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DANUBE WOOD(s)ROUTE

Regional Action Plan

Municipality Žepče

Activity 1.3

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Abbreviations

BiH	Bosnia and Herzegovina
DM	Danube Macro region
DWR	Danube Wood(s) Route
FBiH	Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina
EIS	Economic institute Sarajevo
CCI	Cultural and creative industry
CCT	Cultural and creative tourism
RAŽ	Razvojna agencija Žepče
ZDK	Zenica-doboj kanton

1. Introduction

The Regional Action Plan (RAP) for the municipality of Žepče was created as a key strategic document within the transnational project Danube Wood(s) Route (DW(s)R), with the aim of strengthening the synergy between the traditional wood processing industry, creative sectors and sustainable tourism. This plan represents the operational framework for the transformation of the rich forest wealth of the municipality into innovative products of cultural and creative tourism. RAP maintains the strategic orientation of DWR and RAŽ, as well as the views of the participants of the workshop held in January 2026. The action plan in accordance with the submitted methodology contains the following units or topics, namely:

- introduction
- basic information about RAŽ partner in the project
- natural values of the municipality of Žepče
- cultural values of the municipality of Žepče from the perspective of inclusion in the DWR, and based on an insight into the strategic documents and projects of the Municipality of Žepče and RAŽ, as partners in the project
- social circumstances of the municipality of Žepče from the perspective of the population or human capital and diaspora
- the economic circumstances of the municipality of Žepče from the perspective of its economic structure, labor market and diaspora engagement
- a summary of natural and cultural values in the context of the social and economic circumstances of the Municipality from the DWR perspective

challenges and opportunities for the development of the Municipality in the context of DWR, and from the perspective of the valorisation of natural and cultural values through the development of cultural and creative tourism (considering the design and production of souvenirs for the needs of the Municipality and the Danube Macro region area)

- strategic framework for the development of cultural and creative tourism based on the valorisation of natural and cultural values in the context of DWR
- two measures for the development of cultural and creative tourism, with a special focus on souvenirs, of the municipality of Žepče in the context of DWR with an indication of the relevance and nature of the measure, activities within the

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measure, potential for inclusion in DWR, participants, time frame, indicative costs and indicators of output and results
- implementation and monitoring plan
- potential financing opportunities
- conclusion
- sources

The regional action plan (RAP) serves as a roadmap for the Danube macro region, Project DW(s)R and the Žepča Development Agency (RAŽ).

RAP, in accordance with the methodology, will be the subject of a discussion with key participants, on which minutes and a report will be drawn up. Remarks, suggestions, and comments will be included in the final version of the RAP.

The Regional Action Plan is a vital tool for positioning protected areas Bijambare, Skakavac, Vrelo Bosne, Trebević, and Bentnaša, and maintains Bjelašnica and Igman on the Danube Wood Cultural Route in context education and research.

1.1. Development Agency Žepče project partner

The Development Agency of Žepče (RAŽ) is a key driver of local economic development in the municipality, established with the aim of providing professional support to entrepreneurs and managing development processes. The Municipal Council of Žepče adopted a decision on its establishment in 2009, and the agency was officially registered and started operating in 2010. The agency is 100% owned by the Municipality of Žepče. RAŽ operates through several specialized centers and departments, including Investor Center established in 2016 to support new and existing investors; and Business Competence Center established in 2018 with a focus on education and strengthening workforce skills. The agency is managed by a director, and its work is organized through sectors for project management, strategic planning, and services for entrepreneurs. (RAŽ, 2025) The goals and mission of RAŽ are Support to the economy (Provision of professional assistance to small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and potential investors), Strategic management (Coordination of the development and implementation of the Žepče Municipality Development Strategy and the creation of annual action plans and other sectoral strategies), Education/Training of new skills and knowledge for the labour market (Strengthening the capacity of local partners (public institutions, NGOs and companies). (RAŽ, 2025) RAŽ has implemented numerous projects financed by

international donors (EU, UNDP, USAID, GIZ etc.). The Agency strives to ensure the synergy of the efforts of the public, private and civil sectors of the Municipality of Žepče, on the one hand, and the support that comes from the regional, entity, state, and international environment in the form of various funds and projects, on the other hand. (RAŽ, 2025.)

2. Regional Context

The regional context of the action plan includes: first, basic information about the natural and cultural values of the Municipality of Žepče; second, the social and economic circumstances of the Municipality, third, resume, and fourth, challenges and opportunities. The basis for preparing the review is documents, strategies, projects and bases RAŽ and other relevant resources.

2.1. Natural and cultural values

2.1.1. Natural values

The following natural values of the Žepče municipality have been mapped: geo-traffic position, waters, forests, key natural sites, medicinal plants, agricultural land, etc. Proposal for inclusion in the DWR Danube Wood(s) Rout: Matinski vis, Smolin, Izletište na Previli, Jeleč planina, Lužnjak (Ljubatovići) (RAŽ, Prirodni resursi , 2025)

2.1.1.1. Geographical position

The favourable traffic position of the Žepče municipality ensures:

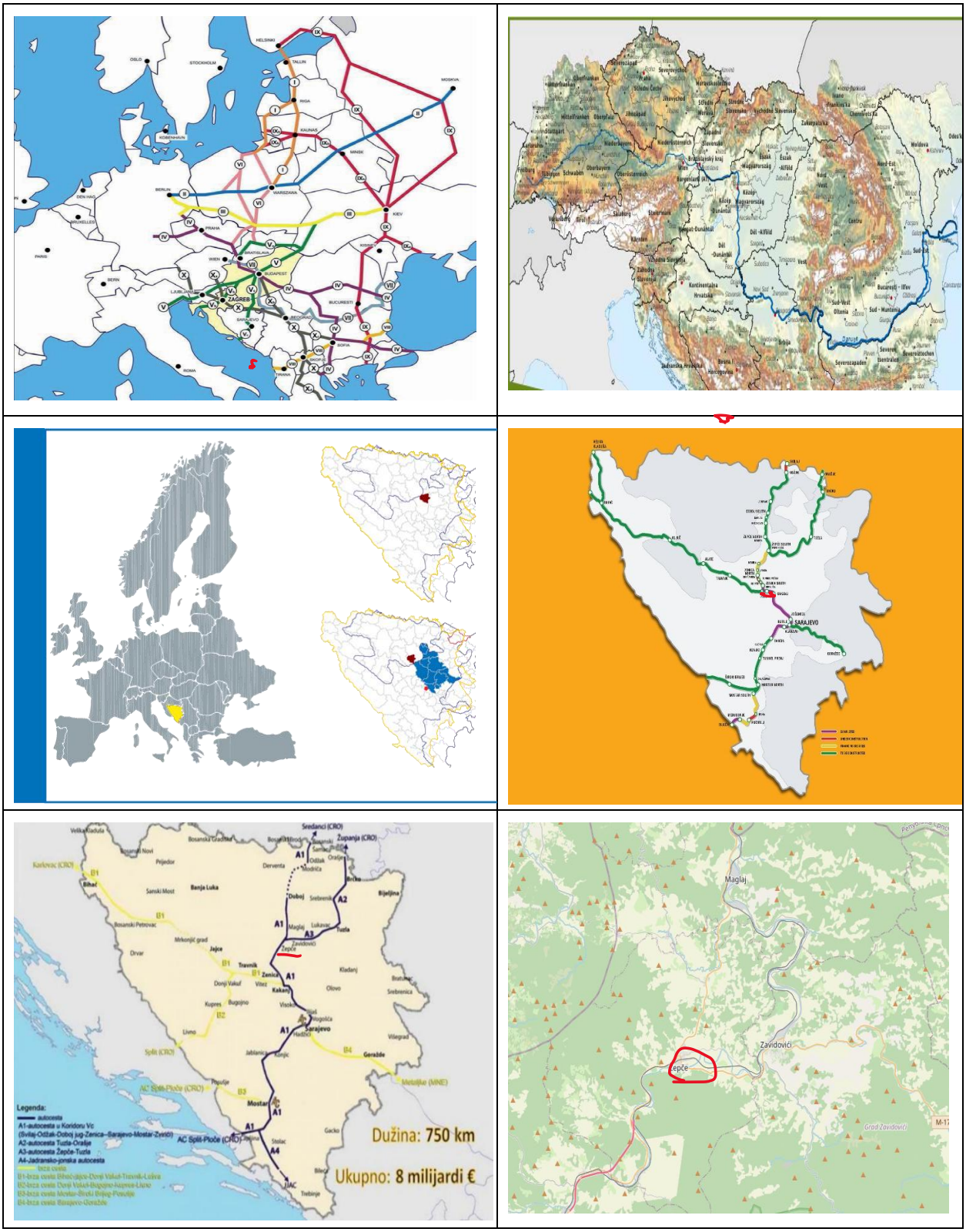
- Excellent traffic connections with important regional centers (Zenica 40 km, Doboj 53 km, Sarajevo 114 km, Banja Luka 160 km, Tuzla 76 km, Zagreb, Croatia/EU 385 km, Belgrade, Serbia 310 km).
- The M-17 Sarajevo-Zenica-Doboj-Bosanski Brod-Slavonski Brod (R. Croatia) main road passes through the Žepče municipality and the Ploče-Sarajevo-Šamac railway.
- The planned routes of the "Corridor Vc" highway (Ploče-Budapest port) connecting Central Europe with the

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- Adriatic Sea and the main road to Tuzla pass through the Žepče municipality and past the "Polja" Industrial Zone for a length of 20 km. (Centra za investitore, Prometna povezanost)

The geo-traffic position of the Municipality allows it to position itself as a relevant excursion destination for the population of the gravitational region, as a resting place on the north-south route for tourists.

Figure 1 Geo-traffic position of the Municipality of Žepče



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Source: https://invest.razepce.com/opci-podaci/prometna-povezanost/; https://danube-region.eu/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/EUSDR-SR.pdf, Vojniković, 2025

2.1.1.2. Water, springs drinking, acidic, mineral and other water

The Bosna River with its tributaries and 14 registered mineral water springs are a significant natural resource. (Kraljica spring, Ravna rijeka and Ograjina rivers, Jakovac and Bukovik springs). Research has been conducted on springs in Ponijevo, Brezovo Polje, Želeća. The local population drinks mineral water, so-called kiseljak, from three natural springs in Bistrica-Kiseljak, Preko and Divove vode. So far, kiseljaks have been discovered in Golubinja, Brezovo Polje, Orlovik, Bistrica-Vrankovac, Ponijevo, the village of Grozdići, etc. Based on the described springs and the results of chemical and other analyses, as well as the criteria that apply to mineral and acidic waters, the mentioned springs can be included in waters that have natural medicinal properties (Investor Center, Resources of the Municipality of Žepče, 2025) These springs represent a key resource for the potential development of health and excursion tourism in 2026. (RAŽ, 2025) (see the Gazette of The National Museum Bosnia and Herzegovina 1919, book 2; Bordanić, 2025) On the Via Dinarica map, it is pointed out that the Kiseljak spring is in the settlement of Bistrica, as one of the richest sources of mineral water. The most important sources and locations: Žepački kiseljak (Kiseljak): The most famous spring in the municipality. Analyses confirm high quality and medicinal properties. Spring in Orlovik Street: known for its iron-rich water. Ljeskovica (springs of thermal water 2017) potentially suitable for spa treatment/medicinal spring.

Figure 2 Water source



Figure 3 Continuity of water research Dr F. Katzer, 1919

Continuity of water research

Main Kiseljak near Žepče (E. Ludwig)

Iron kiseljaki in Orahovica

Thermal kiselica in Ljeskovica ...



See more: Towards the knowledge of mineral waters

In: Bulletin of the Earth Museum, book 2, pp236-241

https://www.scribd.com/doc/56352092/Glasnik-Zemaljskog-Muzeja-1919-Knjiga-2

Source: https://www.google.com/search?sca_esv=0128576e80ac6db7&rlz

Based on the analyses conducted, these waters are recommended for: Digestive problems (Similar to waters from other Bosnian kiseljaks, they are used to alleviate digestive system diseases); General strengthening of the body (Due to their rich mineral composition (especially iron), the waters are suitable for detoxification and strengthening immunity; Health tourism (The areas around the springs (Kiseljak, Bistrica) are considered ideal oases for relaxation and health tourism due to the combination of medicinal water and clean nature). The springs are mostly open to the public and free to use. The Municipality of Žepče, through strategic documents and cooperation with agencies, is striving to further protect springs and equip them with infrastructure so that they become the backbone of the tourist offer as these springs are recognised as a resource that should be further explored and managed in the future. (3C3NP, 2025) (Općina Žepče, Integrirana strategija razvoja Općine Žepče 2017-2027, 2018) (Općina Žepče, Prostorni plan Općine Žepče 2007-2027., 2007)

The importance of water, especially drinking, spring and medicinal water, is growing and soon water will be a precious resource for all activities, especially for cultural and creative tourism, health, and excursion tourism. The municipality has potential that could be

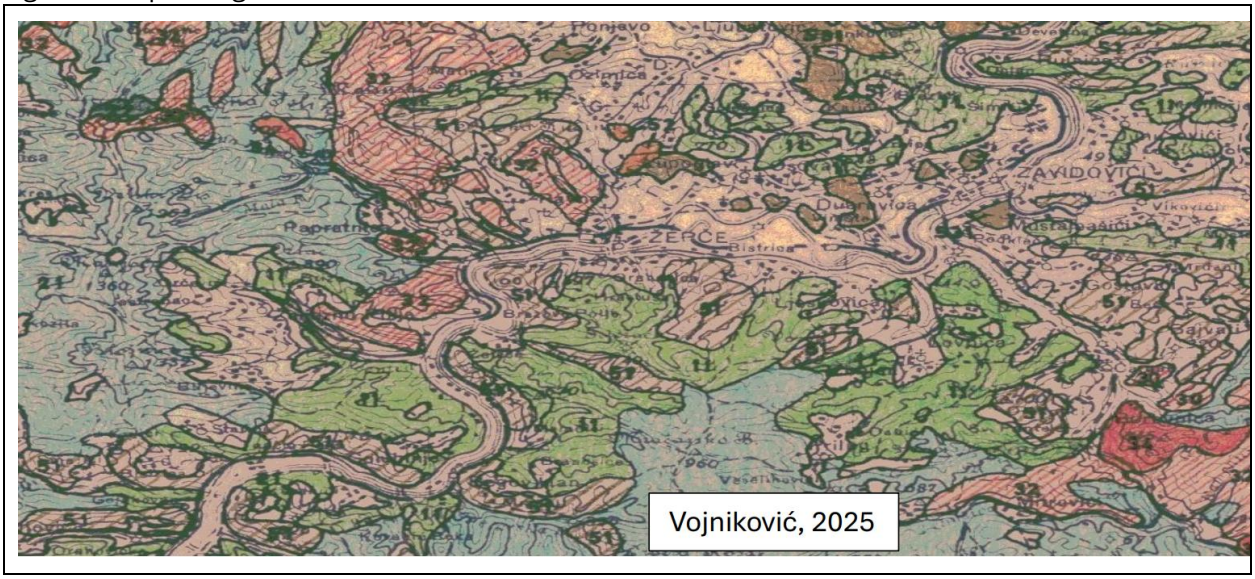
activated and valorised through cultural and creative tourism, health, excursion tourism, or the quality of life of the local population and excursionists.

2.1.1.3. Forests

According to the Ecological-vegetational rezoning of Bosnia and Herzegovina (Stefanović et al., 1983), the area of the municipality of Žepče belongs to the Zavidović-Teslić area. The Zavidović-Teslić area includes the basin of the middle course of Bosnia, as well as the Krivaja and Usora basins. In this area, there is a modified moderately continental climate, in which there is a strong influence of the Mediterranean climate in the period June-August. The central Bosnian ophiolitic zone stretches here, in which the relief is quite pronounced. It is made of serpentinized peridotite, eruptives and cherts, and limestones are less common. The soils are most often eutric cambisol and distric cambisol, pseudogley and calcomelanosol. The specific vegetation that characterizes this area are forests of black pine and black pine, Erico-Pinetum nigrae serpentinicum, black and white pine, Erico-Pinetea nigrae-sylvestris, sedge oak and white five-toed oak, Potentillo albae–Quercetum, sedge and sedge oak, Erico-Quercetum petraeae, and beech-fir forests at higher elevations.

In the basin of the Bosna River and its tributaries (Pepelarska River, Željeznica, Ograjina, Papratnica and Krajnjača) we find forests of sessile oak and common hornbeam, up to 700 m above sea level, and at altitudes of 700 - 1,200 m there is a beech belt, and above 1,200 m above sea level there is a forest of beech, fir and pine. (RAŽ, Prirodni resursi, 2025)

Figure 4 Map of vegetation forest



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The forest vegetation of this area is extremely diverse and is characterized by a mosaic of different habitat conditions, which is the result of the ophiolitic zone that dominates this terrain. Within these forests, various phytocenoses are present, with basiphilic pine forests and basiphilic sessile forests occurring most frequently. There are also acidophilic sessile forests, as well as beech and fir. The occurrence of spruce in higher habitats on peridotite-serpentine, which are influenced by colder climatic conditions, is interesting. In the lower parts of the area with predominantly beech and fir forests without spruce is interesting. In the hilly terrain along the Bosna Valley, sessile and hornbeam forests are characteristic, and secondary acidophilic beech forests are prominent. Within the preserved forest communities, the Yew (Taxus baccata), a strictly protected tree species, is sporadically present. In the lowland (lower) areas, there are remnants of pedunculate oak forests, and along rivers and streams, hygrophilic communities with alders, poplars and willows occur. (RAŽ, Natural Resources, 2025). Forest ecosystems of the Žepče municipality represent one of its most important natural resources, characterized by a high level of biodiversity and the presence of rare plant communities associated with the specific geological substrate of peridotite-serpentine. Key natural values of forests (RAŽ, Natural Resources, 2025)

Forest resource management in the municipality of Žepče is regulated by the Forest Law of the ZE-DO County No. 8/13. Forests in the area of the municipality of Žepče are managed by the "Forestry Company of the Zenica-Doboj Canton d.o.o. Zavidovići", RJ "Forestry Žepče". (Investment Center, 2025). Forest resources 62% of the total area of the municipality. (RAŽ, Natural Resources, 2025) The law defines what is meant by the term forest, and the basic objectives of forest management, which include the preservation of biological diversity, the protection of forest ecosystems and the sustainable use of forest resources. It is necessary to ensure obliged to ensure: Sustainable Forest management within its territory, the development and implementation of planning documents relating to forest resources, including forest policy and forest management plans, regular monitoring of the state of forest resources and the preparation of reports on the same. (Janko, Konsultacije , 2026) Forests of high conservation value (HCVF) in this economic area include forest complexes with special ecological significance, including habitats of rare and endangered species.

The municipality has forests that have the potential to be included in the Danube Wood(s) Route, as well as for valorisation through cultural and creative tourism, i.e. through the activities of the cultural and creative sector.

2.1.1.4. Proposal for inclusion in DWR

For the initial phase of the Danube Wood(s) Route project in the Žepče municipality, the following locations are proposed as key inclusion points to foster sustainable eco-tourism and forest heritage preservation:

Matinski Vis: As the area's highest peak and a prominent hiking destination, it offers panoramic views and a rich forest ecosystem. It is an ideal site for educational trails focusing on mountain biodiversity.

Smolin: Renowned for its untouched nature and rare flora, Smolin underscores the project's commitment to ecological conservation and the safeguarding of natural heritage.

Previla Picnic Area: A well-established recreational spot that bridges the gap between the local community and the natural world. It is perfectly suited for timber-based infrastructure, such as resting areas and interpretive signage.

Lužnjak in Ljubatovići: This site is particularly significant for its ancient pedunculate oak trees, directly aligning with the "Wood Route" theme by celebrating the deep cultural and biological heritage of local timber.

Why these sites excel for Phase One:

- Thematic Alignment: Each location promotes forests as a vital resource and a sustainable tourism asset.
- Geographical Synergy: Their proximity allows for a coherent regional route, whether circular or linear.
- Narrative Potential: They provide a canvas for storytelling, ranging from biological diversity at Smolin to the historical weight of the ancient oaks at Ljubatovići.
- This selection ensures a diverse offering—from active mountaineering to tranquil leisure—essential for attracting a broad range of visitors during the project's launch.
- To advance the Danube Wood(s) Route project, the strategy moves beyond simple trail marking to creating an immersive storytelling experience that bridges nature and culture.

The project emphasizes sustainable, low-impact development using local timber:

- Thematic Rest Areas: Installing "storytelling benches" and wooden kiosks at locations like Previla to serve as social hubs.

- Educational Signage: High-quality interpretive boards at Matinski Vis explaining the unique mountain biodiversity and endemic species.
- Observation Points: Eco-friendly wildlife towers or viewing platforms at Smolin to minimize human impact on rare habitats.
- Heritage Markers: Specific installations at Ljubatovići highlighting the botanical and cultural significance of the ancient pedunculate oak.

Interpretive Storytelling Themes

- The "Mystical Danube" storytelling approach uses wood as a central narrator:
- "Wood as a Witness of Life": Focusing on how forests have shaped local identity and craftsmanship in Žepče over centuries.
- Myths and Legends: Integrating local folklore and mysticism associated with the deep forests and ancient trees.
- The "Wooden Civilization": Narrating the traditional use of wood in local architecture and everyday life.

2.1.1.4.1. Matinski vis

Matinski vis (964mnh) is located about ten kilometres from the centre of the Žepče municipality. Access to the mountain is provided by road (2,2 km) from Vitlaci village. At the foot of the mountain are the settlements Papratnica, Ljubna, Ravne, Kopice, Čobe, Adže and Pire. On the top, there is a wooden chapel of St. Bernard, which is constantly open and serves as a shelter and resting place for mountaineers and visitors (3C3NP, 2025). The built road infrastructure, the relative proximity of the urban center and the existing tourist facilities make Matinski vis suitable for the development of excursion, recreational and ecotourism, with the necessary respect for the principles of nature protection and sustainable use of space.

Due to its values and significance, Matinski vis is included in the Via Dinarica. The Via Dinarica is a network of long-distance hiking trails in the Dinaric Alps (the White Trail, Blue Trail and Green Trail). Via Dinarica connects the countries Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Serbia, Kosovo, and Albania. The Via Dinarica project was launched in 2010 with the aim of promoting and developing tourism in the Western Balkans.

Frame 1 Accommodation and recreational infrastructure

At an altitude of 826 m above sea level (N 44°28'05", E 17°59'08", Mekote locality) a mountain house was built, which is supplied with electricity through solar panels, while water is supplied from its own water supply and a nearby spring. The home has a total of 30 beds in double, triple and quadruple rooms, which are heated during the winter period. Within the building there is an equipped kitchen, a hall with a capacity of about 50 people with a fireplace, as well as a spacious terrace and a grill (3C3NP, 2025). The area around the home is suitable for various forms of stay in nature, including excursions, camping, walks, cycling, winter activities, as well as the organization of sports and recreational facilities. There is a children's playground, an adrenaline park and a "zip-line" on the site, which further enriches the tourist offer (3C3NP, 2025). Well-marked hiking trails make it possible to tour the wider area of Matinski vis, from which there are viewpoints towards the surrounding mountains and elevations (Mahnjača, Smolin, Tajan, Vranica, Bjelašnica, Ravan planina, Ozren, Konjuh and Borje), as well as towards the settlements of Žepče, Maglaj, Zavidovići and Teslić. The guide service of the "Vis" Žepče Mountaineering Society is available to organized groups[1].

