularly pleasant. But when it's over, and the sun finally goes out, you are proud of yourself, and it becomes one of the most vivid memories from your trip.

*"The journeys you remember best are the ones outside of your comfort zone, and Trans Dinarica definitely belongs in that category."*



Trans Dinarica Route –© Joanna Chmara



**Q5: How did interactions with local communities influence your journey, and do you have a memorable story involving local people?**

The interactions with locals are something that make Trans Dinarica more than a stunning route with beautiful views.

I had many situations when I experienced extraordinary Balkan hospitality. People invited me to their homes for coffee or a glass of rakija, gave me fresh vegetables from their garden, or simply shared their life stories.

One of my favourite stories happened in North Macedonia. I camped near a little church on a hill. The next day it was Sunday, so I woke up early to make sure that I packed my tent before any people came there for a service. But already around six o'clock, a group of men and women was there to clean the church.

I wasn't sure how they'd react to me camping there, but one of them just said, "You had a good sleep for sure, because you slept close to God!" and invited me to join them for breakfast. Later, they let me into the church and showed me the beautiful icons and frescoes inside.

**Q6: What advice would you give to other cyclists or travellers considering the Trans Dinarica route, in terms of preparation, timing, and must-see highlights?**

First of all, don't underestimate the mountains. If you want to cycle Trans Dinarica, your legs have to be strong. Don't pack too much - every extra kilogram will weigh super heavy on the climbs.

Secondly, be ready for all possible weather scenarios. On Trans Dinarica, you can experience tropical heat waves, rapid thunderstorms, and snowfall high in the mountains. Keep an eye on the weather forecast and, no matter when you're cycling, pack both a rain jacket and good sunscreen.

*Last but not least: take your time. Cycling Trans Dinarica is much more fun when you slow down to hang out with the locals, learn about the culture, and explore the amazing cities along the way.*

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## PROJECT UPDATES

### Alpe Adria – Trans Dinarica Connection Routes

As part of *Deliverable D.2.2.1 – Alpe Adria–Trans Dinarica Trace Map*, the connecting routes between the Alpe-Adria Cycling Route and the Trans Dinarica Cycling Route have been successfully developed and are now available for viewing and download.



Project partner IFST GoodPlace led the establishment of these connections, linking the well-known and highly frequented Alpe-Adria Cycling Route—running between Salzburg (Austria) and Grado (Italy)—with the Trans Dinarica Cycling Route, which begins in the Julian Alps in Slovenia. These new links provide cyclists with seamless opportunities to extend their journeys across both routes.

To ensure flexibility and accessibility, several route alternatives have been proposed, traversing the Julian Alps in Slovenia and extending into neighbouring regions, including Kärnten/Koroška in Austria and Friuli Venezia Giulia/Furlanija Julijska krajina in Italy.

All routes are supported by detailed technical information, including distance, elevation gain, and surface type. Additionally, they highlight key points of interest such as accommodation, dining options, visitor information, and cultural and natural attractions.

Users of the Ride with GPS (RWGPS) app can also access and download the routes by scanning the QR code.



## THIRD MEETING OF TRANSDINARICA2 PROJECT PARTNERS

Partner Meeting – 24 March 2026



The third International Steering Group meeting of the TRANSDINARICA2 project took place in Zlatibor on 24 March 2026, hosted by PP6 OPČA. The event gathered 30 participants from 11 partner organisations and two associated strategic partners. Opening remarks were delivered by Dr. Katarina Polajnar Horvat (LP1 ZRC SAZU), Miroslav Ivanović (OPČA), and representatives of the Tourist Organisation of Zlatibor.

The meeting focused on key project activities and future development plans. PP4 MARA presented the territorial situation analysis for five pilot destinations: Zlatibor, Konjic, Knin, Žabljak, and Ilirska Bistrica. The analysis highlighted the destinations' strong natural and cultural assets, but also common challenges such as demographic decline, seasonal tourism, fragmented cycling infrastructure, limited data, and weak cooperation between sectors. Baseline findings will support future pilot actions and the transnational strategy.

Stakeholder survey results, presented by LP1 ZRC SAZU, showed strong interest in cooperation among tourism providers connected to cycling tourism. LP1 ZRC SAZU introduced pilot concepts aimed at improving local involvement, visitor experiences, and sustainable tourism development.

Additional sessions covered progress on linking the Trans Dinarica route with the Alpe Adria Ciclovia, development of TD HUBs, communication activities, and project management. Partners also reviewed reporting obligations and upcoming deadlines for the next project phase.



### Study Trip – 25 March 2026

On the second day, 25 March 2026, participants explored several cultural and natural attractions in and around Zlatibor, highlighting the region’s tourism potential and its importance along the Trans Dinarica route. The programme included a visit to the Stopić Cave, known for its unique limestone formations and underground river, as well as the open-air museum “Old Village” in Sirogojno, which preserves traditional architecture and cultural heritage of the Zlatibor region.