Geographical, hydlological and climatic characteristics

Geologically, Matinski vis belongs to the group of typical peridotite-serpentine mountains of the Dinarides, which has caused a specific relief structure and the development of characteristic habitats. The relief is mostly gently modelled, without extremely steep and impassable parts, except for slopes that gravitate to watercourses.

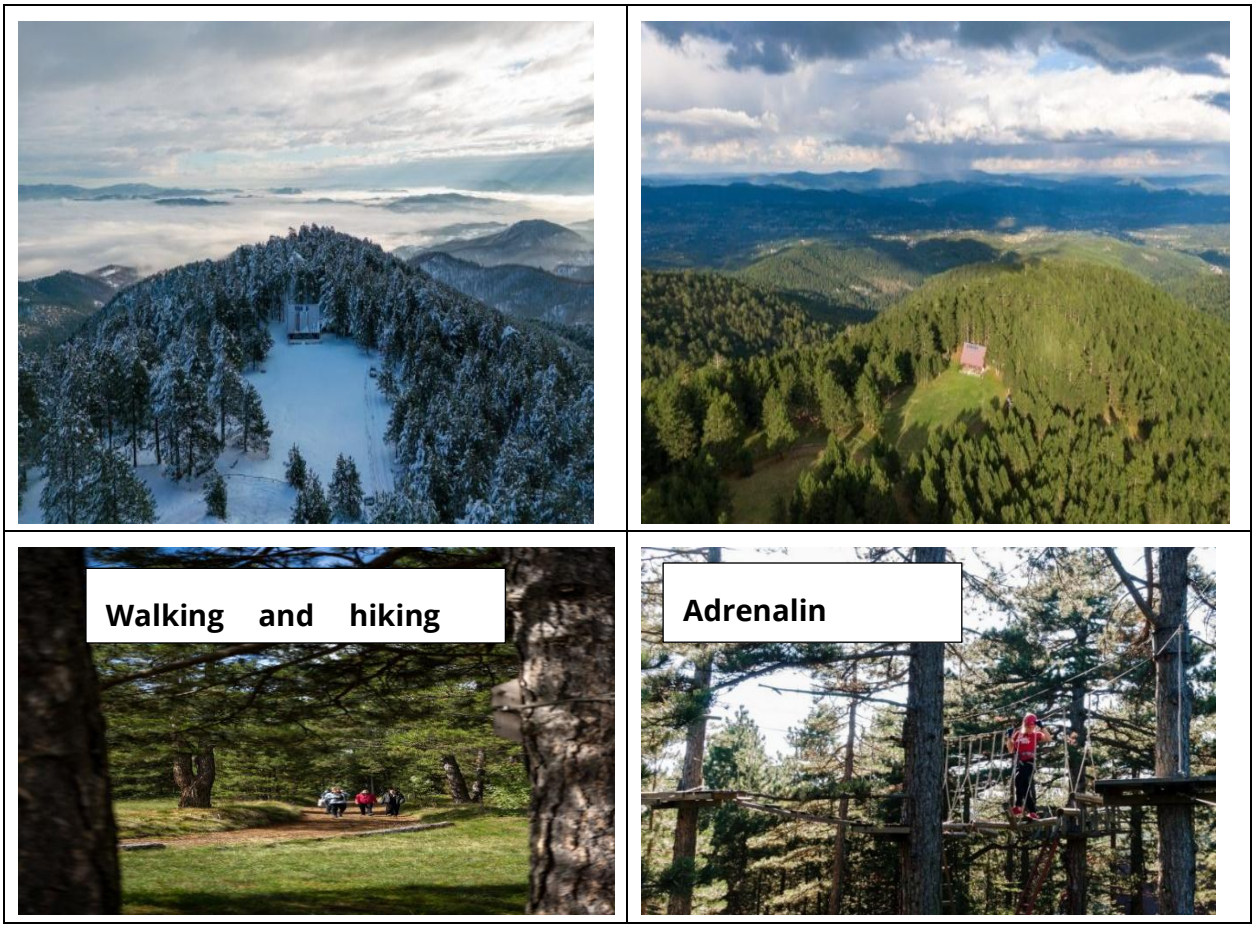
Hydrologically, the area is abundant in small streams and springs, the merging of which creates the Matinska rijeka and Bljuva rivers, with several small waterfalls. There are also four small lakes on the mountain, one of which has a permanent water regime. The water-impermeable magmatic substrate is conducive to the formation of springs, but earlier intensive deforestation led to the drying up of part of the springs, which further emphasizes the need to preserve the forest cover. The climate of Matinski vis is temperate continental, with an average temperature of around 23 °C in July and around 0 °C in January, and an annual rainfall of 800 to 900 mm. In higher parts, temperatures are 2–3 °C lower. The relief and stream valleys create pronounced microclimatic differences, which play an important role in the development of diverse flora.

[11] https://trail.viadinarica.com/bs/hut/planinarski-dom-matinski-vis/16050203/

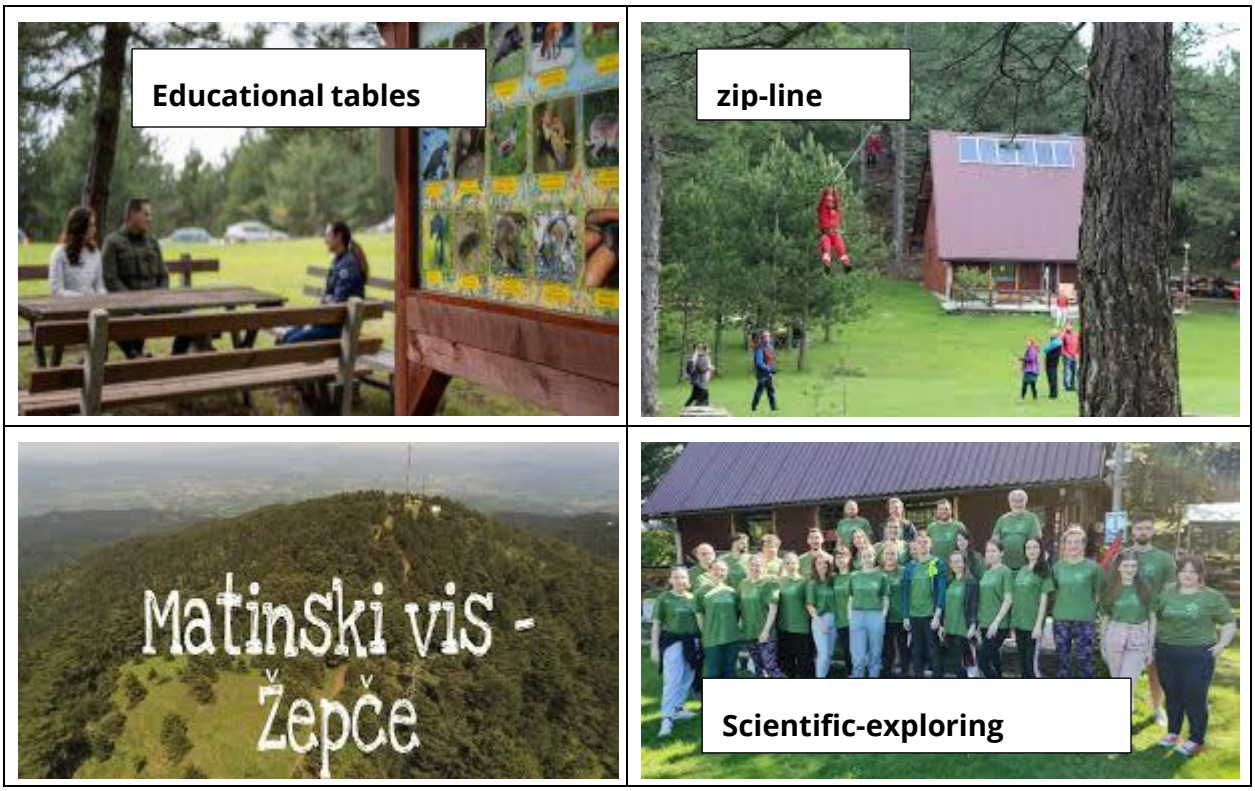
Flora and fauna

Geologically, Matinski vis belongs to the group of typical peridotite-serpentine mountains of the Dinarides, which has caused a specific relief structure and the development of characteristic habitats. The relief is mostly gently modeled, without extremely steep and impassable parts, except for slopes that gravitate to watercourses. Hydrologically, the area is abundant in small streams and springs, the merging of which creates the Matinska rijeka and Bljuva rivers, with several small waterfalls. There are also four small lakes on the mountain, one of which has a permanent water regime. The water-impermeable magmatic substrate is conducive to the formation of springs, but earlier intensive deforestation led to the drying up of part of the springs, which further emphasizes the need to preserve the forest cover. The climate of Matinski vis is temperate continental, with an average temperature of around 23 °C in July and around 0 °C in January, and an annual rainfall of 800 to 900 mm. In higher parts, temperatures are 2–3 °C lower. The relief and stream valleys create pronounced microclimatic differences, which play an important role in the development of diverse flora.

Figure 5 Matinski vis



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Source: 3C3NP, RAŽ 2025

2.1.1.4.2. Smolin

The locality of Smolin near Žepče represents a geomorphologically and ecologically specific entity within the framework of central Bosnia, whose natural characteristics are the result of a complex interaction of the geological substratum, relief relationships, pedological features and microclimate conditions. Together, these factors condition the development of specific habitats and the appearance of rare and endangered plant species, which gives this area a pronounced conservation significance.

From a geological point of view, the area of Smolina is characterized by the presence of carbonate rocks (predominantly limestone and dolomite), in some places in contact with serpentinites and silicate substrates in the wider area of Žepča. This lithological diversity results in pronounced edaphic heterogeneity, including shallow, skeletal, and often poorly developed soils, which are limited in depth but rich in mineral components. Rendzina and shallow brown soils dominate on carbonate substrates, while chemically specific soils with elevated magnesium and heavy metal content develop on serpentinites, which additionally selects plant communities.

Geomorphologically, Smolin is characterized by a broken relief, with a combination of gentle slopes, smaller valley extensions and marginal elevations. This terrain configuration is

conducive to the formation of various microhabitat niches, including sunny exposures, sheltered depressions and transitional zones between forest and open habitats. It is precisely this spatial heterogeneity that allows the coexistence of species with different ecological requirements in a relatively small area.

Ecologically, Smolin is in the temperate-continental climate zone, with pronounced microclimatic variations determined by the relief and vegetation cover. Locally, conditions of increased soil and air humidity are present, especially in lower parts and depressions, which is conducive to the development of mesophilic and hygrophilic plant species. At the same time, thermophilic and xerophilous communities develop in shallow and sunny habitats, which additionally contributes to the overall ecological diversity of the area.

The special ecological value of Smolina is represented by the combination of stable, long-term preserved habitats and low intensity of anthropogenic influences, which enabled the survival of sensitive and rare taxa, such as Viola beckiana and Orobanche salviae. These species are closely related to specific edaphic and microclimatic conditions and represent indicators of preservation of natural processes and habitat stability.

Viewed as a whole, the geological-ecological specificities of Smolin near Žepč make this area a micro-focus of biodiversity, the value of which derives from pronounced lithological diversity, relief heterogeneity and preserved microhabitat conditions. These characteristics justify the need for special treatment of Smolin within the framework of nature protection planning, with an emphasis on the preservation of the geological base, habitat integrity and natural dynamics of the ecosystem.

The Smolin locality represents a floristically sensitive and conservation important area, primarily due to the presence of rare and poorly researched plant taxa, whose range in Bosnia and Herzegovina is extremely limited. Although spatially relatively small, this locality is characterized by a specific combination of edaphic and microclimatic conditions, which enables the survival of plant species with narrow ecological amplitudes.

In the area of Smolin, an almost endangered (NT) species, Viola beck Iana Fiala, was recorded, whose habitats in the wider area of central Bosnia are subject to successional changes and anthropogenic pressures. Its presence indicates preserved ecological niches and relatively stable habitat conditions, but at the same time warns of the potential vulnerability of populations due to changes in the way the space is used.

The special importance of Smolina is also reflected in the presence of the parasitic plant Orobanche salviae F. Schultz ex Koch in Rohling, recorded as a form of bosniaca Beck, which is classified in the category of insufficient data (DD). This finding is of exceptional scientific value, as it points to the possibility of the existence of locally endemic or relict populations,

but also to the pronounced deficit of systematic floristic research in this area. The lack of reliable data on abundance, population dynamics and host species spectrum further emphasize the need for targeted research campaigns.

In the context of nature protection planning, Smolin can be seen as a potential micro-focus of floristic diversity, the preservation of which requires a preventive approach to management, limiting intensive interventions and establishing long-term monitoring. The inclusion of this locality in the regimes of special protection would contribute to the preservation of rare taxa and the improvement of knowledge about the floristic diversity of the central part of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Figure 6 Smolin





https://luportal.ba/istrazivanje-bioloske-raznolikosti-vrha-smolin-lokalna-zajednica-u-misiji-ocuvanja-prirode/





Interreg Danube Region
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DANUBE WOOD(S)ROUTE






Source: 3C3NP, RAŽ, 2025

2.1.1.4.3. Wild paradise – picnic area on Previla

It offers a fantastic view of the town of Žepče and the surrounding mountains, hiking trails, horse riding, paintball, bocce ball, barbecue, camping... Art colonies are also held at the picnic area. There are two paragliding airfields on the Orlovik hill that are used by local clubs. The forest road, suitable for mountain biking and off-road riding, leads over Bukovik hill all the way to the village of Lovnica. It passes through a hunting ground where there are hunting shelters and a hunting house under construction. The resort is located in Previla, at an altitude of 606 meters. It is 4500 meters away from the city center and is located at the coordinates N 44°24'33" E 18°01'13". A mostly paved access road leads to the picnic area through the settlements of Preko and Hrastuša. There is one built facility at the excursion site, but there are no accommodation facilities.

Figure 7 Picinic area on Previla





Source: 3C3NP, RAŽ 2025

2.1.1.4.4. Jeleč mountain – the mountain around which eagles and falcons fought

Jeleč Mountain (Jeleč planina) is a mountain located above Žepče, known for its nature and as a location for outdoor activities, mentioned in the context of socializing and spending time in the fresh air, and mentioned as a place where various sights and stories are located, such as monuments and sites with historical significance, and which is part of the wider Žepče area, known for its multiculturalism and natural beauty.

Frame 2 Key information about Jeleč maountain

Key information about Jeleč Planina: Location: Directly above the town of Žepče, offering views of the valley and the surrounding area. Significance: A popular destination for recreational enthusiasts, hikers, and nature lovers. Interesting facts: It is mentioned alongside historical and religious monuments such as that of St. Anthony and the Jewish Cemetery, which are located nearby, on old roads and locations with deep history. Activities: A place for walks, excursions and enjoying nature, and has hosted sporting events for local population.

Jeleč Mountain is a natural oasis is combining the beauty of the landscape with history and local stories. According to a folk song, eagles and falcons "fell" long ago, below Žepče on Jeleč Mountain, due to a dispute over ownership of the mountain ("Our mountain!" vs. "Our ancestral land!"), and the conflict was so fierce that they "clouded all the clear waters", and not even a pašinica with girls could calm them down, until the appearance of a fairy in the mountain. It was not a real, historical event, but a folk song that metaphorically describes conflicts in the region. Time: Not specified, but described as "since ancient times" and in the context of "pašinica" and "ancestry". Place: Jeleč Mountain, near Žepče (present-day Bosnia

and Herzegovina). Reason for the quarrel: Dispute over the mountain, the eagles considered it theirs, the falcons their ancestral land. Consequence: They clouded the clear waters, and their quarrels affected the environment. Solution (in the poem): Only the appearance of a fairy in the mountain brings peace, and the well of the pasture remains clean.

Table 1Lyrics of the song Eagles[2] and Falcons Quarrelled and values

Version 1	Version 2	Vaules
Above Žepče, on Jeleč-mountain. The eagles say: "It's our mountain!" And the falcons: "Our grandfather's land!" How they quarreled angrily, They muddied all the waters with mud. They couldn't find the pasha's well, The pasha's young daughter guards it. On her lap are two twin sons: One named Golden Sun, The other named Bright Moon.	Oh, they quarreled, aman, eagles and falcons, ah, more Žepča, aman, on the Jeleč mountain. Ah, the eagles say, aman, it's our mountain, ah, and the falcons, aman, our ancestral land. Ah, how, aman, they quarreled bitterly, ah, all the springs, aman, muddied in turn. Ah, they couldn't, aman, clear Kiseljaka, ah, it's guarded, aman, by nine maidens.	It is difficult to find more Bosnian, Sevdalian, older and more difficult songs than "Svadili se orli i sokoli". The song was written right in the center of Bosnia (Žepče, a small town on the left bank of Bosnia, 44 km from Zenica, former residence of Bosnian rulers, with the most beautiful springs of mineral water). the richness of the melody and all the decorations that require exceptional musicality, accurate intonation, a well-placed and clear voice, as well as superb breathing technique due to those long tones.

Source: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vY9ZhrUjQhc

[2] https://www.google.com/

2.1.1.4.5. Ljubatovići oak (Zelića oak)

The pedunculate oak (lat. Quercus robur) in Ljubatović is one of the symbols of the Novošeher region and few locals have not heard of the geographical designation “by the oak”, and the name “Zelića oak” has also become established. (3C3NP, 2025) Its diameter is over 2.5 meters and its height is over 30 meters, making it one of the largest in Bosnia and Herzegovina. It is estimated to be over 400 years old. (3C3NP, 2025) As such, it is the subject of research and a topic for lectures at forestry faculties throughout the region. Even the oldest locals remember it as being just as big. Despite its impressive age, the oak does not wither, but on the contrary continues to grow. In the 1950s, there was a 70 x 30 x 30 cm hollow in its trunk, into which a child could easily crawl. Today, the hollow has completely grown over. (3C3NP, 2025)

Figure 8 Ljubatovići oak (Zelića oak)





Source: https://www.facebook.com/100064403273203/posts/hrast-lu%C5%BEnjak-latquercus-robur-u-ljubatovi%C4%87u-jedan-od-simbola-novo%C5%A1eherskog-kraj/1137650316393799/

2.1.1.5. Medicinal herbs

For buying medicinal herbs, teas and herbal tinctures, the following options are best: Žepče City Market: The main place where local herbalists from the Mahnjača and Matinski vis mountains bring their harvested herbs (St. John's wort, thyme, yarrow). You can find out more about medicinal herbs and herbal preparations at DREN Trogrlić doo, herbalist Trogrlić, natural products „Goga“ Radunice, Directly at eco farms: OPG "HABAB" (Željezno Polje): They offer preparations based on medicinal herbs and forest fruits. Local beekeepers: Many beekeepers in Žepče also sell "honey mixtures" with medicinal herbs (e.g. for immunity or respiratory tract). The Development Agency Žepče organises the traditional agricultural fair “Days of Raspberry and Honey”, which takes place in Žepče at the beginning of July, with the aim of promoting local agricultural production, in particular

milling and beekeeping. The fair brings together producers, cooperatives, and processors, providing a platform for presenting local products, exchanging knowledge, and strengthening cooperation between farmers and institutions. It is a sales exhibition of local products where visitors can find rare herbal preparations, homemade balms, and syrups that are not available through regular retail channels. If you are looking for specific medicinal herbs from Mahnjaca, it is recommended to visit the Matinski vis Mountain Lodge on weekends, where the hosts and mountaineers often have supplies of teas picked on the mountain itself. Medicinal herbs can be of interest to hikers, tourists, the diaspora, and the local population.

2.1.1.6. Agricultural land

Of the total area of the Municipality, 4,489 ha is agricultural land. The first zone is located along the Bosna River valley at 219 meters above sea level. Fertile alluvial deluvial soils are extremely suitable for agricultural development and include Žepačko polje, Orahovičko polje, Bistričko polje, Ljeskovičko polje and Viniško polje. The second zone is extremely favorable for fruit plantations. The third zone is extremely favourable for the development of animal husbandry. Most of the agricultural land has not been chemically treated for more than 15 years and is suitable for starting ecological production. The area of the municipality of Žepče is favourable for fruit production, it has ideal conditions for growing wheat, corn, and vegetables. (Investor Center, 2025) The municipality has the potential to provide the population, diaspora, tourists and excursionists with healthy functional food and drinks of high nutritional value (vegetables, fruits, honey, milk, dairy products, meat, wine, fruit and vegetable products, fish, etc.). To a certain extent, the municipality could be self-sufficient (food sovereignty in a certain number of products). There is the possibility of consuming local products at farms and local restaurants and purchasing them directly at farms. In the future, products could receive a mark of origin and be packaged in (wooden or other suitable) packaging. The attractiveness of the product would be increased by the possibility of shopping 24/7, especially on Sundays and holidays, creative design, appropriate packaging (wood, no plastic/waste). Agricultural land is a prerequisite for the food sovereignty of the local population in certain products, as well as for a quality offer of nutritionally valuable and functional foods to excursionists and tourists. (shortest path from field to table). Possibility of consumption, but also shopping, on Sundays and holidays.

2.1.2. Cultural,historical, architectural values

The potential for the development of cultural and creative tourism in the Municipality of Žepče is cultural, historical, and architectural heritage, cultural institutions, civil sector, other contents, wood and cultural-historical and architectural heritage and media.

2.1.2.1. Cultural, historical and architectural heritage

RAŽ (2025) highlights cultural and historical monuments

- Stećci in the area of Pazarić and Novi Šeher localities
- Sites of Roman houses in Novi Šeher
- The Orthodox Church dedicated to the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary was built in 1894
- Jewish cemetery over 300 years old in the immediate vicinity of the city
- Ferhad Pasha's mosque, built in 1568, was built by Ferhadbeg, who was called Ferhad Pasha in Žepč
- Alibeg's mosque, built at the beginning of the 16th century, was built by Alibeg in Žepč at a place called Trzna. It was declared a national monument of Bosnia and Herzegovina (RAŽ, 2025)

The cultural and historical heritage of the Municipality of Žepče covers a very long historical period, includes many objects, historical events, personalities associated with their origin, construction, renovation, arrangement, use, cultural and religious customs, traditions, as well as stories/legends. There are interesting connections with historical figures from all areas and areas (Rome, Dubrovnik, Turkey, Austria-Hungary, etc.), of various professions (merchants, rulers, military leaders, architects, researchers, artists, writers, apothecaries, bakers, builders, ...). There are also stories about families, relationships in families, women, mothers, their status, progress, and disappearance. The above and much more related to the past is a potential for interpretation and valorisation through cultural and creative tourism. This presupposes real knowledge, continuous holistic research and (re)interpretation, and the involvement of all members of the local community. It is a process in which there are no irrelevant details (objects, materials, structures in space and society, construction techniques, people, culture of living, housing, nutrition, business, communication, story, legend, feelings). A creative local community and every individual in that community can valorise everything, every detail, through tourism and the cultural and creative industry.

The valorisation of cultural heritage through partnership with education, research, culture, design, construction, architecture, furnishing, crafts, trade, design, decoration, signage, film, media and other activities enables numerous direct, indirect, induced and synergistic effects on the local community in the direction of its refinement as a sustainable community of quality living and profitable business.

Below, some of the elements of cultural and historical heritage are presented in a basic.

Roman houses in Novi Šeher and the Roman road (20 AD) - Novi Šeher: A site with finds of Roman houses and traces of ancient settlement. (Dragicevic, 1896) In Beg's Han, the remains of Roman ceramics and coins were discovered, which confirms that this area was inhabited in antiquity.

In the Bosna Valley, near Zenica and Maglaj, traces of a Roman road have been found, which means that one of its branches probably passed through the Žepče region. The road was completed in 20 AD, connecting Salona with this area. Four possible roman routes of:

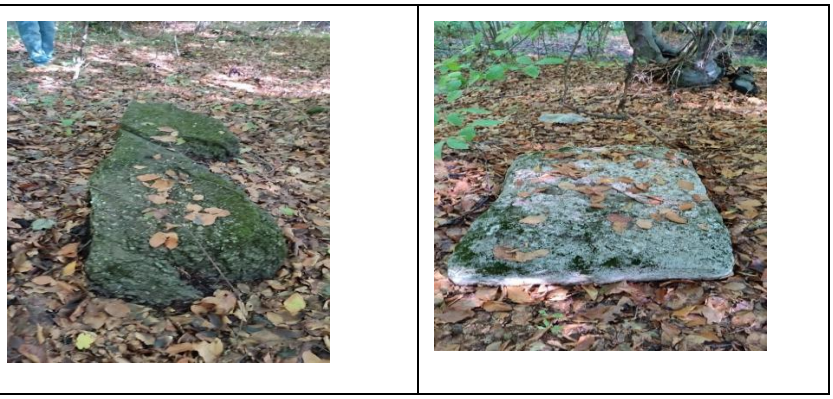
1. Salona – Livno – Kupreško polje – Šipovo – Jajce – Turbe – Travnik – Zenica – Žepče,

2. Salona – Livno – Kupreško polje – Bugojno – Mošunj – Zenica – Žepče,

3. Salona – Trilj – Duvno – Kupres – Bugojno – Mošunj – Zenica – Žepče,

4. Salona – Trilj – Duvno – Varvara – Gornji Vakuf – Mošunj – Zenica – Žepče.

Figure 9 Stećci



Source: https://www.ugf.ba/lokacije/stecci-pazaric/

In the village of Ljubatovići, medieval tombstones were found, indicating a Slavic and Christian presence as early as the 12th century. Older graves have also been found. There is a necropolis of stećak tombstones on Pazarić Hill. At least 10 sandstone and limestone stećak

tombstones without decorations are visible. [3] The largest stećak is of impressive dimensions, while the others are mostly stone slabs, largely damaged and difficult to recognize. [4] In any case, this location should be further investigated and protected.

In the 9th and 10th centuries, Christianity was already spreading in these areas, first through Frankish missionaries, and later through the Franciscans. The first churches were wooden, modest, but they existed – as a sign that there were life, piety, and community here.

Figure 10 Parish church



Source: https://www.ktabkbih.net/hr/vijesti/zepce-zupa-sv-antuna-padovanskog-u-brojkama-na-kraju-2024-godine/123881

580 ago, the first Catholic church in Žepče was built near the Žepče Tower by the Bosnian King Stjepan Tomaš (1446).

The oldest established Catholic parish is Osova.

The church was built in 1857, because it was only at that time that it was possible to get a building permit. It was built of stone. Due to the poor condition of the building, it was started in 1925. campaign for the construction of a new church. The project was created by Karlo Pařik (Paržik). Construction began in September 1928, and in December of the same year the church was under the roof. It was finally completed in 1930. Due to omissions in the construction of the church, repairs were made as early as 1936, and in the 1960s it had to be demolished. The new church (37x34 m) was built in 1968-71. year according to the project of M. Subotić, N. Muftić and S. Malkin. There are three bells on the bell tower. In recent years, the roof of the parish church was changed and the exterior decoration of the church was done. The presbytery of the church was designed by sculptor Lojzika Ulman, and the Stations of the Cross were created by painter Josip Bifel in 1983. (Dimitrijević, 2010)

[3] https://www.facebook.com/stareslikezepcaiokolice/posts/%

[4] https://www.ugf.ba/lokacije/stecci-pazaric/

The beautifully landscaped courtyard is adorned with a statue of the late missionary Fr. Vjeko Ćurić and the simple, but no less beautiful, Our Lady's Cave. The church with its 30-meter-high tower has an unusual appearance and stands out from most sacral buildings in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The church facade is adorned with a stained-glass window made of glass bricks that forms the image of Our Lady. By upgrading the original project, the parish office was connected to the church by an auxiliary building and a terrace, and they now form one compact unit. The presbytery was designed by sculptor Lojzika Ulman, and the Stations of the Cross were created in 1983 by painter Josip Bifel. It is located at: N 44°26' 49" E 18°04'38" at an altitude of 320 meters (3C3NP, 2025) (Dimitrijević, 2010)

There are three branch churches in the parish area, built according to the design of Eng. Fra B. Borić: in Vinište and in Goliješnica and Vrbica. All three are 176 square meters in size. A new one was built on the site of the original parish house from 1830 in 1866. This house survived for more than six decades. In 1930-31, a new one was built according to the design of Pařik, and the current one was built according to the design of Subotić in 1974. The parish hall was also built in the same year. From 1998 to 2001, the parish house was renovated and expanded, and the surroundings were landscaped. During the 19th and early 20th centuries, the parishes of Ponijevo, Radunice, Žepče and Zavidovići were founded from the Osova parish. Towards the end of Ottoman rule, the Franciscans founded and ran a primary school in Osova. The parish had 2,706 Catholics in 1877, 2,300 in 1935, and 4,050 in 1991 (1974: 3,730). The parish is made up of the settlements: Osova, Goliješnica, Lug, Lupoglav, Milišić, Ozimica, Tatarbudžak, Vinište and Vrbica.[5]

The first mention of Žepče dates back to 1458 in a charter of the Bosnian king Stjepan Tomaš dated 14 October 1458, which he issued to Stjepan Ratković. The name of the city is a derivative of the Latin Emtio (purchase, purchase). There are written documents that prove that the city of Žepče maintained trade relations with the Republic of Dubrovnik at the end of the 12th century. The history of Žepče is rich in many sites and traces of human settlements from the Neolithic, Bronze and Roman ages.

The history of the Parish of St. Anthony of Padua in Žepče is extremely rich. Parish registers of births, marriages and deaths have been preserved since 1750. Until 1766, some records were written in Bosnian script. Data collected during the blessing of families in 2024/2025 show that 3,826 members live in 1,422 families in the parish area.[6]

The Islamic community in Žepče has existed since 1458.

[5] https://www.bosnasrebrena.ba/zupe

[6] https://www.nedjelja.ba/hr/vijesti/bih/zupa-sv-ante-padovanskog-proslavila-svog-nebeskog-zastitnika/36773

Mahal Mosque in the Upper Mahala there is a typical mahal mosque, with a wooden minaret. It was built by a certain Mehmed Buzadži, as can be seen from the berat of 1816, who filled the position of imam in that mosque. The mosque has been renovated and repaired several times. The penultimate time was thoroughly reconstructed in 1989-1990, just before its greatest destruction.[7]

Mosque is in the settlement of Preko, on the right bank of the Bosna River. It is not known when it was built, but it is also placed in the 17th century. It was an ordinary mahal mosque with a wooden structure and a wooden minaret. In the early 1980s, due to the deterioration of the materials, the mosque was demolished, and a new one was built in its place from concrete elements and a concrete minaret. It also remained only until 1993. . According to available sources, the list of mosques in Žepče includes: Gornjomahalska mosque, Priječka mosque), Ferhatpaša mosque (Žepče) (built in 1568) and Alibegova mosque (renovated in 2017)

It is assumed that the main mosque of Ferhadija (1568) was built in Žepč 548 years ago. According to Hamdija Kreševljaković in 1567. The mosque is called Ferhat-pašina or Ferhadija because, according to Muvekit, it was built by the same Ferhat-bey who built Sarajevo's Ferhadija. In addition to this mosque, there was also a school and a madrasa, which was active until the Second World War. In its authentic form, it measured 20 x 9 m with outdoor sofas, had a four-sided roof and a wooden minaret. It kept this shape until 1977, when a new mosque was built from the ground up on the same site, which retained the concrete minaret built in 1946.

In front of the mihrab wall are two sarcophagi, which must be restored due to damage. It is not known who the people buried there are, but it is known that one of the two sarcophagi, on which the inscription "God is one and Muhammad is a prophet, year 1053/1643" is the oldest tombstone discovered in Bosnia and Herzegovina. It is located at: N 44°25'40" E 18°02'16" at an altitude of 284 meters. (3C3NP, 2025)

One of the most famous Bosnian alhamijado literary authors on the soil of Bosnia, Abdulvehab Ilhamija Žepčak, also worked as an imam in the Ferhat Pasha Mosque. Ilhamija Žepčak was also a professor in the madrasa. On the wall of the mosque are his words: "Do not seek reputation with your tongue. Guard the congregation. Guard your heart with your feet and consider the Quran with your head!" The Ferhat Pasha was renovated and opened

[7] The fourth mosque is in the settlement of Preko, on the right bank of the Bosna River. It is not known when it was built, but it is also placed in the 17th century. It was an ordinary neighborhood mosque with a wooden structure and a wooden minaret. In the early 1980s, due to the deterioration of the materials, the mosque was demolished, and in its place a new one was built from concrete elements and a concrete minaret. It too remained only until 1993..

in 2006. Two sarcophagi are located in front of the mihrab wall of the mosque. [8] (Gračić, 2024)

Figure 11 Ferhat Pasha Mosque and Trzanska Mosque

Ferhat Pasha Mosque	Trzanska Mosque
	

Source: https://dzamije.ba/info.php?id=trzanska-alibegova-dzamija-91

According to tradition, the mosque was built by Ali-bey as an expression of his wish that his followers would continue to talk about him after his death. He endowed the land and then built the mosque. It is in a village called Trzna, which is how it got its second name, Trzanska mosque. The second is the under-domed mosque in Žepč. It is famous for the oldest mosque and religious building in the municipality. In the mosque, weddings are regularly held, Juma, Eid and all prayers during the month of Ramadan are offered. The external dimensions of the main cube of the mosque are 12x12 meters, while the depth of the entrance is three meters, and it is decorated with a 27-meter-high minaret. A special characteristic of the mosque are the doors made of three types of wood: oak, linden and walnut, and they were made by local carpenter Drago Barbara. The family trade Hajdar-art from Zavidovići was in charge of decorating the mosque with carvings of a unique appearance. The minbera, or the place from which the Effendi gives a sermon/speech during Juma and Eid, was made of wood by the Fajić company from Mostar, which oversaw the entire construction. In the harem of the mosque there is a small cemetery with about twenty niches. Since 2009, the mosque, together with the harem, has been on the list of national monuments of Bosnia and Herzegovina (Džinić-Odobašić A. , 2021). It is located at the location: N 44°25'27'' E 18°02'11'' at an altitude of 287 meters. (3C3NP, 2025)[9].

[8] https://preporod.info/bs/article/48665/ferhat-pasina-dzamija-u-zepcu-cuvar-najstarijeg-nisana-pronadenog-u-bih

[9] https://medzlis-zepce.info/trzanska-dzamija-u-zepcu-dva-imena-i-nekoliko-prica-o-njenoj-izgradnji/

Trzna is a toponym that usually denotes a place where people gather. In some writings, this neighbourhood was also called trgoviste, which is probably related to trade and the people who lived there. [10]

When Eugene of Savoy passed through these areas, as he burned wherever he passed, so did Žepče. And all four mosques in Žepa (Tutnjić) perished with him. And in that year 1697, according to legend, somewhere in a corner, in the attic of the mosque, the boy Ali, who would later become known as Alija Žepčak, hid.

He joined the army of Ferhad Pasha Sokolović, which defeated Eugene of Savoy and managed to capture seven generals and the eldest son of Eugene of Savoy. Due to his merits in the battle of Ferhad Pasha, Sokolović appointed Alija Žepčak a bajraktar-bey and gave him the bey Žepačko polje.

The armies concluded a truce and when the defeated general Eugen Savoyski read the terms of the peace, he said: "I pay the war indemnity as usual, and I won't give a penny for my son! Do with him what you want!". The compensation was paid by the mother, the Countess of Savoy, who sold her estates in Styria and Hungary and bought her son (Tutnjić).

Part of the ransom, as he stated, Ferhad-paša Sokolović donated to the flag-bearer Ali-beg Žepčak, and he used that part to rebuild the Trzanska mosque, which was named Ali-beg's because of this act. He also built an inn for travelers, a building for the Great Madrasah, and a ferry on the Bosna River with free transportation (Tutnjić). [11] Since Ali-beg hid in the mosque building as a boy while Savoy burned Žepče, Effendi Tutnjić emphasizes that in this case, although he is mentioned as the builder of the mosque, he was not the one who built it but rather renovated it. Although they tried to obtain more information from the Majlis of the Islamic Community of Žepče that would testify to the earlier existence and establishment of the mosque, they were unsuccessful. There is no data that would testify to the existence and origin of the mosque before the dated time, states Tutnjić, who, among other things, says that according to unconfirmed data, this mosque could be one of the endowments of Sultan Sulejman. We even came to Istanbul, but we didn't manage to find anything except Alibey and Trzanska (Tutnjić). In August 1993, the Trzanska/Ali-beg mosque was mined and destroyed. After that, only the stone foundations remained of it. Considering that the mosque was included in the List of National Monuments in 2009 by the Commission to Preserve National Monuments of Bosnia and Herzegovina, it is also part of the plans and programs of all those who come to visit Žepče (Tutnjić).[12]

[10] https://medzlis-zepce.info/trzanska-dzamija-u-zepcu-dva-imena-i-nekoliko-prica-o-njenoj-izgradnji/

[11] https://medzlis-zepce.info/trzanska-dzamija-u-zepcu-dva-imena-i-nekoliko-prica-o-njenoj-izgradnji/

[12] https://medzlis-zepce.info/trzanska-dzamija-u-zepcu-dva-imena-i-nekoliko-prica-o-njenoj-izgradnji/

Jews moved to Žepče from Sarajevo and Travnik in 1879. The first Jews mentioned in Žepče were Samuel Moše and Isak Havijo, while the most famous families were the Altarac, Finci, Kabiljo, Levi, Maestro, Musafija, Pinto, Strauss and Weiler families. There were no poor or socially disadvantaged people among them. Most of them were craftsmen and merchants. Craftsmen were: tinsmiths, quilters, moulders, coachmen. Jews were seen in Bosniak, Serbian and Croatian societies and reading rooms, because they did not have their own. Until 1941, they had their own cemetery and synagogue. [13] They founded the cemetery in 1890. The synagogue was built in 1903 across from the current police station. On August 1, 1941, all Jews living in the Žepče district were rounded up (about 250 Jews; about 170 in Zavidovići, 20 in Begov Han, and 60 in Žepče). Five returned from the camps, six from exile. The Jews of Žepče perished in the Jasenovac and Stara Gradiška camps. (Rajener, Džinić-Odobašić 2021)

Figure 12 Jews in Žepče 1908/ 1918

	
Jewish engagement in Žepče 1908	Jews of Žepče after World War I

Žepče was then an autochthonous Sephardic community with all its traditional forms, customs and way of life. The Jewish cemetery dates from the end of the 19th century, more precisely from 1890. Mirijam Rajner's research tells about the locations of cemeteries, the way of treating and burying the dead, all the rituals related to burial, mourning and raising tombstones. The fact is that cemeteries were located fifty cubits from the nearest inhabited house because it was believed that dead bodies were a source of ritual impurity, but also that they were the abode of evil spirits or demons. The limited space of the cemetery often made it necessary to bury the dead one above the other, observing the rule of a distance of six feet between each layer of the grave. The same distance was left between two adjacent graves. Within the cemetery wall there were also certain rules on the arrangement of individual graves. A separate corner of the cemetery was intended for suicides, baptized Jews and members of the community whose past was considered unworthy of the central plots. Men and women often dug separately. These

[13] According to some sources, they did not have a synagogue.

strict rules were applied predominantly in communities of orthodox Jews, while conservatives and reformists were less rigorous.

The tombstone is of exceptional value and testifies to the gradual opening of Jewish communities to the non-Jewish environment and their inclusion in general cultural and artistic trends. This speaks of fostering community and togetherness as one of the postulates by which believers are guided. In the span of four centuries, starting from the 15th century until the end of the 19th century, the tombstone underwent several changes. In the past, the basic decorations were an epitaph written in Hebrew square letters, wall paintings of wooden synagogues, the introduction of anagrams, and all the way to a wealth of floral decoration (roses, tendrils, bowls and fruit baskets) complemented by animal decorations. An interesting fact is that images of animals often symbolize the name of the deceased; thus the lion signifies the name Leib, the fish is Fischer or Fischel, while the deer is Hirsch. Jewish gravestones are most often divided into Ashkenazi, usually rectangular slabs placed vertically, and Sephardic, where the slab is laid horizontally. According to the shape of the grave, but also through the relief itself, which can be a sarcophagus, a stone tent or a canopy with a tomb in the center, it is possible to discern the deceased's social position. (Rainer)

There are 42 tombstones in the form of sarcophagi in the Jewish cemetery in Žepč. They weave a special story about a way of life. It is a smaller cemetery located above the railway station, next to which the M-17 highway passes. The cemetery exists and bears witness to a time as the last trace of the "Jewishness of Žepa". An informal group of students and teachers of KŠC "Don Bosco" Žepče (2017) cleaned the Jewish cemetery and paid tribute to those who were buried. (Džinić-Odobašić A. , 2021). (Anon, 2010) (Kisić, 1984)

The Ponijevo chaplaincy was established in 1854 by separating from the Osova parish. The first director of the independent chaplaincy was the famous Bosnian Franciscan Grgo Martić (1822-1905). [14] He also found time for active literary work. The epic poem “The Avengers” was written during his chaplaincy service in Ponijevo. He planted an orchard and a vineyard and maintained his love of nature throughout his life.

[14] Franciscan, collector of folk songs, poet, Renaissance writer, cultural and political activist. In addition to his native Croatian, he spoke Latin, Italian, French, Turkish, Hungarian and German. As a parish priest in Sarajevo in 1856, he became the representative of the Franciscan province for relations with Turkey and consular authorities. He led the Franciscans who opposed the annexation of Bosnia and Herzegovina to Serbia and Montenegro and advocated Austro-Hungarian rule over the area. Fr. Grga Martić became one of the most trusted figures of the Austro-Hungarian authorities in Bosnia and Herzegovina, but when it became obvious that Vienna refused to unite these regions with Croatia, he, offended and disappointed, withdrew from political life. He is known for his wise patriotic saying from 1860: "It is difficult for a people without brotherly love, as for Bosnia without the land of Croatia."

Figure 13 Fra Grga Martić, Chapel Ponijevo





Source: https://hr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Grgo_Marti%C4%8

Every year on July 19, on the eve of St. Elijah, a procession takes place from this chapel to the parish church in Novi Šeher. It is located at N 44°29'35" E 18°01'47", at an altitude of 260 meters. (3C3NP, 2025)

161 years ago, in the municipality of Žepče, in the settlement of Ponijevo (around 1865), the satirical-polemical newspaper "Bismillah - In the name of God" was published. The editor was Fr. Franjo Momčinović, chaplain at Ponijevo near Novi Šeher.

Figure 14 The first satirical-polemical paper 1865 Ponijevo



Source: https://www.facebook.com/bosanskiprijatelj/photos/fra-franjo-mom

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146 years ago (1880) the Civic Reading Room and the State Elementary School were founded in Žepče. Different cultures have intertwined in the Žepče municipality over the centuries. The State Elementary School is now called the Žepče Elementary School and is celebrating its 145th anniversary.

The Orthodox Church of St. Paraskeva in Žepče was built 132 years ago (1894) and is dedicated to the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary. (Municipality of Žepče, Partnership with Diaspora, 2016) (3C3NP, 2025) The church was built in 1894 with voluntary contributions from the faithful. The towers were built in the Baroque style. It is dedicated to the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary. The feast day, Saint Paraskeva, is celebrated on October 27 every year. It is located at N 44°25'27'' E 18°01'51'', at an altitude of 273 meters. (3C3NP, 2025)

Figure 15 Orthodox Church of St. Paraskeva



Source: https://3c3np.ba/pravoslavna-crkva-u-zepcu/

In Žepče, already traditionally, in the Orthodox church, since 1894, when the Temple of the Holy Virgin was built and consecrated, every year on October 27. Parliament Day is celebrated, St. Paraskeva, or Holy Friday. After the service of the holy liturgy on St. On Fridays, the celebratory ceremony is held. After the religious ceremony, the faithful can enjoy folk festivities with live music, kolo and drinks.[15]

Saint Petka, (Saint Paraskeva, Pyatnitsa, Pyetka or the so-called Petka Trnovska), is a Christian saint who was born in the city of Epivat, which was located between Silimvria and Constantinople in Thrace in the middle of the tenth century. Among the Orthodox, she is a saint and a miracle worker, and the Church celebrated her on October 14 according to the old calendar, or October 27 according to the new calendar. This Paraskeva is usually called Saint Petka by the South Slavic peoples (Croats, Serbs, Macedonians, and Bulgarians), and Petka of Biograd in the coastal regions. She had a brother named Euthymius. Even as a little girl, while going to church with her mother, she heard the words of the Gospel: "Whoever wants to come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me" (Mk 8:34), and because of this she belonged to God with all her heart and when she was an adult she joined the group of pious devotees of God. After the death of her parents, Petka left her parental home and went to Constantinople, and then headed to the Jordan Desert. In her old age, she went to Epivat and lived for only two more years, during which time she prayed regularly and fasted often. She was buried in a grave separated from the city cemetery according to Christian custom. [16] Many healing springs are dedicated to Saint Petka. This miraculous and healing water heals all sick people who believe in God. [17]

The monument of St. Anthony is located on the old road to the village of Donje Ravne, below the railway line, and is about five hundred years old. This Christian monument was once located about five hundred meters away and was moved to its current location. The reason for this is of great ethical and moral importance; namely, the land on which it is now located was once the property of a Muslim whose child fell ill. The man, who wanted to save his child, made a vow to St. Anthony with the promise; if he recovered, he would donate part of the land for his monument. This is what happened, to everyone's good fortune[18].