Participants also joined a guided walking tour of Zlatibor, gaining firsthand insight into the destination’s landscape, tourism infrastructure, and local attractions. The visit provided an opportunity to experience the natural and cultural values that the project aims to promote through sustainable and cycling tourism development.

### PP6 - OPČA – Municipality Čajetina

#### Tourism Strategy Development for the Municipality Čajetina

The strategy defines a coherent development framework aligned with the TRANSDINARICA2 project, national and local planning documents, and EU sustainable development policies. It envisions Čajetina/Zlatibor as a year-round mountain destination offering high-quality experiences while balancing tourism growth, quality of life, and environmental protection. Three strategic objectives guide the development: sustainable tourism management and space protection, diversification and improvement of tourism products with emphasis on active, cycling, wellness, sports, and congress tourism, and strengthening local identity through integration of tourism with the local economy.



## STAKEHOLDER WORKSHOPS IN PILOT AREAS

Stakeholder workshops in the five TRANSDINARICA2 pilot areas - Žabljak, Konjic, Ilirska Bistrica and Zlatibor - represent a key element of the project's participatory approach to sustainable tourism development. These workshops bring together local authorities, tourism stakeholders, and community representatives to exchange knowledge and identify priorities along the Trans Dinarica route. Through this collaborative process, the project ensures that strategies and pilot activities reflect local needs while aligning with broader regional objectives. By fostering dialogue and cooperation across destinations, the workshops contribute to building resilient, inclusive, and high-quality tourism experiences across the participating countries.



As part of the TRANSDINARICA2 project, the International Development Agency MARA, in partnership with ZRC SAZU and the Municipality of Žabljak, organized a stakeholder workshop for the local tourism sector to support the development of the Žabljak Municipal Tourism Development Strategy. The meeting aimed to actively involve key stakeholders in shaping a strategic framework that promotes sustainable tourism while safeguarding the exceptional natural value of Durmitor National Park, a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Participants contributed insights on balancing tourism growth with environmental protection and enhancing the overall quality and inclusivity of the destination's offer.

# Konjic, Bosnia and Herzegovina



Within the framework of the TRANSDINARICA2 project, a stakeholder workshop was held in Konjic to validate the findings and priorities identified in the Tourism Situation Analysis of the City of Konjic. The workshop gathered representatives of the public, private, and civil sectors involved in tourism development and destination management.

The workshop served as a platform for presenting the current tourism situation in Konjic and discussing the key challenges and development opportunities for the destination. Participants reviewed the results of the analysis and contributed to defining priorities and recommendations for sustainable tourism development.

Particular focus was placed on sustainable destination management, tourism pressures, diversification and improvement of tourism products, and the development of cycling tourism and bike-friendly infrastructure. Discussions also addressed the application of sustainable and green destination principles, with emphasis on strengthening local cooperation, improving visitor experiences, and enhancing the long-term sustainability of tourism development in Konjic.



# Ilirska Bistrica, Slovenia



A stakeholder workshop was held in the municipality of Ilirska Bistrica in cooperation with local representatives and tourism stakeholders as part of the preparation of the destination's tourism strategy. The workshop gathered participants from the tourism sector and related organisations to discuss key priorities and measures for future tourism development.

Discussions focused on stakeholder involvement in improving tourism infrastructure, sustainable mobility, events, cooperation among tourism providers, and the use of existing marketing and promotional channels. Particular emphasis was placed on strengthening cycling tourism as an important part of the destination's tourism offer.

Ilirska Bistrica is located along two recognised cycling routes – the Alpina Mediterranean route and the Trans Dinarica route, which connects eight countries between Slovenia and Serbia. As part of the TRANSDINARICA2 project, the municipality will establish one of the project's cycling hubs, further supporting its development as a sustainable and cycling-friendly destination.



# Zlatibor, Serbia



On 23 March 2026, a TRANSDINARICA2 workshop was held at the Innovation Business Centre Zlatibor, gathering project partners, local stakeholders, tourism experts, and institutional representatives to assess tourism in the Municipality of Čajetina.

The workshop enabled open dialogue, joint planning and knowledge exchange. Through a SWOT analysis, participants identified key strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats, and defined priorities for future initiatives.

Discussions focused on sustainable tourism, infrastructure, product development, promotion, and the preservation of natural and cultural resources, emphasizing the importance of regional and international cooperation. The results will support the final territorial analysis of Čajetina and guide future actions for long-term tourism development, economic growth, and SME support.

The workshop highlighted that sustainable tourism depends on cooperation, shared vision and active local participation, reinforcing Čajetina's commitment to responsible development and regional collaboration through TRANSDINARICA2.



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