In November 1926, the Ordinariate submitted a plan for a new parish apartment to the parish office in Radunci near Zavidovići. In this letter, the designer's name is not

[15] https://zepce.ba/foto-u-zepcu-proslavljena-sveta-petka-paraskeva/
[16] https://zepce.ba/foto-u-zepcu-proslavljena-sveta-petka-paraskeva/
[17] https://zepce.ba/foto-u-zepcu-proslavljena-sveta-petka-paraskeva/
[18] https://hr.wikipedia.org/wiki/%C5%BDep%C4%8De

mentioned, but from another document, in which Paržik claimed a fee for this project, it is concluded that he made these designs. However, in September 1928, the parish priest asked for permission to create a second project, because the previous one was too expensive, and from his description it is known that Paržik's project envisaged a ground floor and a first floor.206 No document was found that would link Karl Paržik with the creation of a second project for a parish apartment in Raduci. As for parish houses in Bukovica near Derventa and in Poljaci near Brčko, Paržik offered a project that did not suit rural parishes because of the high investment value. (Dimitrijević, 2010)

The old parish house from 1967 was in a bad condition, so the Serbian Orthodox Church Municipality of Žepče decided to start the construction of a new parish house. The restoration was completed in 2022 with the help of the Municipality of Žepče in the form of documentation and financial support.

Figure 16 Parish house Žepče



Source: https://zepce.ba/foto-zavrsena-izgradnja-novog-parohijskog-doma-u-zepcu/

The parish of Novi Šeher was created by separating from the parish of Osova in 1854 and has been keeping parish registers since then. For some time since that year, it existed as an independent chaplaincy. The parish was originally called Ponijevo, because the parish seat was in the town of the same name. In 1896, the parish seat was transferred to Novi Šeher and then the parish received its new, current name. In 1854, a parish house was built in Ponijevo, the lower part of which was used as a chapel for worship, since there was no church. After the transfer of the parish seat to Novi Šeher, preparations began for the construction of a church. However, this idea did not materialize for a long time. For another quarter of a century, worship was held in a modest wooden church. It was not until 1923-25 that a solid parish church was built. It was significantly expanded in the second half of the sixties. According to the design of dip. The church was thoroughly

renovated by architect Florijan Škunce from 1998 to 2001. Among the works of art, the painting of St. Elijah, the patron saint of the parish, painted in oil on canvas, is worth mentioning. The church contains stained glass windows by academic painter Vladimir Blažanović with motifs of the Stations of the Cross[19].

here is a branch church in Ozimica, built according to the plan of Eng. Fra B. Borić in 1983, while the bell tower was erected three years later, when the bell was also purchased[20]. Another branch church was built in Dubrava in 1990. There are also about ten chapels in the parish, some of which are wooden[21]. The parish house was built in 1905 and has been used until recent times. The current one was built in 1973-76 according to the design of Eng. Antolković[22].

Figure 17 Stations of the Cross outdoors in Bistrica



Source: https://www.nedjelja.ba/hr/vijesti/bih/krizni-put-na-otvorenom-u-zupi-bistrica-kod-zepca/32358

In the parish of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross in Bistrica near Žepče, the faithful, according to Lenten tradition, performed the Stations of the Cross from the parish church to the Field of Souls on Friday, March 1. Numerous faithful, including children and young people, readers and singers, led by the parish priest, prayed the "biblical" Stations of the Cross, singing the Stabat Mater and receiving the blessing "By the Sign of the Holy Cross" at the chapel on the Field of Souls. The young people prayed the Stations of the Cross and the choir sang and responded loudly with the people: "We worship You, Christ, and

[19]www.bosnasrebrenaarhiv.ba/samostani-i-zupe/samostansko-podrucje-kresevo/novi-seher.pdf

[20] https://www.bosnasrebrenaarhiv.ba/samostani-i-zupe/samostansko-podrucje-kresevo/novi-seher.pdf

[21] https://www.bosnasrebrena.ba/novi-seher-zupa-sv-ilije-proroka

[22] https://www.bosnasrebrenaarhiv.ba/samostani-i-zupe/samostansko-podrucje-kresevo/novi-seher.pdf

we bless You…" This is done every Friday until Easter, as well as on the 14 Fridays before the patron saint of the parish. In Bistrica near Žepče, the Stations of the Cross is performed every Friday during Lent. After Holy Mass, the faithful head from the parish church to the Field of Souls. On this 850 m long section, the former parish priest, Rev. Dominko Bilić, together with the parishioners, set up 14 Stations of the Cross. As early as 1900, the old parish church in Žepče was dedicated to the Finding of the Holy Cross, and so the new Žepče church in Bistrica has the Exaltation of the Holy Cross as its title. [23]

Near the village of Takale (Ozimica), a Cross of Peace was erected, calling for peace among people of good will throughout BH and beyond. It was supported by all people, regardless of religion or nationality, who recognized a more beautiful and peaceful future in this idea. The Cross of Peace is a gift to all people of good will so that they never forget that with faith in God and sincere human deeds they can build their lives, say the project's creators. (3C3NP, 2025)

The initiative came from Antun Ante Tomić and Mirko Milan Duspara, who live in Switzerland. Antun's father, Ante Tomić from Ozimica, donated the land for construction and was with this project with all his heart and soul until his death, in December 2011. His last wish was to see the cross in all its glory, which came true for him three days before his death. (3C3NP, 2025) At one time, the late Anto Tomić donated the second largest stone ball to the Žepče, which he found on his property and kept for 20 years. (3C3NP, 2025) The cross is made of a steel structure and covered with panel boards, is 25 meters high, and its span is 13 meters. It weighs about 15 tons and is made of four elements that are stacked on top of each other and connected into a whole. The cross is set in a concrete dome that contains about 9 tons of iron and 90 cubic meters of concrete. (3C3NP, 2025) The initiators of the project claim that it is the second largest steel cross in the former state. (3C3NP, 2025) On the plateau where the cross is located, there is also a monument to Austro-Hungarian and Croatian soldiers. (3C3NP, 2025) The plateau offers a view of the surrounding villages: Matina, Ljubatovići, Ponijevo, Lug and Goliješnica. (3C3NP, 2025) There is a facility near the cross that can be used during a visit for relaxation. The location does not have accommodation facilities or catering services, but as part of a tour of the cross, you can visit the OPG "Dropulja" in Matina, which offers homemade cured meat products from its own cultivation and is located about 1500 meters from the cross. N 44°28'46" E 18°02'39", at an altitude of 380 meters. (3C3NP, 2025)

[23] https://radiomarija.ba/index.php/vijesti/nase-obavijesti/8583-krizni-put-na-otvorenom-u-zupi-bistrica-kod-zepca

Cultural, historical, and architectural heritage has the potential to be valorised through cultural and creative tourism. At the same time, it shows the use of wood, types of wood, and craftsmanship over time.

2.1.2.2. Famous personalities, their traces in Žepče and recent artists

A basic overview of personalities associated with the Municipality (by birth, life, work, events, works, etc.) can be summarized as follows: in this context, there is potential for the promotion of cultural and creative tourism, as well as other activities within the cultural and creative industry sector. It is particularly important to note that there are a significant number of writers, painters, art historians and other artists in the Municipality and the diaspora.

King Stjepan Tomaš: The most significant name in the early history of Žepče. On October 14, 1458, he issued a charter "on Žepče", which is the first official mention of the name of the city. Stjepan Tomaš Kotromanić, also known as Stipan Tomaš Ostojić (1411–1461), the first legal Bosnian king from 1444 to 1461, because the Pope only recognized the royal title of the Bosnian ruler, which they had previously held self-proclaimed, in 1445. He is from the ruling house of Kotromanić. In his marriage to King Stjepan Tomaš, Queen Katarina gave birth to two children: Žigmund and Katarina. With his former wife Vojača, he had an older son, Stjepan Tomašević. King Stjepan Tomaš died suddenly in the summer of 1461, and his son Stjepan Tomašević immediately took over the kingdom. King Stjepan Tomaš: Bosnian king Reign 1443–1461. Predecessor Tvrtko II. Successor Stjepan Tomašević; Spouses; Vojača and Katarina Kosača-Kotromanić; Children: Stjepan Tomašević, Žigmund Tomašević, Katarina Tomašević; Dynasty Kotromanići; Parents: Father Stjepan Ostoja; Birth around 1411; Death 10 July 1461, Orihovac; Burial Bobovačka Chapel; Religion Christian, and from 1445 Catholic.[24]

Logotet[25] Stjepan Ratković: The charter of King Tomaš from 1458 was issued to him as a recognition of his faithful service. Serbian nobleman and the last great logotet of the Serbian Despotate. His court was in Draginovci, in the Lepenica area in Serbia, where he had his oldest estates. However, all were under the system of pronoja, in which a

[24] https://hr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stjepan_Toma%C5%A1_Kotromani%C4%87

[25]From the time of King Milutin (1282-1321) and his Byzantization of Serbia, the title of logothete appeared in it, and later, with the proclamation of the kingdom, logothetes also appeared in Bosnia, with the same role as in Serbia. They were at the head of the court office and were in charge of writing and issuing charters, and they also had certain roles related to the church. Logothet was a Byzantine title, which was used for high officials whose duties mainly related to finances, but this term was also used as the basis for the names of other high officials, who were at the head of certain logothezion departments. This title passed from Byzantium to the countries under its influence, including medieval Serbia, and later to Bosnia. In them, the logothet performed the role of the head of the court office, while in the Republic of Dubrovnik this term meant an ordinary scribe.

nobleman's ownership of his lands was conditional on his providing military support to the state, unlike hereditament, the other form of land ownership in medieval Serbia, which was complete and unconditional. Stefan Ratković aided the plans of Helena Palaeologan and King Stefan Tomaš, played a leading role in organizing the marriage of Tomaš's son to Maria, daughter of the late Despot Lazar, and the illegal seizure of power from Despot Stefan Branković that followed in 1459. He did this in exchange for confirmation of his privileges, raising his estates to hereditament status, as well as the allocation of 100 (one hundred) houses in Bosnia to be used by him, his family, and servants, and permission to leave the kingdom with his people and movable property if and when he wished. When Stefan Tomašević betrayed the hopes of the Serbian Despotate by surrendering Smederevo without a fight, Ratković seems to have gone with him to Bosnia. [26]

Eugene of Savoy (1663-1736) Austrian military leader who captured and burned the Žepa fortress in 1697 during the Great Turkish War. Eugene of Savoy was a prince, Austrian military leader and statesman. He was considered the greatest military leader of his time. He came from a minor line of the Savoy dynasty. Birth: 1663, Paris, France Death: 1736, Vienna, Austria Burial place: Vienna Cathedral, Vienna, Austria Siblings: Louis Thomas, Count of Soissons Parents: Eugene Maurice, Count of Soissons, Olympia Mancini, Countess of Soissons. He studied mathematics and natural sciences. He joined the Austrian army after an unsuccessful attempt to be recruited into the French army. Having distinguished himself in the wars against the Turks near Vienna, Pest and Belgrade and against the French in Piedmont, he became a general, and in 1693 a field marshal. From 1703 until his death he was president of the Court War Council. He was as capable a statesman and politician as he was a military leader, and had a great influence on the conduct of affairs in Austria in the first half of the 18th century.

Duda, daughter of the Žepče 45hemse, resists Eugene of Savoy Historical sources and folk lore do not mention the full name of the 45hemse (commander of the fort) who ruled Žepče during the attack by Eugene of Savoy in 1697, but he is primarily known as Duda's father. Here are key details about the defense and command at the time. When a large Habsburg army arrived before Žepče, the local 45hemse, realizing the superiority of the enemy, decided to abandon the fort and retreat with most of the defenders to the nearby hills to avoid a massacre. His daughter, known to the people as Duda, refused to leave the tower. According to legend, she took command of those who remained (or remained completely alone) and fired a cannon shot at the Austrian army, which was the signal for the beginning of the battle. This act of resistance led to a fierce attack by Eugene of Savoy

[26] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stefan_Ratkovi%C4%87

in which the city was burned, and Duda was killed defending the tower. Although history records Prince Eugene's campaign in his war diary, he often only states that he encountered resistance in individual fortresses without naming the Turkish commanders. In the case of Žepče, it is folk song and oral tradition that have preserved the memory of the "46hemse" and his daughter as symbols of the time. In Žepče, in 1697, the soldiers of Prince Eugene of Savoy were opposed by Duda, the daughter of the local 46hemse (commander of the fortress), according to folk tradition and historical records. Her courage remained recorded in local tradition as a rare example of female resistance.

The saying "Da di Duda ne pukuca (iz top)" or its variations refer to a key moment in the legend. The expression is used to emphasize a crucial moment or unexpected resistance that changes the course of events. In the context of the legend, this is the moment when everyone thought the city had fallen, but Duda herself fired a cannon from the tower. This act of defiance provoked the anger of Savoy, who ordered the storming and burning of the city. Duda died in those battles, and her sacrifice became a symbol of heroism and the unequal struggle for freedom. Today, her character represents the personification of the courage of Žepa women in local history and folklore.

Alibeg Mosque, an endowment of Sultan Suleiman. [27]

Ali-beg (builder or restorer) Ali-beg (Trzan) mosque: Built in the 17th century. or XVIII. century, is one of the oldest sacred buildings in the city. It was named after Ali-beg, who is connected with its construction or renovation. The boy Ali-bey hid in the mosque building while Savoy burned Žepče. Nothing was found about Alibeg even in Istanbul. Who was Ali Bey?

Franciscans: Historical sources mention the activities of Catholic orders that built monasteries and churches in the area (such as the Church of the Virgin Mary or earlier Pauline buildings).

Fra Vjeko Ćurić (1957–1998): The most famous contemporary Franciscan from the Žepče region (born in Lupoglav). He was a missionary in Rwanda, where he saved thousands of people during the 1994 genocide, which is why he is called the "African Oscar Schindler".

Historical presence: Žepče was first mentioned in 1458 in a charter of King Stjepan Tomaš, and the Franciscans have been key figures in literacy and religious life in the area since then

[27] rule 1520-1566

Today, in Žepče, in addition to the Franciscans who have historically been the most present, the Salesians (Salesians of Don Bosco) are also very active, having arrived in the city in 1995 and running the Catholic School Center "Don Bosco".

The Salesian[28] presence in Žepče began on September 13, 1995, and over three decades of activity, several key figures who shaped the Catholic School Center "Don Bosco" Žepče have stood out:

Founders of the mission (the first three) These three Salesians arrived in Žepče while the war was still ongoing, to lay the foundations of the future center: Don Ambrozije Matušić: (Deceased) Member of the first Salesian group in Žepče. Don Stjepan Matijević: One of the pioneers of Salesian work in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Don Tihomir Šutalo: Member of the first mission who later served as Provincial of the Croatian Salesian Province. In 2024 and 2025, he actively participated in celebrating the anniversaries of the Center's work.

Directors and prominent employees: Don Ivan Širić: Current director of the Catholic School Center "Don Bosco" Žepče (data from 2024 and 2025). Don Mirko Barbarić: Director of the Salesian community in Žepče (appointed in 2021). He has been in Žepče on two occasions, significantly contributing to the development of the community. Don Milan Ivančević: Long-time former director of the KŠC who led the Center during the celebration of its 25th anniversary (2020/2021) before leaving for service in Split.

Don Josip Stepan (1942–2026): An experienced Salesian who passed away in January 2026. Although he spent most of his career in Croatia (Rijeka, Zagreb), he was spiritually connected to the development of the Salesian charism throughout the province, including the mission in Žepče.

The Salesians in Žepče today run a Gymnasium and a Technical and Crafts School, a student dormitory, and a Salesian Oratory, which brings together hundreds of young people through a preventive education system. In September 2025, the 30th anniversary of their arrival in Bosnia and Herzegovina was solemnly celebrated.

Fra Grga Martić (1822–1905), a famous Franciscan, educator and writer, is directly connected to Žepče primarily through the heritage and institutions that bear his name,

[28] The Salesians or Society of St. Francis of Sales (Latin: Societas Sancti Francisci Salesii, also Salesians of Don Bosco) are a Roman Catholic ecclesiastical order of papal law founded on 18 December 1859 by St. John Bosco. The monks are called Salesians, and their basic mission (charism) is the Christian education of adolescents and young people, especially the poorest and abandoned. Over time, and especially in missions, their apostolic work has spread to all levels of society. The Salesians received a decree of commendation from the Holy See (provisional approval) in 1864, final approval in 1869, and final approval of the constitutions in 1874. Members of the society are called Salesians. The total number of Salesians in the world (2008) is 16,234; of these 15,632 are religious, 118 are bishops, cardinals and church dignitaries, and 484 are novices. The Salesians have 2,030 houses, they operate on all continents, in 129 countries, organized into 96 provinces, in 8 world regions.

while his main activities were related to Sarajevo and Kreševo. For a time, he did not work in Žepče. Franciscan Grgo Martić was the first director of the independent chaplaincy Ponijevo. He also found time for active literary work. The epic poem "The Avengers" was written during his chaplaincy service in Ponijevo. He planted an orchard and a vineyard and preserved his love of nature throughout his life. In the municipality of Žepče, the "Fra Grga Martić" Elementary School, located in Ozimica, is named after him. The school also has branch departments, such as the one in Globarica. As one of the most important Bosnian Franciscans of the 19th century, Martić is celebrated throughout Bosnia and Herzegovina as a symbol of the struggle for education and people's rights. His name in the Žepče region serves as a permanent reminder of the Franciscans' contribution to education and culture. Although he was born in Rastovača near Posušje and spent most of his life in a monastery in Kreševo, Martić was in constant contact as a politician and diplomat with representatives of Bosnian regions, including the area of central Bosnia to which Žepče gravitates.

Karlo Paržik (Karel Pařík), one of the most important architects in the history of Bosnia and Herzegovina, left his mark in Žepče by designing religious buildings that are still recognizable symbols of the city today. His key projects in Žepče include:

The Parish Church of St. Anthony of Padua: Paržik is the author of the design for this church, which was built in the late 19th and early 20th centuries (construction began around 1889). The church was designed in the spirit of historicism, with elements of neo-Gothic and neo-Renaissance, which was characteristic of his work in that period.

Old parish house: In addition to the church itself, Paržik often designed ancillary buildings, including parish palaces, creating harmonious architectural ensembles in the centers of Bosnian and Herzegovina's towns.

Karlo Paržik (1857–1942) was a Czech architect who worked in Sarajevo and Bosnia and Herzegovina for almost 60 years. In addition to Žepče, he designed some of the most important buildings in the country, such as the National Museum of Bosnia and Herzegovina, the City Hall (first phase), the Sharia Judicial School, and the Hotel Evropa in Sarajevo. His work in Žepče is part of a broader opus of sacral architecture with which he modernized the appearance of Bosnian towns during the Austro-Hungarian rule, introducing European architectural standards and styles.

Abdulvehab Ilhamija Žepčak (1773–1821): One of the most important poets of alhamijado literature (writing in the vernacular language in Arabic script). Known for his social criticism, he was executed in Žepče by order of Đelaludin Pasha. Theologian and al-Hamijad poet, sheikh of the Naqshbandi tariqa. Born in Žepče. Ilhamija's teacher was the son of the poet Abdullah Karahodža Ahmed (born in the 1730s). He studied mysticism

(Sufism) in the Fojnica tekke. He then entered the Naqshbandi dervish order and made a pilgrimage to Mecca, earning the title of hajji. In the last years of his life, he served as an imam and hatib (preacher and religious teacher) in the main Žepče mosque. He wrote under the strong influence of folk poetry. In terms of productivity, he is one of the representatives of Croatian al-Hamijad literature with the largest opus. Author of the collection of poems Dîwân in Croatian, Arabic and Turkish. Politically engaged in his poems. He unequivocally expressed his dissatisfaction with the general situation in the Ottoman Empire. His work consists of devotional and instructive poems (ilahije and kasid) in Croatian, Turkish and a few in Arabic. [29]

Politically rebellious, which cost him his life. Arrested for the views expressed in his poems. Arrested for fraud. The Bosnian vali, whom Ilhamija explicitly mentioned in some kasids, invited him to Travnik. The Bosnian vali, vizier Dželaleddin-paša (Seid Ali Dželal-paša) gave the order for Ilhamija's execution and some other prominent Bosnians. These were three bloody years of Dželal-paša's viziership, "many alaibegs, beys and captains innocently paid with their heads, that's a fact", the happier redeemed their lives by paying dearly, he equipped prominent captains in exile on the condition that no one was allowed to return to Bosnia, some saved 49hemselvess by fleeing Travnik or even leaving all of Bosnia, waiting for better times. He was executed in Travnik in the town fortress. He was buried on the outskirts of the city and a mausoleum was built at the place where h' was exe"uted. It was demolished in 1959 when his remains were transferred to an older mausoleum in the western part of Travnik. It is located behind the Catholic church, in Potur-mahala, inside the old Muslim cemetery. Even today, he is renowned as one of the greatest moral role models in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Karahodža, Abdulah (Karahodža-Žepčevic, Abdullah), poet (Žepče, early 18th century — Žepče, 1765). Towards the end of his life, he worked as a teacher in a madrasa and imam of the Ferhat-pasha mosque in Žepče. In 1740/41, he wrote a religious poem in the Bosnian language known as Bošnjakuša (Oriental Collection of the Archives of the Croatian Academy of Sciences and Arts in Zagreb); It consists of 14 tercets written in septem and octave, and in it he calls the faithful to prayer and criticizes blacksmiths, merchants, captains, cagers and urbanized peasants for not attending. His son Ahmed (born in the 1730s), the teacher of the poet Ilhamija, translated the poem into the Ikavian dialect and supplemented it (31 stanzas); an incomplete translation was found at the end of the 19th century, is kept in the Gazi Husrev-beg Library in Sarajevo, and is considered to be of no particular literary value[30].

[29] https://hr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ilhamija_%C5%BDep%C4%8Dak

[30] https://hr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ilhamija_%C5%BDep%C4%8Dak

Nedžad Ibrišimović (1940–2011): Nobel Prize candidate. He lost his father at the age of three and moved with his mother to Žepče, where he finished elementary school. After attending a technical school in Zenica for one year, in 1957 he moved to Sarajevo and attended the High School for Applied Arts, majoring in sculpture, graduating in 1961. After a year of teaching in Žepče, he enrolled in the study of philosophy in Sarajevo and graduated in 1977. Although born in Sarajevo, he spent his childhood and youth in Žepče, which he called his eternal inspiration and "the place he always returned to". He was an academic, winner of numerous awards and author of cult works such as the novel Vječnik I Ugursuz. He has been a member of the Association of Fine Artists of Bosnia and Herzegovina since 1982. From 1982 to 2000, he had ten solo exhibitions. He was the president of the Writers' Association of Bosnia and Herzegovina from 1993 to 2001, and from 1995 to 1998, the editor-in-chief of the literary magazine "Život". His works have been translated into Albanian, Czech, English, Turkish, French, Spanish, German and Italian. After the publication of his masterpiece Vječnik (2005), the Writers' Association of Bosnia and Herzegovina nominated him for the Nobel Prize. He died in Sarajevo in 2011 at the age of 71. He received the Dramatic Text Award at the Bled Festival for the television adaptation of Ugursuz (1970). Awards: Award of the Publishing Company "Svjetlost" for the novel Karabeg (1971) Award of the City of Sarajevo for the novel Ugursuz (1975) Award of the Publishing Company "Veselin Masleša" for the novel Braća I veziri (1989) Award of the Writers' Association of Bosnia and Herzegovina for the book Knjiga Adem Kahriman (1992) Award "Skender Kulenović" for Selected Works I – X (2004) Award of the Bosniak Cultural Community Preporod for the novel Vječnik (2005) Award of the Publishers and Booksellers' Association of Bosnia and Herzegovina for the novel Vječnik (2005) Award of the Hasan Kaimija for the novel Vječnik (2006) Works: House of Closed Doors (Sarajevo, 1964) "The Best Clockmaker in the World" (radio drama), 1967. "The Writer and His Creature" (radio drama), 1968. "The Golden Bridge" (radio drama), 1968. Ugursuz (Sarajevo, 1968) Karabeg (Sarajevo, 1971) Priče (Sarajevo, 1972) The voice that broke out about Egidi" (radio drama), 1974. Alive and dead (radio drama), 1978 Zmaj od Bosna (Sarajevo, 1980) Tsar si ove hevta (Sarajevo, 1980) Shamili tubakovi (Sarajevo, 1984) Freak and fairy (Sarajevo, 1986) Dramas (Sarajevo, 1988) House without a door and other stories (Sarajevo, 1989) Brothers and viziers (Sarajevo, 1989) Two days in Al-Akr (Sarajevo, 1989) Adem Kahriman's book written by Nedžad Ibrišimović Bosanc (Sarajevo, 1992) Traps of my soul (Sarajevo, 1994) Vječnik (Sarajevo, 2005) El-Hidro's book (Sarajevo, 2011).

2.1.2.2.1. Recent authors, writers, sculptors, painters, artists

Artists, cultural workers, writers, literary figures, painters, craftsmen, other individuals, and groups who create, perform and/or interpret art are a prerequisite for cultural and creative tourism, or the culture and creative industry sector (in the municipality and diaspora)

Magdalena Blažević: (Žepče, 1982), Croatian writer. A contemporary and multi-award-winning writer born in Žepče. Her prose, such as the story collection Svetkovina, often addresses life in central Bosnia. She published her first story collection, Svetkovina, in 2020. It was translated into German, and several stories translated into English were published in the anthology Take Six: Six Balkan Women Writers. She has won several short story awards: Bugojanska vaza (2018), Zija Dizdarević (2019), Ranko Marinković (2021, 2023). Her first novel, U kasno ljeto (Fraktura, 2022) has been translated into English, French, Catalan, Italian, Macedonian and Slovenian. The novel won the Tportal Literary Award for Best Croatian Novel in 2023. The second novel, Harvest Season (Fraktura, 2023) was translated into Catalan and was a finalist for the Tportal Award. All three books were finalists for the Fric Award. Her fourth book is a collection of short stories, The Wolf's House and Other Prose (Fraktura, 2025). Works: Svetkovina, a collection of stories (2020) In Late Summer, a novel (2022) Harvest Season, a novel (2023) The Wolf's House and Other Prose, a collection of short stories (2025).

Sabina Maličbegović: A local poet who has published several collections of poems and actively contributes to the promotion of culture through her work at the City Library. Director of the Žepče Public Library. Her poem 'Ptica stanarica' was published on the pages of the anthology Poetry Treasures: National Poetry Competition-Collection 2013 (London). This is the largest and most prestigious poetry competition that has been held in London since 1978. Every year, more than 5,000 poets apply to this competition, which a three-member jury reviews and evaluates, and after an exhaustive selection, the best are chosen to be published in the anthology. “Best Manager 2021” award for the overall contribution to the development of library activities in the ZE-DO Canton

Anto Marinčić (Čusto Brdo, Žepče, 1954) is a Croatian writer, journalist and politician from Bosnia and Herzegovina. He writes novels, poems, short stories, and plays. His poem "Jeka" was included in the book of the most beautiful lyrical poems based on the competition of the International Institute for Literature ERATO. His novel Rafaelo was the 5th most read novel in Croatia in October 2012 according to the Croatian Library Association. He collaborated on the script for the HRT documentary film Žepče on the Bosna River from 1996. He is the screenwriter of the Bosnian documentary film Imal' igdje ljepšeg kraja? Novels: On the Other Side, Ceres, Zagreb, 1997. At the Source of Passion,

HKD HUM, Mostar, 2005. Mujahedin's Wife, Matica hrvatstea, Split, 2007. (and screenplay for a feature film) Master of Illusions, vl. naklada, 2010. Rafaelo, Society of Croatian Writers of Herceg Bosna, Mostar, 2012. Short stories: Water and Stone, 2002. (published in "Croatian National Yearbook", 2005.) (3rd prize of HKD Napredak) A Place for a Teacher, (published in "Croatian National Yearbook", 2006.) When Will You Learn?, a collection of short stories, Society of Croatian Writers of Herceg Bosna, Mostar, 2009. Dramatic plays: Crisis Management, tragicomedy and screenplay for a film.

Ljerka Njerš (Begov Han, Žepče 1937) is a Croatian sculptor, painter and ceramist. She is also known as an illustrator, works as a lithographer, and is also involved in bookbinding. She has also created glass and mixed media paintings – created using computers and photography. She has recorded a ten-minute experimental film with original music by composer Matej Meštrović. She studied ceramics at the Zagreb School of Applied Arts in the class of Blanka Dužanec. She studied painting at the Zagreb Academy of Fine Arts, where she graduated in the class of Professor Marin Tartaglia. She is a participant in the auction of contemporary ceramics at the world-famous auction houses Cristie's and Bonham's. She has exhibited at over 80 solo and group exhibitions. A monograph about Ljerka Njerš was written by Croatian art historian Ivanka Reberski, as well as Croatian art critic Josip Depolo. Ljerka Njerš is important for Croatia because she spread the word about Croatian art abroad, especially in Great Britain. She is a member of HDLU and ULUPUH. Some of the awards she received: 1994: City of Zagreb Award for 1994 and the Order of the Croatian Daystar with the image of Marko Marulić. Accepted as a member of the International Academy of Sciences and Arts in Bosnia and Herzegovina (IANUBIH) in 2023. Opened a gallery in Žepče. See more on the official website of Ljerka Njerš https://ljerkanjers.com/

Mladen Ivešić: Academic painter and professor who promotes the city's art scene with his work and exhibitions (such as the exhibition "Žepče Artists").

Josip Ivandić: Academic painter and sculptor, regularly participates in cultural events and exhibitions in his hometown of Žepče.

Saša Zečević: A painter known for cycles such as 'The Blue Rider,' whose exhibitions have opened significant cultural events in Žepče. He graduated in 2002 from the Academy of Fine Arts in Široki Brijeg, Department of Painting, in the class of Prof. Ante Kajinić. He has been a long-time art teacher in primary schools in Ozimica, Novi Šeher, and Žepče. He has exhibited multiple times in collective exhibitions both in the country and abroad. He is the author of several public works in sacred spaces. He has participated in several art colonies. So far, he has had three solo exhibitions. A distinctive feature of this artist is that, for example, he made more than 100 versions of the depiction of St. George as a

horse, and he mentioned that he did the same number for St. Francis. He mainly worked using oil and acrylic techniques on canvas.

Anton Bekić (1968, Bistrica, Žepče): Self-taught artist known for his specific technique of making paintings in wood (marquetry and carving, woodcut), with an opus of over 300 works. Anton is engaged in the production of handicrafts, the woodcut technique. Woodcut (engraving, engraves, engraving) in fine arts refers to the technique of carving or making a relief of a certain image in a hard and most often flat surface. Anton is a self-taught artist, and from 2006 to the present day he has created a total of 310 paintings with various themes and motifs, most often religious and hunting.

Šefik Zvekić was born in 1952 in Željezno Polje. He spent his entire working life as a teacher in education, and today, in retirement, he works as an independent artist. Zvekić studied art history in Osijek, and to date he has painted over 500 paintings. (The exhibition is also for sale)

Academic painters and sculptors Anđela Nikolić Vilić, Josip Ivandić, Kristina Ćavar, Slađana Matić-Trstenjak, Josip Ivešić, etc.

There are also other engineers, architects, builders, artists, painters, craftsmen who participated in the construction and/or restoration of the cultural, historical, and architectural heritage of Žepče.

The Citizens' Association Society of Visual Artists “Mrlja” in Žepče is actively engaged in visual arts. It was founded in 2022, and its members have initiated various activities including organizing art workshops and exhibitions of artists' works.

Famous personalities of Žepče are also businessmen, professors, doctors, artists, bakers, winemakers, herbalists, and others who live and work in Žepče and/or are part of the Žepče diaspora. They, their life, work, works should be manageable in the Municipality.

2.1.2.3. Mahale culture of housing and living

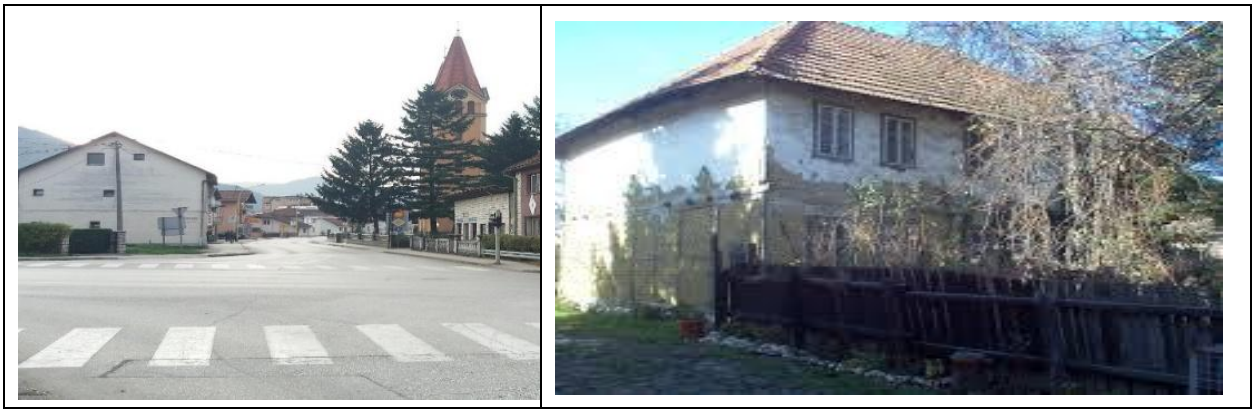
Mahala, housing and living culture, architectural heritage, tangible and intangible heritage have a special place in the profiling of the Municipality as an attractive destination for the local population, diaspora, excursionists, and tourists.

Mahale are still the symbol of the Žepče. The biggest rivalry was between Trzanska and Gornja Mahala, first by wealth, and later by who gave more engineers, doctors, beautiful girls and boys. Just as they nested hundreds of years ago on the banks of the Bosna and Krajnjača rivers, the Žepa mahallas, which form the urban core of Žepča, still stand today. Berek, Trzna, Gornja Mahala, Mala ulica, Krajnjača, Varoš and Preko have been symbols

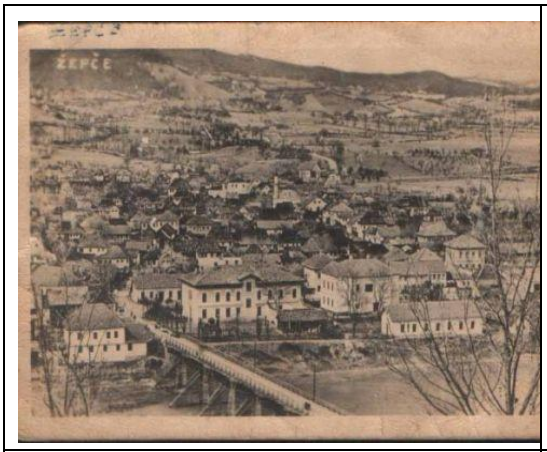
of Žepačka bazaar for decades. (R.A., 2019) Over time, they were rebuilt, the names of the streets were changed, but all these waves survived. (R.A., 2019) Old Bosnian houses and courtyards studded next to each other, after the unfortunate events of war, arson and demolition, were replaced by new, modern, but still beautiful houses. (R.A., 2019) Each of them is characterized by certain surnames and family names and the trades they practiced. (R.A., 2019) Each mahal had its own craftsmen and artisans, tailors, barbers, merchants, bakers, blacksmiths.

Two bridges over the Bosna River connect the čaršija with the Prečka mahala. Packed and studded with houses around the Prečka mosque, it is known for its kiseljak, which is also sung about in folk songs. Eagles and falcons fought at the foot of Žepče on Jeleč mountain. They muddied all the waters, but the clear kiseljak could not, it is guarded by nine maidens... - these are the words sung about the Prečka kiseljak, above which rises the symbol of Žepče, the Orlovik hill[31]. In each mahala there is one place of worship, sometimes two, so the people of Žepče can boast of the coexistence and intertwining of cultures and religions. (R.A., 2019) The Trzna mahala is a toponym that usually denotes a place of gathering of people. Sometimes in some writings this mahala was also called the marketplace, which probably has some roots in trade and the people who lived there (R.A., 2019)

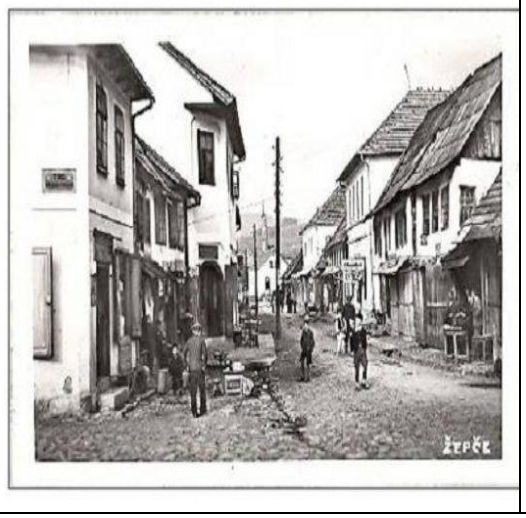
Figure 18 Old pictures of Žepče - mahale



[31] Damir Ovčina Brdo orlova https://impruva.ba/index.php/knjizevnost/brdo-orlova







1943



Source: https://www.google.com/search?

2.1.2.4. A wood and cultural, historical and architectural heritage

Due to the abundance of forests, the culture of living in Žepče is inseparable from the use of wood in building and furnishing the home. This is confirmed by the modern development of the wood industry (furniture, parquet), which has its roots in a centuries-old craft tradition. The presence of wood in the cultural, historical and architectural heritage of the Žepče municipality represents an inextricable link between natural resources and the identity of its inhabitants. Wood was not just a material, but the foundation of architectural expression and everyday life throughout the centuries.

Wood as the foundation of traditional architecture - During the Ottoman period, the housing culture in Žepče was based on the bondruk system (a wooden structure filled with bricks or stone).

Čardaci and doksati: Traditional houses had upper floors made of wood, with protruding windows (doksati) that provided a view of the street, which is a characteristic element of the Bosnian town house present in the old cores of Žepče and Novi Šeher.

Shimla and kaplam: Roofs were traditionally covered with wooden planks (shimla), while ceilings (shishe) were often richly decorated with carvings, reflecting the social status of the owner.

Figure 19 Wood in residential construction



Sacred and memorial architecture - Wood plays a significant role in the interior design of religious buildings under protection: Mosque interiors: In the Trzanska (Ali-beg) Mosque and the Ferhat-pasha Mosque, wood is the primary material for the construction of mimbers, mahfils and decorative ceilings. The handwork in wood testifies to the high level of craftsmanship of the Žepači masters. Church furniture: In Catholic and Orthodox churches in the municipality, wood was used to make altars, iconostases and benches, combining local materials with European artistic styles of the 19th century.

Figure 21 Wood in the sacred architecture of Žepče and crafts



The importance of wood is also reflected in the preservation of old crafts. Through events such as the "Cultural Heritage Colony" (August 2025), the importance of educating young people about wood as a material that has shaped the vision of the city and the countryside is emphasized. Wood in Žepče represents a "living heritage" — it combines medieval stećci (whose wooden predecessors have been lost), Ottoman residential

architecture and modern industry that today makes the municipality recognizable in Europe. The cultural values of the forests of the Žepče municipality are closely intertwined with the history and tradition of the local population, primarily through the tradition of forestry, the wood industry and the intangible heritage related to life in forest areas.

Tradition and economic importance Forestry and wood processing: Forests have been the foundation of the local economy for centuries. The tradition of logging, wood processing and the wood industry is deeply rooted in the identity of the municipality.

The forests of Žepče are, therefore, primarily culturally valuable due to their long-term function as a resource that has shaped the life and work of the local community, and as a space of tradition and contemporary ecological awareness. In the municipality of Žepče, wood is not only a natural resource, but also a fundamental element of tangible and intangible cultural heritage. It connects the centuries-old tradition of construction with the modern identity of the municipality as a center of the wood industry.

2.1.2.5. Stories and legends

There is many stories and legends with potential relevant for cultural and creative tourism of Žepče.

Storytelling is vital because it transforms raw facts into emotional experiences, providing authenticity and a distinct identity to any destination. Why it matters for Tourism? Creating "Sticky" Memories: Stories link emotions to events, helping visitors remember the destination vividly and share their experiences with others. Competitive Edge: In the "experience economy," a story is the tool that differentiates one location from another, giving products and services a unique identity. Enhanced Satisfaction: Through narratives, tourists gain context and meaning behind historical events, deepening their understanding and overall satisfaction. Sustainability & Community: Authentic local stories encourage responsible tourism and empower local communities as the rightful guardians of their heritage.

UNESCO recognizes storytelling as the cornerstone of Intangible Cultural Heritage.Preserving Tradition: Oral traditions are the primary mechanism by which knowledge, customs, and values are passed down through generations. Living Heritage: Stories are not just "products"; they are living processes that provide communities with a sense of identity and continuity. Cultural Diversity: In the age of globalization, stories help preserve unique languages and customs, fostering intercultural dialogue and mutual respect. Protection Against Loss: Documenting and recording oral narratives is crucial for saving traditions that are at risk of disappearing. For deeper insights into how heritage is

managed, you can explore the UNESCO World Heritage Convention guidelines on cultural significance.

How to utilize these stories in tourism?

Digital Storytelling: Implementing QR codes at heritage sites that lead to audio recordings of original legends or local testimonies.

Interactive Workshops: Moving beyond passive observation by allowing tourists to "tell the story" themselves through dance, song, or traditional cooking.

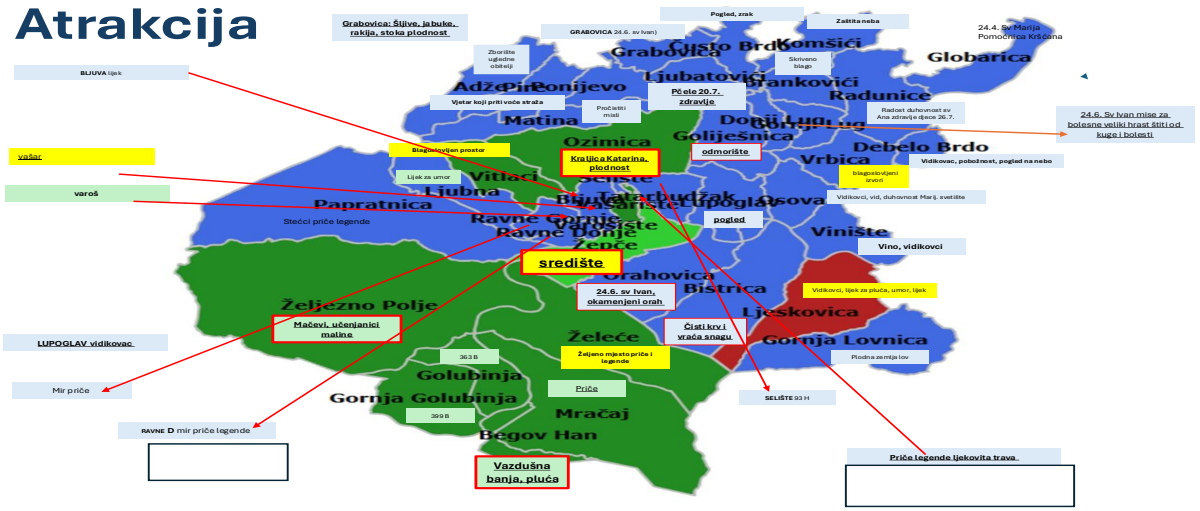
Thematic Routes: Linking multiple UNESCO points into a single, cohesive narrative about a region's identity.

To create a winning storytelling route, we must shift the focus from "see this" to "experience this" (consulting the Interpret Europe guidelines for heritage interpretation).

Figure 20 Stories and legends



Figure 21 Attractions with potential for cultural and creative tourism

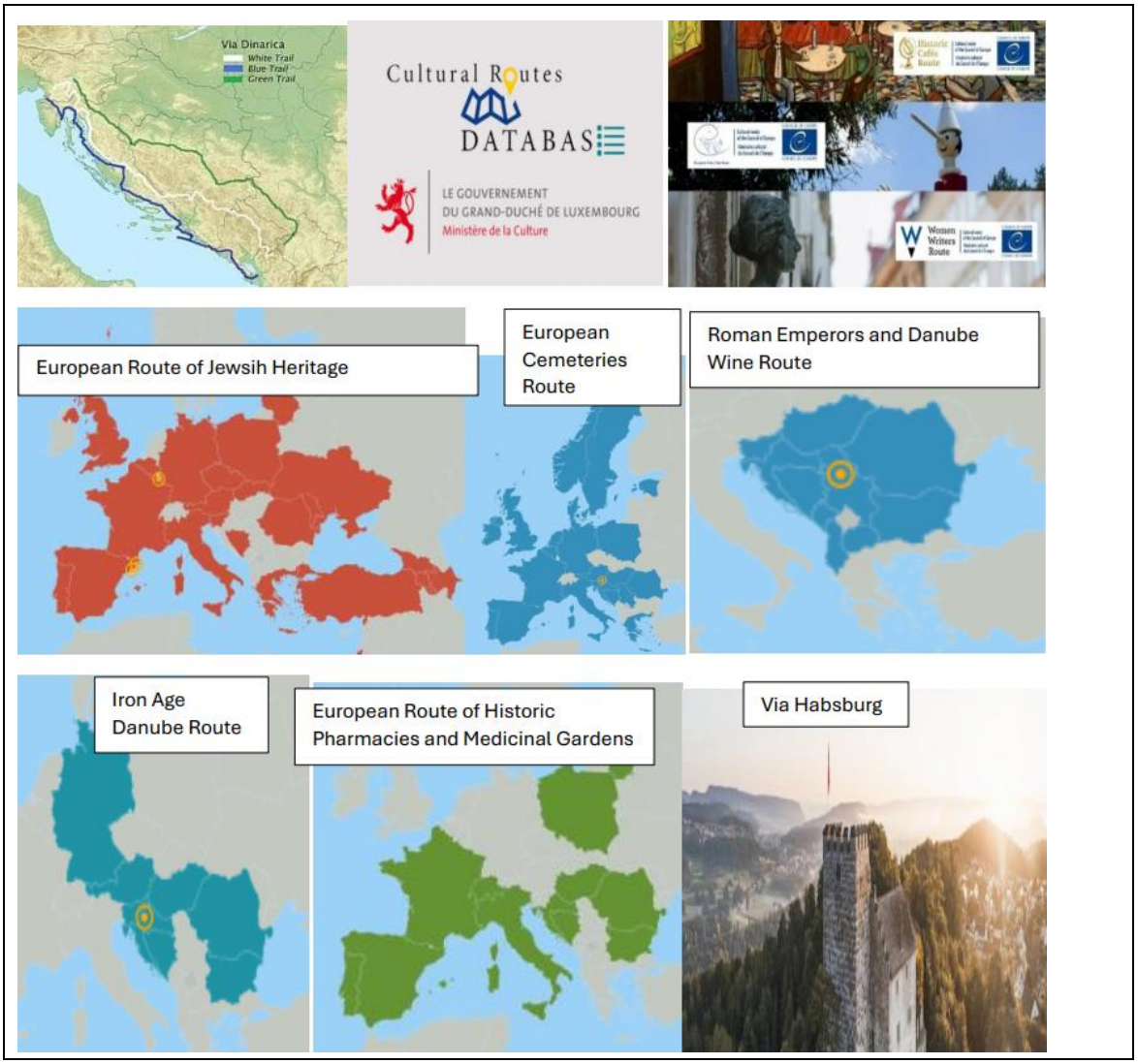


interreg Danube Region
Co-funded by the European Union
DANUBE WOOD(S)ROUTE

2.1.2.6. European cultural routes

Žepče has the potential to be included in the following European cultural routes[32] in which BiH is included. They are used in the context of sustainable tourism, cultural tourism, and educational and research tourism.

Figure 22 Culture route



[32] The Cultural Route of the Council of Europe is a project launched in 1987 (starting with the Way of Saint James - Santiago de Compostela) that connects historically and culturally significant places into a unique network. It is a journey through space and time that shows how the heritage of different countries in Europe is actually shared. A route is not necessarily a physical road; it is a thematic network (e.g. olive roads, routes of the Roman emperors, routes of the Reformation) that promotes European identity and human rights.

Supports: Sustainable tourism: Instead of mass tourism in city centers, routes direct visitors to lesser-known rural regions, boosting the local economy. Cultural diplomacy: Serves as a tool to connect peoples through shared history, crafts and traditions. Education and research: Encourages young people to learn about Europe through direct experience and cooperation with local communities. Quality standard: Obtaining the "Cultural Route of the Council of Europe" certificate is a prestigious mark that guarantees a destination visibility at an international level.

Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) is an active participant in several Cultural Routes of the Council of Europe. Having joined the Enlarged Partial Agreement on Cultural Routes (EPA) in 2016, the country uses these networks to integrate its heritage into the broader European narrative. Here are the key routes in which BiH is currently involved:

Iter Vitis (The Wine Route of the Council of Europe): The Herzegovina Wine Route is a major part of this network. It connects around thirty wineries and cultural heritage sites in the southern region, promoting Mediterranean viticulture and the unique identity of Mostar and its surroundings.

Aromas Itinerarium Salutis (European Route of Historic Pharmacies and Medicinal Gardens): Certified in 2024, this route highlights BiH's millenary pharmaceutical heritage and the traditional use of medicinal herbs in monastic and urban contexts.

Roman Emperors and Danube Wine Route: This route connects archaeological sites from the Roman period. In BiH, it focuses on the Roman presence in the Balkans and the ancient tradition of winemaking that flourished under imperial rule.

Iron Age Danube Route: Focusing on the archaeological landscapes of the Iron Age, this route involves BiH in research and presentation of pre-Roman history and the cultural connections of the Danubian region.

European Route of Jewish Heritage: This route connects sites significant to Jewish history and culture, including the invaluable monuments and synagogues in cities like Sarajevo, reflecting the country's multicultural history.

European Cemeteries Route: BiH participates by showcasing historically and architecturally significant cemeteries as places of shared European history, art, and memory.

Implementation and Support

In 2026, the Advisory Council for the Implementation of Cultural Routes in BiH continues to coordinate efforts between entity and cantonal ministries. The focus remains on developing high-quality Interpret Europe style tourism products that emphasize sustainability and youth engagement.

To successfully join the Cultural Routes of the Council of Europe, strict criteria must be met that go far beyond a simple tourism offer. Here are the key prerequisites:

Shared European Theme: The theme must be present in at least three European countries. The project must prove that the heritage it represents holds genuine European value and is historically or culturally linked to the continent's identity.

Network Formation (Networking): You cannot apply alone. You must be part of a legal entity (association or network) that brings together partners from different countries. This requires a high level of cooperation between local authorities, museums, universities, and the private sector.

Scientific Research: Every route must be grounded in academic expertise. A multidisciplinary team must be ensured to conduct research and guarantee that heritage interpretations are historically accurate. The European Institute of Cultural Routes regularly audits this scientific foundation.

Educational and Cultural Exchange for Youth: The route must plan activities for young people (e.g., summer schools, exchanges, volunteer camps). The goal is for heritage to become a tool for learning about human rights and democracy.

Sustainable and Innovative Tourism: It must be proven that the route contributes to local development without compromising the environment or authenticity. The focus must be on interpretation rather than just commercialization, recommending the application of Interpret Europe standards for experience creation.

Visibility and Branding: Candidates must have a clear marketing plan that utilizes the official Council of Europe certification to attract visitors interested in in-depth cultural experiences.

Detailed guidelines and the certification process are outlined in Resolution CM/Res(2013)67 of the Council of Europe.

Given that Bosnia and Herzegovina is already included in a number of these routes, these prerequisites have been met at the national level, and it is now essential to leverage this open opportunity at the municipal level.

There is untapped potential that has not been utilized until now, which could be significantly valorized within the efforts to develop the cultural and creative tourism of the Municipality. This dormant potential lies in the fact that municipalities possess "sleeping heritage"—stories, crafts, or sites that are locally known but have not been transformed into a tourism product according to international standards. This potential can be significantly valorized through the framework of cultural and creative tourism:

From "Resource" to "Product": Moving beyond merely having a site or tradition by applying storytelling and interpretation to create a structured visitor experience.

Creative Tourism (Tourist as Co-creator): Creative tourism goes a step further than traditional cultural tourism. Instead of the tourist being a mere observer, they actively participate

Horizontal Integration (Local Value Chain): Integrating the municipality into European routes (like those previously mentioned) mandates collaboration across sectors: Agriculture: Local family farms (OPGs) become integral stops on the route. Arts: Local artists design the visual identity or authentic souvenirs. Hospitality: Restaurants serve dishes based on the historical research associated with the route.

Digital Valorization: Utilizing modern tools such as smart panels and Augmented Reality (AR) allows heritage to be "seen" and experienced even where only foundations remain, which is ideal for archaeological and other historical sites. Access to EU Funds: Participation in projects such as Creative Europe or Interreg is much easier if the municipality acts as part of a certified European Cultural Route. This opens doors for funding infrastructure renovation and staff education.

2.2. Social and economic circumstances

The municipality of Žepče occupies a strategically important position in the central part of Bosnia and Herzegovina, representing a key link between the northern and southern regions of the country.

Figure 23 Municipality of Žepče geo-traffic position

Geotraffic location of Žepča in Bosnia and Herzegovina	Žepče vs ZDK
	

The municipality covers about 395 km²[33]. Administratively, it belongs to the Zenica-Doboj Canton of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina. The municipality includes 48 inhabited places, and the center of the municipality is the town of Žepče, located in the valley of the Bosna River. Žepče is in the valley of the Bosna River, surrounded by mountain massifs. In the east rises the mountain Mahnjača, and in the west the mountain Ozren and the locality Matinski vis. The town of Žepče lies at about 219 meters above sea level, while the mountain peaks in the area exceed 1,000 meters. It borders the municipalities of Zavidovići in the east, Maglaj in the north, Tešanj in the northwest, Teslić (RS) in the west and Zenica in the south. The municipality of Žepče has one of the most favorable traffic locations in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The main road M-17 (Sarajevo – Bosanski Šamac), which is the main traffic artery of BiH, passes through the municipality. Also, the route of the future highway on Corridor Vc passes through the municipality, which further increases its attractiveness for investors in 2026. The municipality lies on the main railway line Šamac – Sarajevo – Ploče, which enables the transport of goods to the port of Ploče and Central Europe. Thanks to this position, Žepče has developed into a significant transit and trade center, which the Žepče Development Agency (RAŽ) has used to attract numerous textile companies to business zones. This geo-traffic position makes Žepče the "gateway" of central Bosnia, connecting the industrial center of Zenica with the Posavina basin and the border with the European Union (Croatia). Žepče occupies an extremely favorable position in the central part of Bosnia and Herzegovina, located right next to the main road (M-17) and railway. Distances of Žepče from key regional centers in Bosnia and Herzegovina and the countries of the former Yugoslavia:

in Bosnia and Herzegovina	in neighbouring countries
• Zenica: 40 km (about 45 min) – administrative seat of the canton. • Sarajevo: 115 km (approx. 1 h 45 min) – the capital of Bosnia and Herzegovina • Tuzla: 85 km (approx. 1 h 40 min) – via Zavidovići and Banovići • Banja Luka: 110 km (approx. 2 h) – via Teslić and Mount Borja	• Slavonski Brod (HR): 85 km (approx. 1 h 15 min) – the nearest major city in the European Union. • Zagreb (HR): 275 km (approx. 3 h 30 min) – mostly via the E70 (Brotherhood and Unity Motorway).

[33] According to the Federal Institute of Statistics of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, the area of the municipality of Žepče is 282.3 km². https://fzs.ba/wp-content/uploads/2025/07/zenicko-dobojski-kanton.pdf (pristup 2/1/2026)

• Doboj: 30 km (approx. 35 min) – a key transport hub in the north • Mostar: 240 km (approx. 3 h 45 min)	• Belgrade (SRB): 245 km (approx. 3 h 45 min) – via the border crossing Rača or Šamac. • Split (HR): 300 km (approx. 4 h 30 min) – via Livno or via Herzegovina. • Ljubljana (SLO): 410 km (approx. 4 h 45 min). • Podgorica (MNE): 340 km (approx. 6 h).

Note: The travel times listed are estimated for passenger vehicles in normal traffic conditions. With the construction of sections of Corridor Vc in 2026, travel times towards Sarajevo and the Sava River will be significantly reduced.

2.2.1. Population – human capital (cultural and creative potential)

It is estimated that the municipality of Žepče has about 30 thousand inhabitants[34]. Although the 2013 census recorded a larger number (30,219), the actual population is smaller due to emigration. The share of the working-age population in the total population is about 72%. The employment rate is 28.3% while the unemployment rate is 36.2%. According to estimates, about 14% of the population is under the age of 14, and about 19% of the population is in the 65+ age group. About 67% of the population is between the ages of 15 and 64. Natural increase is negative. The number of deaths continuously exceeds the number of births (vital index is below 1.0). Natural growth rate -0.5 (2024) Mechanical growth (migration) is negative, but more stable compared to neighbouring municipalities due to a relatively strong local economy. Nevertheless, the departure of young people of working age to EU countries is still present. Examples of immigration from EU countries have also been recorded. In 2023, the Šlimper family, Malte and Kristina, and their three children moved to the Municipality of Žepče. They moved from Lauenbrück near Hamburg, Germany to Žepče. They registered the company "Hanseatische Beratung" to work in the field of energy, sales and occupational safety. Children are included in schools.

Municipality Žepče has a specific and extended role in the field of primary and secondary education compared to most other municipalities in the Federation of Bosnia and

[34] according to some sources, about 24,500 inhabitants, due to the large number of people outside the municipality of Žepče. In the newsletter Cantons in figures for ZDK, there is no information about the number of inhabitants in the municipality of Žepče for the year 2024 (status on June 30, 2024, page 13 of the bulletin Cantons in figures for ZDK 2025. chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcglclefindmkaj/https://fzs.ba/wp-content/uploads/2025/07/zenicko-dobojski-kanton.pdf

Herzegovina. While it is common practice for cantons to be responsible for educational institutions, in the case of Žepče certain competences related to the management, financing, and maintenance of schools are exercised at the municipal level. Such a model enables a stronger alignment of the education system with local development priorities, labour market needs, and the strategic development goals of the Municipality of Žepče, which represents an important basis for planning and implementing measures within the regional action plan.

Primary education in the Municipality of Žepče is organized in four central schools in the city of Žepče, Ozimica, Begov Han and Željezno Polje and 15 branch schools. Secondary education takes place in two secondary schools; SMŠ Žepče and KŠC Don Bosco. The Municipality of Žepče operates the Primary and Secondary Music School "Katarina Kosača Kotromanić" with seven branch schools. Preschool education takes place in the Don Ivica Čondrić Kindergarten, the Private Institution for Preschool Education Mumi and the Private preschool institution Madagaskar[35]. Students are enrolled in four-year grammar school, technical and artistic programs, and various three-year programs for trades. Almost 90% of students continue their education after primary school. The number of students in primary schools is about 2,100. The number of students in secondary schools is about 850. The Žepče Mixed Secondary School and the Don Bosco Catholic School Centre are key institutions. There is also the Žepče Business Competence Centre, founded by the Žepče Development Agency. The Centre provides non-formal education tailored to labour market needs through programmes and workshops focused on developing practical business and professional skills. Through partnerships with employers, educational institutions, and the local community, the Centre contributes to empowering individuals at different stages of their careers—particularly young people, women, and the unemployed—and supports their faster integration into a dynamic working environment (Investor Centre, Quality of Life, 2025). Accordingly, approximately 3,000 students are included in the primary and secondary education system.

According to the Federal Statistical Office, in the 2024/2025 school year in Žepče, 2,129 students (49% female) attended primary school in 18 schools with 295 teachers, and 1,094 students (49% female) attended three secondary schools with 120 teachers. Accordingly, over 3.3 thousand students in 21 primary and secondary schools employing 415 teachers[36]. In the total number of students, the Žepče Autonomous Community participates with 7.2% when it comes to primary school students and with 8.8% when it

[35] A kindergarten was opened by a returnee to Žepče. There are video recordings.

[36] https://fzs.ba/wp-content/uploads/2025/07/zenicko-dobojski-kanton.pdf

comes to secondary school students, and in the total number of teachers with about 9.2%.

The Catholic School Center Don Bosco has one of the best equipped workshops in BiH for student practice for metal processing professions, while the Žepče Secondary Mixed School stands out with a modern practical workshop for training textile workers. Personnel in tourism and hotel management, agriculture and forestry, service industries, economics and commerce, medicine, transport, and construction are also educated locally.

The quality of the workforce according to the information and research of RAŽ is based on the following:

- The unique possibility of planning personnel education through the enrollment policy of the Municipality,
- The possibility of influencing the business community on enrolment policy through the Local Economic Forum of Žepče (dialogue between the private and public sectors) and the Committee for Education and Employment of the Municipality of Žepče (through surveys on workforce needs),
- Technical personnel are trained locally,
- The best school workshops for technical personnel,
- 300 students graduate from high school every year,
- Easily available staff from colleges in the area,
- Retraining and training programs easily available locally and within a radius of 50 km,
- Services of the Center for investors in the field of workforce,
- Services of the Business Competence Center of the Development Agency Žepče,
- Support in finding qualified labor,
- Information on the state of the labor market by sector,
- Information on employment and retraining programs,
- Coordination of retraining and training activities in connection with relevant institutions,
- Cooperation with secondary schools, education centers, universities and institutes,
- Information on available employment incentives and mediation in exercising rights,

- Information on current labor legislation. [37]

According to scholarship data, the municipality has about 350–400 active students studying at universities in Zenica, Sarajevo, Mostar, Tuzla, Zagreb, Osijek, Split, Slavonski brod, Rijeka, Zadar etc. The municipality does not have a university. There are about 4,400 registered pension beneficiaries in the municipality.

The workforce is estimated at around 9,500 people. According to the Tax Administration, around 6,100 people are employed in Žepče. According to the Statistical Office, in 2024, around 6,000 people or 5,944 [38] (around 7% of the number of employees in the ZDK) were employed with an average net salary of around 83% of the average for the Zenica-Doboj Canton. (RAŽ, Municipality of Žepče, a modern community with traditional authenticity, 2025)

Žepče contributes around 8.6% to the total population of the ZDK, and around 7.1% to the total number of employees. There are around 4,400 pensioners for every 6,000 employees, or 1.35 employees per 1 pensioner.

The Employment Office records around 3,200 unemployed people, with a continuous decline due to people going abroad or finding work in local business zones. According to the Federal Statistical Office, in December 2024, there were 3,453 unemployed people or 7.4% of the unemployed in ZDK.[39]

Unemployment in Žepče has a pronounced female predominance, which is partly related to the availability of jobs in sectors that traditionally employ men (such as construction). Women make up about 60% of the total number of unemployed people according to the ZDK Employment Service.

The largest number of unemployed people are people with third and fourth level of education, while the share of highly educated people is relatively low due to their greater mobility. KV (Skilled workers) are the most numerous group with about 36% or 1,250. NK (Unskilled workers) in the total number of unemployed people participate with about 34% (1,161). People without completed secondary school or with only primary education, often in older age. Secondary education (SSS) has 23% of the unemployed (808) (Mainly economic and general technicians) VSS (Higher education) about 3.4% (117 people). The smallest group, with the shortest average wait for a job. [40]

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[37] https://invest.razepce.com/investiraj-u-zepce/radna-snaga/

[38] https://invest.razepce.com/investiraj-u-zepce/radna-snaga/; https://fzs.ba/wp-content/uploads/2025/07/zenicko-dobojski-kanton.pdf

[39] https://fzs.ba/wp-content/uploads/2025/07/zenicko-dobojski-kanton.pdf

[40] https://fzs.ba/wp-content/uploads/2025/07/zenicko-dobojski-kanton.pdf

There is an evident trend of a decrease in the number of young people on the register (due to emigration) and an increase in the share of people over 50. Young people (up to 30 years old) make up about 15%. The number is falling because young people quickly find jobs in local companies or go abroad. Middle age (30 - 50 years old) makes up about 40%. A stable group, often with experience in industry. Older age (over 50 years old) makes up about 45%. This is the most critical group (people who are difficult to employ) who often remain on the register until they meet the retirement requirements.

Figure 24 Population



2.2.1.1. Diaspora

The Žepče diaspora makes up only a small share of the total number of Bosnian emigrants, but there is no official data on the exact number of emigrants from Žepče. In the 1960s and 1980s, they were economic migrants, and in the early 1990s, they were

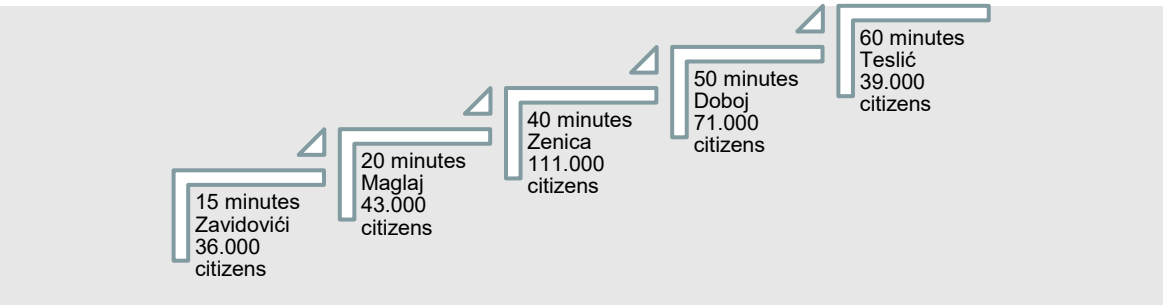
Interreg Danube Region
Co-funded by the European Union
DANUBE WOOD(S)ROUTE

war refugees. Most members of the Žepče diaspora are highly educated people who have achieved significant success in the countries they immigrated to and are interested in returning to their country of origin. Some of them have returned and started businesses in the Žepče municipality. They are successful individuals and even more successful companies that are all present on the BH and EU markets. Given that the diaspora of the Municipality of Žepče numbers, according to some estimates for the year 2025, about 25,000 people, that it is very successful in the social and business life of the countries where it lives today, as well as that it is strongly connected to Žepče, it has a special place in considering the development of cultural and creative tourism in the Municipality. The significance is twofold. On the one hand, it generates demand for cultural and creative tourism services, and on the other hand, based on the knowledge, skills and capital at its disposal, it generates the offer of cultural and creative tourism in the Municipality. It has a special role in raising the visibility and recognition of Žepč as an area of quality, unique rest and recreation.

2.2.1.2. Population in cities if the gravitational region

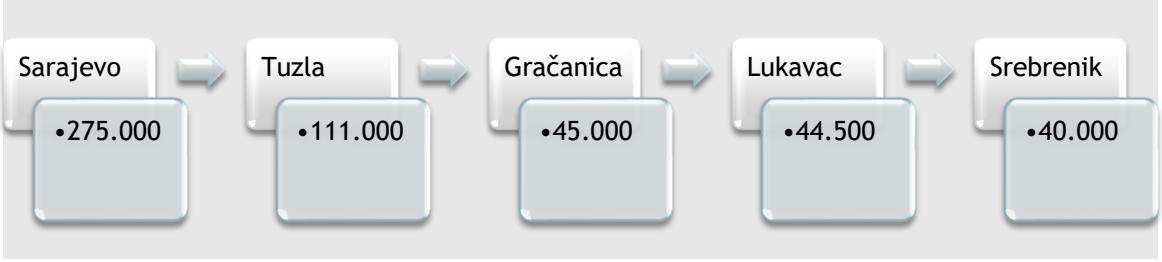
According to available data, about 340 thousand inhabitants live in cities within a 60-minute drive.

Figure 25 Demographic potential of cities within a 60-minute drive.



About 516 thousand inhabitants live in cities within 60-100 minutes.

Figure 26 Demographic potential of cities within a 100-minute drive



Interreg Danube Region
Co-funded by the European Union
DANUBE WOOD(S)ROUTE

The Municipality of Žepče has the potential to respond to the needs of the population (families with children, people 65+, people with certain health problems) from the first and second circles of the gravitational region regarding excursions, recreation, rest, walks, education, religious and cultural events, healthy food, medicinal herbs, clean and healing spring water. Families (parents and children) need to spend some time (weekends, holidays) with their children in a smoke-free, plastic-free environment, where they can get healthy food, spring water, education (knowledge) about natural and/or cultural and/or spiritual (religious) values, where they can walk, hike, recreate, fish, talk. At the same time, they can shop at eco farms (both on Sundays and holidays) for food (vegetables, fruit, honey, milk, milk products, medicinal herbs, but also (functional) water from the source. (short supply chains) Residents 65+ also need to spend the weekend and holiday in the Municipality of Žepče.

2.2.2. Economy

In 2026, the Municipality of Žepče retains the status of one of the most dynamic local self-government units in the Zenica-Doboj Canton, thanks to the developed sector of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and its strategic geo-traffic position (RAŽ, Municipality of Žepče, a modern community with traditional authenticity, 2025).

The largest number of registered companies operates in trade (19.1%), followed by processing industry (17.2%), other service activities (15.7%). The largest number of trades belongs to the agriculture and forestry sector (26.7%), trade (18.2%) and catering (10.4%). The sector that employs the largest number of people is the export-oriented processing industry, with around 2,000 employees in 2024. A sector that has significant potential for generating additional income, self-employment and the employment of additional workers is agriculture, which grows year by year both through the number of RPGs and through the registration of agricultural trades. The number of registered agricultural businesses is 159. (Investor Center, Business Environment, 2025)

According to RAŽ data, 97% are small and 3% medium-sized enterprises, the main sectors are: trade, metal processing industries, transport, wood industry, textile industry and agriculture. [41] The textile industry employs about 1,100 workers, trade about 620, transport about 550, metal processing industry about 520 and wood processing industry about 410.

[41] https://invest.razepce.com/investiraj-u-zepce/zasto-investirati-u-zepce/

The municipality has the BFC SEE (Business Friendly Certification) certificate, which is a confirmation of a favourable business environment for domestic and foreign investors. Žepče is an extremely export-oriented municipality. In the territory of the municipality in 2024, 1,573 business entities were registered, of which 978 were legal entities (including business units) and 595 were craftsmen. The main export products are furniture, prefabricated wooden houses, textile products and metal parts for machines. The most important export markets are the countries of the European Union, primarily Germany, Austria, Croatia, and Italy (RAŽ, Municipality of Žepče, a modern community with traditional authenticity, 2025).

Table 2 Basic economic activities

Industry	No company	No craft	No of employees	Exports in million KM	% in exports Žepče
Wood	37	20	414	85	54
Metal	39	12	521	52	33
Textile	15	9	1118	15	10
Total	91	41	2157	152	93
% Žepče	5,7	6,7	36	163	93

Source: https://invest.razepce.com/wp-content/uploads/2025/11/

Therefore, about 36% of the Municipality's employees (in wood, metal and textile processing) generate about 93% of exports. The most important market is the Czech Republic with about 60 million KM exports (wood 53 million, metal 6.6 million), then Germany with about 20 million KM exports (wood 14 million, textiles 6.1 million), followed by France with about 8 million KM exports (wood), Slovenia with about 6.3 million KM exports (metal), Poland with about 4.3 million KM exports (textiles) and Austria with about 2 million KM exports (textiles).

2.2.2.1. Wood processing industry

In 2025, the wood processing industry of the municipality of Žepče confirmed its role as a strategic economic branch, making a key contribution to exports and employment in the region. The sector has transformed towards products with higher added value, with a special emphasis on sustainability and design. There are 37 companies and 20 trades

that deal with wood processing and employ around 414 workers in the territory of the municipality of Žepče. Production programs include:

- Production of panels for massive furniture (beech, oak);
- Production of parquet and wooden floors;
- Production of wooden joinery: room and entrance doors, windows and balcony doors, sliding walls, shutters or shutters;
- Production of furniture and furniture parts: kitchens, bedrooms, latoflex beds, furniture for business interiors, production of beech sticks and dowels for furniture;
- Production of prefabricated wooden houses and wooden elements for prefabricated houses; Production of pellets and briquettes from biomass-wooden waste. (RYE, Wood Industry, 2025

The basic characteristics are: High quality of products and wood raw materials (Bosnian beech); Competitive product prices compared; Quality and trained workforce; Adherence to quick deadlines and the ability to adapt to specific requirements; Compliance with the requirements of European markets (possession of FSC certificate). (RYE, Wood Industry, 2025)

The wood industry exports 85 million KM (2024), which is about 54% of the export of the Municipality's economy. About 53 million KM are exported to the Czech Republic, 14 million KM to Germany and 8 million KM to France, or almost 90% of wood industry exports are directed to these three markets.

Figure 27 Wood products



Source: https://nansi.ba/o-nama/ https://zepce.live/foto-prezentacija-zepackih-kompanija-metar-uspjeha-inspirirajuce-price-izindustrije-metal-drvo-tekstil/

Production of sawn timber;

RAŽ singles out the following as the most important companies:

- Budo-export d.o.o. (production of elements and panels for solid furniture and pellets);
- Nansi d.o.o. (solid panels, latoflex beds, wooden floors and pellets);
- Prograd Holz d.o.o. (wooden carpentry and furniture);
- Stolarija Šimić d.o.o. (production of modular furniture);
- Dom-invest d.o.o. (production of prefabricated houses); PRO 9 d.o.o. (production of prefabricated houses);
- Barbara Mebl d.o.o. (furniture production);
- Prlić d.o.o. (production of unique furniture in a combination of wood and epoxy resin, production of unique furniture from bariq barrels);
- A.M. INTER-STIL d.o.o. (furniture production);
- Drvex d.o.o. (timber production). (RYE, Wood industry, 2025)

2.2.2.2. Agriculture

To integrate local gastronomy and traditional production into the Danube Wood(s) Route, the focus shifts to the authentic flavours of the Žepče region. This "Forest-to-Table" approach adds a sensory layer to the visitor experience: apiculture, wine, traditional food/products, etc.

In 2024, 2,490 agricultural farms, 159 agricultural trades, four agricultural associations and four agricultural cooperatives operated in the territory of the municipality of Žepče. (RAŽ, Agriculture, 2025) The advantages of the Municipality's agriculture are: Tradition in fruit production; Ecologically preserved area; Favourable climatic conditions; Relatively low prices of necessary raw materials and transport; A diverse offer of top-quality domestic products (cheese, honey, wine, etc.). (RYE, Agriculture, 2025) With exports of about 0.6 million KM (2024), agriculture generates about 1% of the Municipality's exports (mainly to Hungary). (RYE, Agriculture, 2025) (RYE, Agriculture, 2025) A third of the agricultural land is arable land and gardens, 17% orchards, 29% pastures and 21% meadows. (RYE, Agriculture, 2025)

Fruit growing is one of the most developed branches of agricultural production in the municipality of Žepče; Orchard plantations occupy 815 ha of agricultural land; The most common fruit crop after orchards is berry fruit (raspberries, blackberries, strawberries, blueberries) on an area of 280 ha. (RYE, Agriculture, 2025)

Viticulture is a branch of agricultural production that has experienced great growth in the municipality of Žepče over the past 10 years; The total area under intensive vine plantations is 32.6 ha; The following grape varieties are represented on the territory of the municipality of Žepče: Muller, Thurgau, Malvazija Istria, Pinot siv, Cabernet France, Palava, Traminer, Merlot, Anccellota, Garganega; In 2017, the production of the line of wines named "Z", "E", "M", "LJ", "A" from the vineyards of the Žepa region began. On about 33 ha, 161 tons or 8 tons per ha are produced. (RYE, Agriculture, 2025)

Farming - Most of the crops are directly related to livestock production, therefore wheat plantations are increasingly replacing barley and corn as the basic feed for livestock; In 2024, the sown areas were slightly reduced compared to the previous year; Incentive measures (incentives for spring and autumn sowing) are available to large and small producers. (RYE, Agriculture, 2025)

Vegetable growing - Vegetables are mainly produced in greenhouses for market needs; Outdoor vegetable production is mainly done for own needs; In 2024, in the territory of the municipality of Žepče, the total area under greenhouses amounted to 4.88 ha; Peppers, tomatoes, cucumbers, spinach, onions, lettuce are produced in greenhouses, and several greenhouses are also engaged in flower production. (RYE, Agriculture, 2025)

Beekeeping - Honey production has a tradition, and honey is recognizable for its exceptional quality, medicinal properties, specific color and aroma; This branch offers significant investment opportunities through the construction of a honey bottling plant and the acquisition of additional beekeeping equipment that would help in more efficient collection of other high-value bee products (pollen powder, royal jelly, propolis); In 2019, the Beekeepers' Register was established, in which 91 beekeepers were registered in 2024. (RAŽ, Poljoprivreda, 2025)

The livestock fund in the Žepče municipality in 2024 is the same as in 2023 (no significant fluctuations). Given that the Žepče municipality is rich in pastures and meadows, this branch of agricultural production has great potential for growth, development, and investment. Limousin beef cows are raised on two farms. (RAŽ, Poljoprivreda, 2025)

The production of organic food (indigenous varieties/species), shortening the path from the field to the table, the possibility to consume food and/or buy it from the producer (on the farm) is complementary to the idea of developing excursion tourism, cultural and creative tourism, but also focusing on the quality of life of the local population and the diaspora. Possibility of consumption/purchase 365 days. A combination of excursions, consumption, and shopping.

Figure 28 Traditional product, food, wine, honey, fruit



Source:
https://www.google.com/search?sca_esv=86e100241312b1c8&rlz=1C1BNSD_enBA1107BA1107&sxsrf=ANbLn7hBNn34twMcvkgTxBgIeQN3D2cAA:1773220014754&udm=2&fbs=ADc_lbMiqGtQJrI9Af0zglw9Wlf3rTAN5uv3jA1NMYc1dIxWt639-DVeac8pEBXDv8M3BibE5JmkKK2o56STlUnzuMToGiaAfwNJPzLiCe0RtjKN73e7SySNgaMSKn2dwq2Qa94nAgWv_NNIstydqZlWRTXF QERO0Fkz_1zgrP5F-K2hx3Zo6K7LsspxCJ-TffvICx2hdmSF21qM06AqVGqE3Q5d8-xA&q=proizvodnja+hrane+meda+u+%C5%BEep%C4%8Du&sa=X&ved=2ahUKEwju79mov5eTAxWmQvEDHV5EJckQtKgLe gQIGRAB&biw=1920&bih=945&dpr=1

2.2.2.3. Forestry

In the context of the Danube Wood(s) Route, forests and forestry cease to be exclusively economic branches and become the basis of sustainable green tourism. Instead of focusing on exploitation, the emphasis is on the ecosystem services of forests and their cultural value. Key aspects of forestry within this route: 1. Sustainable Forest Management (SFM) (Forest as a classroom: Sites like Smolin serve as examples of responsible management, where visitors are explained the cycle of growth, renewal and the importance of preserving indigenous species. Certification: Promotion of FSC-certified wood throughout the route infrastructure, guaranteeing that each wooden element (benches, info-boards) comes from forests managed in an environmentally friendly way.), 2. Forestry as cultural heritage (Tradition of logging and transport: Interpretation of historical forestry methods in Žepče, including old techniques that shaped the local landscape.Old trees as monuments: The Ljubatovići pine forest represents "biological forestry" - the preservation of individual genetically valuable trees that are exempt from regular logging due to their historical and ecological importance.), 3. Wood as a resource for a circular economy (Local value chains: Connecting forestry companies with local craftsmen. Wood cut in local forests is used to build tourist

infrastructure along the route, reducing the carbon footprint. Design innovations: Using wood of less commercial value for creative installations and urban equipment in Previla.), 4. Forest and health (Forest Bathing) (Therapeutic role: In this project, forestry expands into the domain of health tourism. The forest trails on Matinski vis are designed to encourage physical activity and mental recovery, treating the forest as a natural sanatorium.

Forests cover about 60% of the municipality's area, and wood is the most important natural resource. Its importance is reflected in: Economic basis: Provides raw material for numerous export companies; Ecological value: Protection of the Bosna River basin and preservation of biodiversity (especially at the Matinski vis site); Energy potential: Increasing exploitation of forest biomass. Forest management is carried out by the Forestry Company (ŠPD) of the Zenica-Doboj Canton, through the "Šumarija" business unit in Žepče. Over 30 companies directly related to the exploitation and primary/secondary processing of wood operate in Žepče (such as Prlić, Budo-Export, Nansi). Forestry and directly related wood processing plants employ about 1,500 to 1,800 workers, which makes up almost 30% of total employment in the municipality. Most forests and processors have FSC certification, which is a requirement for access to the EU market. Through the Danube Wood(s) Route project, as well as other projects, forests become part of the tourist offer (educational trails, wood routes).

Opportunities (Potentials): Circular economy: Utilization of wood waste for the production of energy and ecological pellets; Innovations in design: Use of "business competence centers" to train designers and CNC operators; Branding: Positioning Žepč as "the European center of designer solid wood furniture".

Challenges: Manpower deficit: Departure of qualified wood technicians and craftsmen abroad; Availability of raw materials: Conflicts between the needs of processing capacity and limited annual cutting defined by forest management principles; Climate change: Increased risk of forest fires and occurrence of plant diseases that threaten conifer stands; Infrastructure: The need to modernize forest roads for easier access and fire protection.

Figure 29 Forests and forestry



2.2.2.4. Souvenir production

Within the framework of the Danube Wood(s) Route project, souvenir production is not merely the making of objects, but the transfer of the “soul of the forest” into the hands of visitors. The focus is on the use of local wood and the traditional skills of the Žepče area, creating products with high added value within the Interreg Danube Wood(s) Route.

It includes, for example:

1. Conceptual souvenir lines - “Piece of History” (Ljubatovići): Miniature replicas or stylised pedunculate oak leaves made from old wood or recycled oak, with an engraved story about the longevity of the Danube Wood(s) Route – Digital Map. “Mountain Scent” (Matinski Vis): Wooden diffusers or pendants made of pine or spruce that retain the natural scents of the forest, often complemented with small bottles of essential oils from local herbs. “Forest Table” (Previla): Handcrafted serving boards, wooden spoons and tableware used by local hospitality providers, which visitors can purchase as functional souvenirs.

2. Production and inclusiveness - Local artisans: Encouraging cooperation with small wood-processing craftsmen from Žepče to ensure authenticity and support the local economy. Interactive workshops: Instead of purchasing a finished product, visitors at locations such as Previla can participate in woodcarving workshops and create their own souvenir, which creates a strong emotional connection with the route.

3. Eco-friendly packaging and certification - Plastic-free: All souvenirs must be packaged in recycled paper or wooden boxes. QR Storytelling: Each souvenir carries a QR code that directs the buyer to a digital story about the exact location (e.g. Smolin or Matinski Vis) from which the material originates.

4. Digital and innovative souvenirs - NFT “Digital Leaf”: For younger generations, the possibility of obtaining a digital certificate confirming a donation for planting a new tree along the route together with a physical wooden pendant.

Souvenir production in Žepče is undergoing a transformation from a hobbyist activity into an organized sector, primarily thanks to incentives through projects and activities of the Žepče Development Agency (RAŽ). There are a few key entities (smaller crafts and companies) that have integrated souvenirs into their permanent assortment. It is estimated that there are another 15 individuals and associations (such as women's associations and HKUDs) that make souvenirs occasionally or on order. The cooperation of small designers with large woodworking companies that provide leftovers of high-quality wood (walnut, oak) to produce luxury souvenirs is characteristic. Given the tradition, wood is the primary material. Souvenirs are often modern, but inspired by heritage (stecak motifs, traditional ornaments, or replicas of old tools). Another important branch is souvenirs with traditional embroidery and weaving, which are most often produced by local women's associations. A significant increase in interest among local craftsmen in education on souvenir design has been recorded. Souvenirs are most often sold through cultural, traditional events and fairs in the municipality, also online platforms, and social networks, which are becoming the main channel for younger producers. Although the sector is still developing, souvenirs are no longer just "memories", but are becoming an important promoter of the Žepačka economy and creative industries. In the context of the project, it is necessary to exploit the potential of becoming a center for souvenir production of the Danube Macro Region and the DWR project.

Figure 30 Souvenirs in Žepče



There is a need to increase the quality, creativity, innovation of souvenirs, for souvenirs to reflect the identity of the Municipality more adequately and fully, the cultural and historical heritage, material and immaterial, architectural heritage, as well as to ensure the economic, ecological and social sustainability of production. There is a possibility for the Municipality to position itself as a key producer and/or creator of souvenirs for the Danube Macro region.

2.2.2.5. Tourism

The Danube Wood(s) Route project is a strategic transnational initiative aimed at revitalising the tourism landscape of the Danube region by placing forest heritage and timber craftsmanship at its heart. Stretching across 11 countries, the project seeks to establish a permanent Cultural Route that promotes sustainable, eco-conscious travel. Core Tourism Pillars: Green & Slow Tourism: The route emphasizes "slow travel" experiences, encouraging visitors to engage deeply with local landscapes and traditional lifestyles rather than mass tourism hubs. Timber Heritage as a Narrative: Wood is utilized as a central storytelling tool. This includes visiting open-air museums (such as Staro Selo Sirogojno), observing traditional wooden architecture, and participating in workshops led by local artisans. Transnational Connectivity: By linking remote rural areas through a unified brand, the project increases the visibility of lesser-known destinations. It integrates with existing networks like the EuroVelo 6 cycling route and the Danube River

Basin ecosystems. Sustainable Destination Management: A key output is the Danube Woods Route Strategy, which provides local municipalities and tourism boards with frameworks to develop "wood-based" products without compromising environmental integrity.

According to the available estimates of the ZDK Tourist Board in 2024, there were about 3,500 tourists in Žepče and Zavidovići, namely: one-third domestic and two-thirds foreign guests, who spent about 7.5 thousand nights (staying 2.2 days). It is estimated that the number of tourists increased by about 50% in 2025.

2.2.2.5.1. Tourist infrasctructure

When it comes to tourist infrastructure, it will be shaped in accordance with the vision of the development of cultural and creative tourism, as well as with shifting the focus to the diaspora and tourists from the gravity region, that is, its needs and expectations. The focus will transit from the object to the subject of cultural and creative tourism. Recent infrastructure consists of public, private and civil sector institutions, accommodation facilities, catering facilities, picnic areas, recreation centers, swimming pools, hiking trails, footpaths, classic and digital signage, etc.

Table 3 Tourist infrastructure

JU „Dom kulture“ Žepče (cultural centre)	1
JU „Opća biblioteka“ Žepče (public library)	1
Restorani i moteli (restaurants and motels)	16
Kulturno umjetnička društva (cultural and artistic societies	13
Sportski klubovi i kolektivi (sports clubs)	24
Lovačka društva (hunting clubs)	2
Lovačke kuće i lovišta (hunting lodges and hunting grounds)	20
Sportsko-ribolovna društva (sports fishing clubs)	1
Izletišta za odmor i rekreaciju (excursion sites for rest and recreation	7

Bazeni za kupanje (swimming pools)	2
Pješačke i planinarske staze (hiking and hiking trails)	10

Source: https://invest.razepce.com/opci-podaci/kvaliteta-zivota/

2.2.2.5.2. Accommodation

Accommodation in Žepče is predominantly smaller, such as hotels and private apartments: Hotel "In" Žepče: 4-star hotel offering accommodation and a restaurant. Private accommodation: Numerous apartments and holiday homes are available, which can be booked through platforms such as Booking.com and Airbnb. Disadvantage: There is a noticeable lack of 4- and 5-star accommodation compared to 3-star ones, which limits the attraction of more demanding guests. The newly opened Hotel Story also holds a four-star rating and offers luxury accommodation, a restaurant, and facilities for organising weddings and other events. Hotel Story is located along the M-17 main road, close to the junction with the Vc Corridor in Žepče, which is currently under construction. The proximity of the motorway and the urban area of Žepče makes this location ideal for guests seeking comfortable accommodation and high-quality service.

Mountain lodge Matinski vis is built at an altitude of 826 meters (N 44°28'05" E 17°59'08", Mekote). It is lit by solar panels, and water is supplied from its own water supply and a nearby spring. It has 30 beds in double, triple and quadruple rooms. The rooms are heated in winter. The kitchen is equipped with all dishes, a fridge and a gas and solid fuel stove. Next to the kitchen is a hall for 50 people, with a fireplace that heats the entire home. In front of the mountain lodge is a spacious terrace and a grill with a fireplace. The area around the mountain lodge is suitable for excursions, camping, walking, skiing, cycling, organizing various sports games such as football, volleyball and more. There is also a playground for children, an adrenaline park and a zip-line. The wider area of Matinski Vis can be explored on well-marked trails. From the hiking trails, there are excellent viewpoints of the surrounding hills and mountains (Mahnjača, Smolin, Tajan, Vranica, Bjelašnica, Ravan planina with the highest peak Tvrtkovec, Ozren, Konjuh, Mjevica, Očauško lice, Borje), as well as the surrounding towns of Žepče, Maglaj, Zavidovići and Teslić. In addition to the mountain lodge and the chapel, there are two more canopies on the mountain with arranged barbecue areas. The guide service of the "Vis" Žepče Mountaineering Society is available to organized groups of mountaineers. The nature around the home is rich in forest fruits such as various types of berries and

mushrooms. It is possible to organize picking under the supervision of professional staff of the mountaineering association. (3C3NP, 2025)

"California Dream IN" is located directly along the M17 main road Žepče–Maglaj, in the settlement of Brankovići. Its offer includes a restaurant, motel accommodation, and a swimming pool. Within the Dream IN restaurant there are two halls where, in addition to regular lunches, all types of celebrations, business lunches and dinners, promotions, and other events are organised. The Dream IN restaurant offers a wide selection of ready-made dishes every day, making it an ideal choice for a quick meal or dining without waiting for travellers passing through. A pleasant ambience, friendly staff, and high-quality culinary specialties are what distinguish this restaurant. The complex also includes a café aperitif bar. The motel, with 14 double rooms, is excellently equipped. A modern, high-quality, and attractive facility, together with professional and courteous staff, ensures a high level of service and guest satisfaction. The rooms are modernly and luxuriously furnished, providing comfortable conditions for a pleasant stay. The complex also features swimming pools for enjoyment during hot summer days, making it an indispensable destination for those seeking refreshment, relaxation, entertainment, and leisure. The complex additionally offers catering services. It is located at coordinates N 44°29'13" E 18°04'40".

At an altitude of 201 metres, the excursion site "Gromilice" is located approximately ten kilometres from the M17 main road, at coordinates N 44°28'35" E 18°06'56", at an altitude of 434 metres. Situated in Gromilice, in a pleasant natural environment, it is suitable for rest, walking, enjoying nature, as well as mushroom picking, which thrives particularly well in this area (3C3NP, 2025)

In the area of the Municipality of Žepče, a variety of accommodation facilities have been developed to meet the needs of business guests, tourists passing through, and visitors to events and manifestations. (Samardžić-Memčić, Kosić, 2026)

Hotel IN Žepče also has a significant accommodation capacity, a higher standard hotel intended for business guests and tourists. The facility has modernly equipped rooms, a restaurant and accompanying facilities, and is recognized for its quality service, pleasant ambience and accessible location within the urban area of Žepče. Hotel IN is often used to accommodate participants in business meetings, seminars and project activities. (Samardžić-Memčić, Kosić, 2026)

Hotel Kavalir is one of the accommodation facilities in Žepče, which provides basic hotel services and is a practical solution for short stays, transit passengers and business visits. The facility is easily accessible, and offers accommodation and catering services tailored to the everyday needs of guests. (Samardžić-Memčić, Kosić, 2026)

In Donji Ravne there is the Sports and Recreation Center and Hotel Marić, which, in addition to tennis courts and children's facilities, also offers accommodation capacities. The hotel has 13 rooms and a total of 40 beds, including VIP rooms equipped with massage tubs. Guests also have at their disposal the so-called “blue lounge”, suitable for meetings, seminars, presentations and smaller business gatherings. The proximity of restaurants and sports facilities makes this complex attractive for active holidays and organized groups. (Samardžić-Memčić, Kosić, 2026)

In addition to hotel accommodation, there are also a large number of private apartments, motels and smaller accommodation facilities in the area of the Municipality of Žepče, which offer flexible accommodation options for short and medium-term visits. These facilities are most often used during events, sports events and seasonal visits and complement the overall tourist and accommodation offer of the municipality. (Samardžić-Memčić, Kosić, 2026)

The California restaurant, located a ten-minute drive from the city center, is suitable for organizing weddings and similar occasions with a capacity of up to 600 people. It is also possible to organize various business events and socio-cultural manifestations. The construction of indoor swimming pools as part of the California Novo Naselje complex is planned. (Samardžić-Memčić, Kosić, 2026)

Restaurant and hotel "Marić" has 13 rooms with 40 beds. VIP rooms are equipped with massage tubs. Guests also have access to the “blue lounge”, suitable for various meetings, seminars or presentations. (3C3NP, 2025) In this context, it is also important to highlight the DINO Žepče Sports Academy, which represents a significant sports and recreational resource in the municipality. The Academy operates as an organised sports centre with a strong focus on working with children and young people, particularly through a football school and professionally guided training programmes adapted to different age groups. The Academy features a football pitch certified with the FIFA Quality Pro standard, enabling high-quality training and sports activities in line with international standards. In addition to its primary sporting role, the DINO Sports Academy has broader social importance, as it contributes to the development of healthy lifestyles, active use of leisure time, and the strengthening of sports culture and social inclusion of children and young people within the local community of the Municipality of Žepče.

Overall, accommodation capacities in the Žepče Municipality enable the reception of various target groups — from business guests and tourists in transit to participants of events, sports events and family celebrations — thus creating a good basis for the further development of tourism, hospitality and related services. (Samardžić-Memčić, Kosić, 2026) It is necessary to work on creative, innovative, design and other solutions that

reflect the identity of the Municipality and through which the philosophy of economically, ecologically, and socially sustainable development is implemented. (local materials wood, tree, lumber, no plastic, zero negative aesthetic, light, and any environmental impact, etc.) and represent the skills of local artists, craftsmen and entrepreneurs (including the diaspora).

2.2.2.5.3. Cultural manifestations

Some of the manifestations are:

Žepče Summer (June – July): The multi-day event "Žepče Summer" is held, which includes various cultural events, concerts (such as "XP FEST", rock music evenings), literary evenings, and sports meetings. As part of the "Žepče Summer", the International Šargija Fair (July) is traditionally held at the city market, which brings together builders and exhibitors of folk instruments from the region. The art colony "Ismet Čahtarević" was held for the tenth time in Golubinja, as part of the large event "Žepče Summer 2025." In the three-day gathering and creative atmosphere, 23 artists participated, who were inspired by nature, landscape and joint creation and painted a total of 34 works of art.

Municipality Day is celebrated (October 14). The celebration includes a ceremonial session of the Municipal Council, cultural programs, and literary competitions for students.

The Ljerka Njerš Gallery is located within the Public Institution Dom kulture Žepče. This space is dedicated to a prominent Croatian artist and serves as a venue for cultural events and exhibitions in Žepče, such as those organized by HKD Napredak. Ljerka Njerš is a renowned Croatian painter and ceramist, and the gallery bears her name in recognition of her work. The gallery hosts various exhibitions of fine art, such as the exhibition of paintings from the “Ismet Čahtarević” art colonies in Žepče, exhibitions of famous painters and sculptors, and other.

There are more than ten cultural and artistic societies in Žepče, whose goal is to preserve tradition, transfer and nurture the customs of Žepče Bosniaks and Žepče Catholic Croats to younger generations. In Žepče, Croatian Catholics cherish original music played on the šargija and violin accompanied by two singers. The songs are lyrical-patriotic, lyrical love, landscape and lyrical-social. The customs of Bosniaks in Žepče are based on the long-standing Islamic tradition and cultural heritage of central Bosnia. The celebrations of Bajram, Mevlud, Ramadan evenings, and special customs related to weddings and funerals are highlighted. The rich gastronomic offer and the nurturing of cultural

heritage, such as the memory of Abdulvehab Ilhamija Žepčak, are key parts of the local identity.

Many ethnos manifestations, prela, sijela, evenings of original music are held, sausage festivals, events dedicated to food, etc, but it should be emphasized that many events are not institutionalized or commercialized. Žepček are characterized a great love for the land on which they live, for song, for women, for good food and for good drink, which, combined with creativity, innovation, culture, and vision, can be the potential for redesigning the economic and overall portfolio of the Municipality.

Table 4 Events throughout the year by month

Month	No	International	Organisation*
1	1		HKUD Bistrica
2	6		JUDK, Sportski savez, OGŠ, OŠ, HKUD Bistrica, KUD Globarica
3	2		JUDK, MK
4	5		PD Vis, JUDK, JUOB, OGŠ,
5	3	1	Šahovski klub, Udurženje Spektar, JUDK
6	9	1	KŠC, JUDK, Župa. OGŠ, PD Vis, Kinološki klub
7	8		PD Vis, JUDK, Sportsko savez, HKUD, Župa
8	3		KUD, Župa, HKUD
9	2	1	Sportski savez, JU DK
10	5		RAŽ, JUDK, KUD, Sportsko-ribolovno društvo
11	2	1	JUDK, Sportsko ribolovno društvo
12	6		JUDK, HKUD, Župni ured, KŠC, Sportsko ribolovno društvo
Total	52		

Source: https://www.razepce.com/dokumenti/Na%E7e%20publikacije/2016

Note: the number and structure of organizers and participants is flexible. The review aims to give an illustration on the example of one randomly chosen year.*

Religious events in Žepče are closely linked to major religious holidays of different denominations, and the dates change depending on the church or lunar calendar. Local churches and mejlis organize specific events: Advent/Christmas period (December): The "Holiday Magic" event is held, which includes various activities related to the Christmas and New Year holidays. Religious holidays: All significant religious holidays are celebrated, including Easter/Veskar, Ramadan Bayram, Kurban Bayram, Christmas, and others, accompanied by appropriate religious ceremonies and local gatherings.

For the most accurate and up-to-date information on specific dates and programs for the current year, it is recommended to follow the official websites of the Municipality of Žepče (opcina-zepce.com), the Žepče Cultural Center, and local information portals such as Zepce.ba, Zepce Portal and zepce.live.

Frame 3The most important religious event

The most important religious event in the municipality of Žepče is the celebration of the feast of Saint Anthony of Padua, who is also the patron saint of the parish of the same name in Žepče.

Basic details of the celebration (for illustration) 2026:

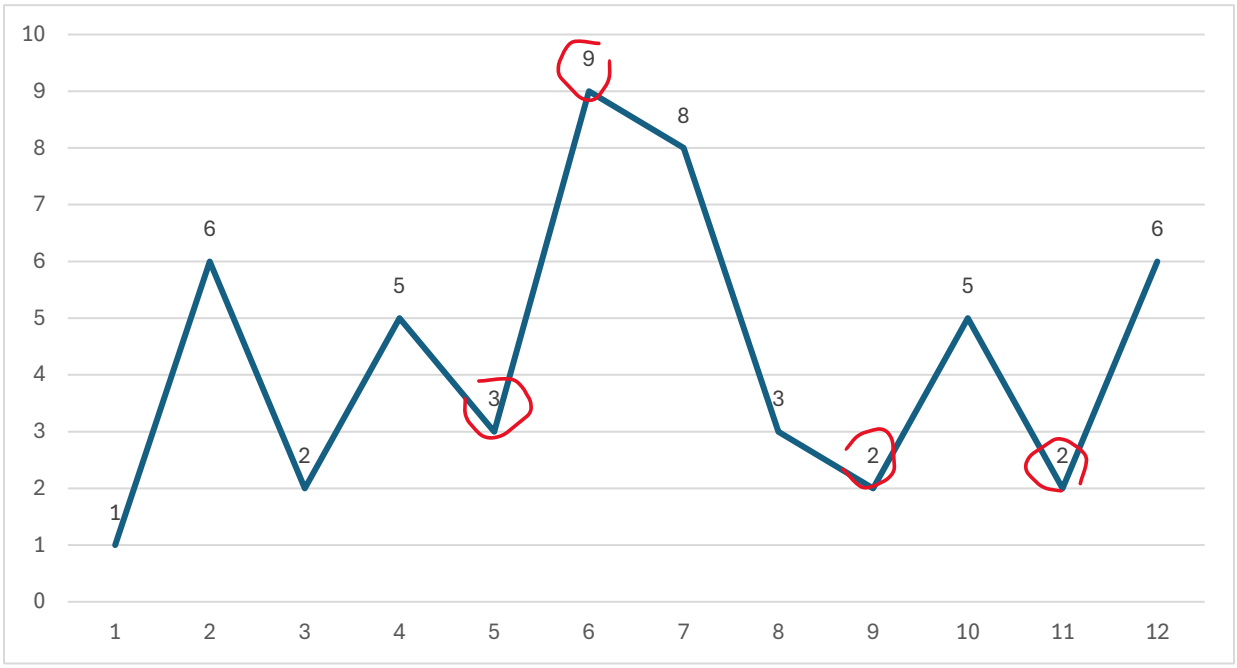
Date: June 13, 2026 (Saturday).

Place: Church and courtyard of the parish church of Saint Anthony of Padua in Žepče.

Number of attendees: The gathering traditionally brings together several thousand believers. It is a mass gathering attended not only by the residents of Žepče, but also by numerous pilgrims from neighboring municipalities and believers from the diaspora who return to their homeland during this period.

The celebration includes a central mass celebration (usually at 11:00 a.m.), while believers prepare for this holiday through the devotions of "Thirteen Tuesdays" and devetnica/trodnevnica.

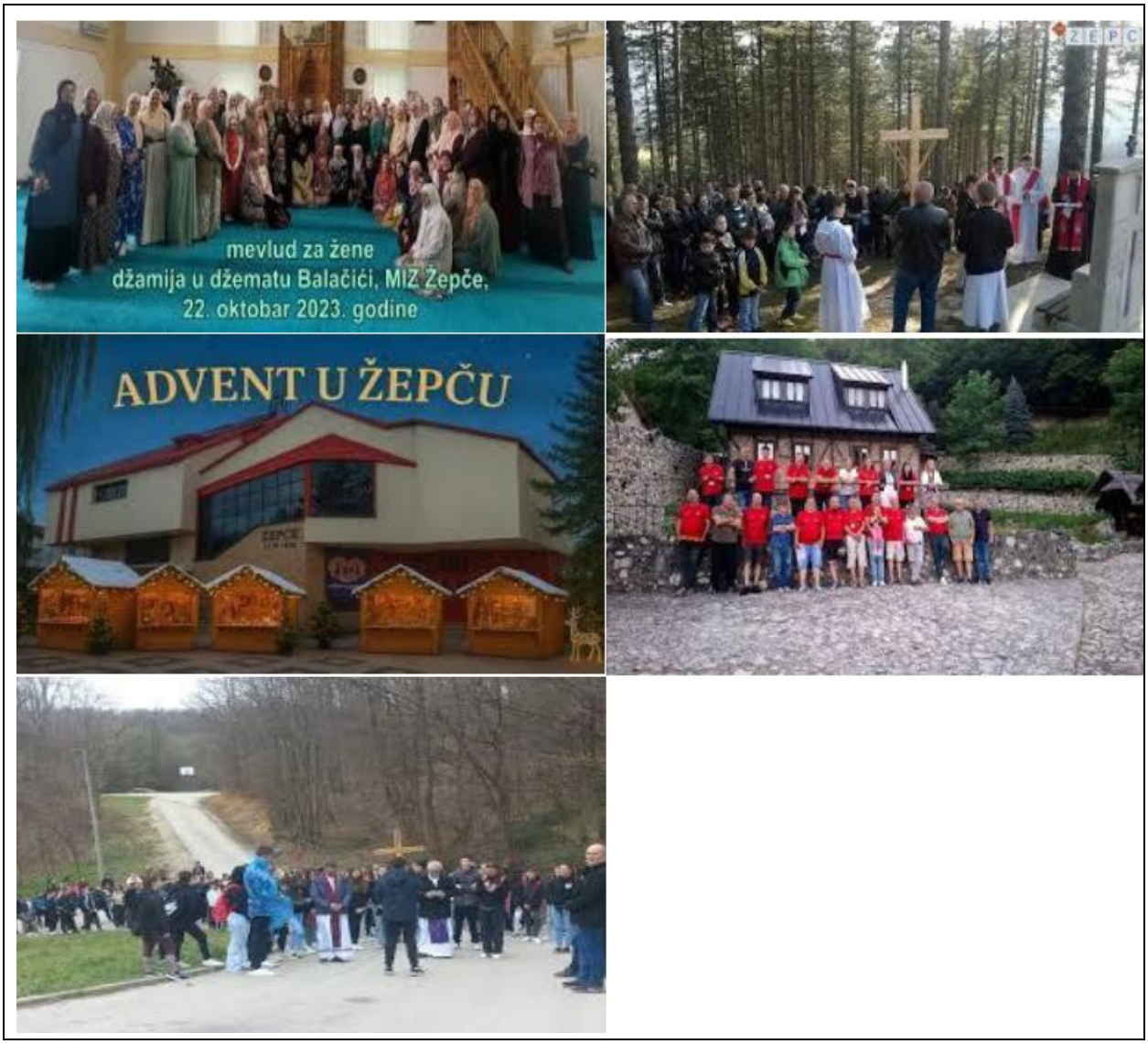
Figure 31 Distribution of cultural and other events by month



Note: red marked months in which an international event is held

In addition to Catholic holidays, Islamic holidays (Ramadan and Eid al-Adha) and Orthodox holidays (Christmas and Easter) are also celebrated.

Figure 32 Manifestations



Manifestations are concentrated in months 6 and 7 with nine and eight manifestations, followed by months 12 and 2 with six manifestations each, and months 4 and 10 with five manifestations each. It is necessary to distribute the events throughout the year and increase the number of international and regional events. At the monthly level, the average is slightly more than four events. There is potential to attract diaspora and excursionists as participants and/or observers. (growth in numbers, change in length of stay, change in consumption and structure)

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Frame 4 Feast of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary August

In August, the most significant celebration dedicated to Our Lady in the Žepče municipality will be held in the parish of Osova, which celebrates the feast of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary. Main event: Assumption in Osova Date: August 15, 2026 (Saturday). Location: Parish Church of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary in Osova, which is one of the oldest Marian shrines in this part of Bosnia. Significance: Our Lady is the patron saint of the Osova parish. The celebration traditionally begins with vigil masses and processions, while on the feast day itself, a central mass celebration is held, which brings together several thousand believers from the Žepče region and the diaspora. Tradition: Believers from surrounding towns often make a pilgrimage on foot to Osova, and the celebration is also known for the folk joy that accompanies the religious part of the program.

Frame 5 Other events in August

Other celebrations in August, although Osova is the center of the August Our Lady festivities, religious life in the municipality also includes other important aspects: Spiritual preparation: In the days leading up to August 15, novenas or three-day vigils are held in honor of the Lady in most parishes (including the parish of St. Anthony in Žepče). Our Lady of Kondžilo (Komušina): Although located in the neighboring municipality of Teslić, many believers from Žepče traditionally make a pilgrimage to the nearby Kondžilo shrine on the occasion of the Assumption, as it is one of the most important Marian destinations in the Vrhbosna Archdiocese. Cultural context: During August, activities that began as part of the "Žepče Summer" often continue or end, combining the religious and secular cultural activities of the municipality.

The number of attendees at the most important events in Žepče varies depending on the type of event, with religious celebrations and summer cultural festivals attracting the largest number of visitors. The potential for increasing the number of participants, and especially for increasing the quality of their experience, exists and needs to be activated and *valorised*. Existing and new manifestations (cultural, religious, sports, research, educational and others) are causally connected with cultural and creative tourism, the strengthening of the cultural and creative sector and consensus at the level of the

Municipality on the implementation of socially, economically, and ecologically sustainable development, on the well-being of the community, quality of *life.*

2.2.2.5.4. Hiking and walking trails

There are developed hiking Mountaineering and hiking trails in the municipality of Žepče are primarily concentrated around the mountains Mahnjača and Matinski vis. The trails are well marked, and most of them are maintained by PD "Vis" Žepče. Below is a list of the most important tracks with available parameters.

Matinski vis circular trail. This is the most popular hiking route in Žepč, which leads to the top of Matinski vis (964 m above sea level). Length: 10 – 12 km (depending on the starting point and variation of the circuit). Weight: Medium light (T1/T2). The trail is accessible, but includes several climbs that require basic fitness. Features: It passes through endemic stands of black pine and a serpentine zone with viewpoints that offer a panoramic view of the Žepač basin.

Mountain trail Željezno Polje – Mahnjača. A new route that has been additionally laid out to use the potential of the Mahnjača mountain. Length: 8 – 10 km in one direction. Weight: Medium weight. Due to the greater height difference and steeper climbs, it requires better physical fitness. Features: Connects rural areas with high mountain pastures and offers an insight into the traditional lifestyle of mountain villages.

Goliješnica – Brankovići Hiking Trail. Primarily a hiking and recreational trail intended for walkers and recreational users. Length: About 5 km. Difficulty: Easy. Mostly flat or slightly sloping terrain along the M17 main road, designed for safe pedestrian communication between settlements.

Local trail Žepče – Kiseljak. Hiking route connecting the city center with the Kiseljak picnic area. Length: 3 – 4 km. Difficulty: Very easy. Suitable for families and walking, without significant climbs. Features: Leads to a source of healing mineral water.

Table 5 Hiking and hiking trails

Name	Length km	Difficulty	Points
Kružna tura Matinski vis	11 km	Srednje lagana	Planinarski dom Matinski vis

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Željezno Polje - Mahnjača	9 km	Srednje teška	Vrh Mahnjače
Goliješnica - Brankovići	5 km	Lagana	Naselje Brankovići
Žepče - Kiseljak	3.5 km	Vrlo lagana	Izvor mineralne vode

For a safe stay, it is recommended to use Wikiloc GPS tracks or contact the local association PD "Vis" Žepče (hiking club) via their Facebook page for information on the current condition of the markings, especially in winter conditions.

2.2.2.5.5. Hunting, fishing and birdwatching

Hunting tourism has a tradition and a certain potential based on natural resources, infrastructure (hunting societies, checks, hunting lodges, hunting grounds) and interests. There are also certain challenges and dilemmas regarding the protection, conservation, and welfare of animals. Hunting societies operate in area (LD Jeleč, LD Orlovik, etc). There are as many (16) hunting lodges and lodges. Papratnica Hunting Lodge is one of the better known. Hunting grounds are rich in game (roe deer, foxes, wild boars and pheasants).

Fishing trails: The Bosna River flows through Žepče with tributaries. A managed fishing area has been set up near the city bridge, operated by the Sports Fishing Society "Bosna" Žepče. In 2024, the association hosted the International Fishing Cup “Žepče 2024“.There are also swimming areas, and the area along the Bosna River offers oases for relaxation, especially in the village of Papratnica and Brankovići.

Birdwatching sites: Specific birdwatching sites are not particularly highlighted in the available sources, but the richness of nature and the Bosna River suggest the potential for the development of this form of tourism.

2.2.2.5.6. Sports and recreation centre

Sports and recreation center "Gromilice", privately owned, area of approximately 10,000 m2. It is located in Gromilice, 4 km from the M17 highway, direction Žepče - Doboj.

Facilities: Hunting lodge, with catering facilities, small football stadium, asphalt volleyball and basketball courts, fishpond for sport fishing. Tourists, in a relaxed, recreational, healthy, and fun way, by walking or cycling, have the opportunity to get to know the local landscape, customs, culture, tradition, gastronomy. (Municipality of Žepče, Partnership with the Diaspora, 2016)

In the sports and social life of the Municipality of Žepče, the DINO Žepče Sports Academy also(plays an important role as a key centre for sports activities. The Academy focuses on the development of motor skills, healthy lifestyle habits, team spirit, and sports culture among the population through professionally guided training sessions and programmes adapted to the age and abilities of participants. Through its activities, the DINO Sports Academy contributes to the functional improvement of sports infrastructure and to enhancing the quality of leisure time for children and young people. Its work also has a broader social significance, as it promotes social inclusion, the prevention of unhealthy lifestyles, and contributes in the long term to the overall quality of life in the local community (Kosić, 2026).

Sports and recreation center "Pazarić", privately owned, area of approximately 25,000 m2. It is located in Komšići, 3 km from the main road M17, in the direction of Žepče - Doboj. Facilities: Facilities for tourists, grass football field, clay volleyball and basketball court, bocce court, and various recreational facilities for children and youth. Enjoying untouched nature, with numerous facilities for children and young people. (Municipality of Žepče, Partnership with Diaspora, 2016)

Sports and recreation center "Hrastuša", private property, surface approx. 10,000m2. It is located in Hrastuša. Facilities: facility for picnickers, dirt football field and paths for recreational walking. A place for rest and recreation, far from noise and asphalt. (Municipality of Žepče, Partnership with Diaspora, 2016)

Sports and recreation center "Marić" (private property). It is in Donji Ravne. Facilities: tennis courts intended for sports and recreational purposes, and courts for children. Accompanying facility, facilities in addition to the tennis courts include kitchenette, porch, changing rooms and wet room. (Municipality of Žepče, Partnership with Diaspora, 2016)

Tennis court "Tomić", private property, surface approx. 500m2. It is in Goliješnica. Facilities: tennis courts, bocce court, promenade. Accompanying facility-contents: kitchenette, porch, dressing room and wet room. (Municipality of Žepče, Partnership with Diaspora, 2016)

"CALIFORNIA" SWIMMING POOL (private ownership) It is in Goliješnica. Facilities: semi-Olympic pool and children's pool, with accompanying facilities. A place where you can

find refreshment on hot summer days. (Municipality of Žepče, Partnership with Diaspora, 2016)

2.2.2.5.7. Eco and organic farm

Although the region is rich in natural resources and has potential for health tourism, specific, formally certified eco or organic farms that are fully integrated into the tourist offer are not listed in detail in the available sources. The Kiseljak, Žepče, Papratnica area is mentioned as suitable for weekend and health tourism, which indicates a healthy environment and potential for rural tourism. In the area of the Žepče municipality, the number of farms engaged in organic farming and agritourism is growing.

OPG Mrkonjić (Ljubatović) This is one of the most important farms for the development of rural tourism in the municipality. Location: Ljubatović (Ozimica) settlement, Žepča. Offer: Agricultural products: Plantations of grapevines, rose hips (wild roses) and various seasonal fruits. Agrotourism: Housing with animals (interesting for children and families), camping with electricity and water, and the possibility of a vacation in nature. Products: Homemade juices, jams and other processed organic products. Opening hours: The farm is primarily available by appointment, while the camp and recreation area are open during the summer season.

OPG "HABAB" (Železno Polje) Specialized farm known for processing berries and other fruits according to traditional recipes. Location: Železno Polje. Offer: More than 20 different products, including homemade brandies, jams and syrups from organically grown fruit from the mountain slopes of Mahnjača.

Eco farms in development (trades) Several specific eco farms engaged in targeted production are registered in the municipality: Eco Farm "Zejd": Focused on organic production of specific crops (owner Hatidža Hajdarević). Eko Farm "Jagoda": Specialized in the cultivation of berries (owner Izudin Efendić), which is a strategic culture of Žepč. Eko Farm "Prijić": A family farm in Žepče included in the network of organic producers.

Most of farms operate as family farms. For the purchase of fresh products or a tourist visit (tastings, horseback riding, sightseeing), it is best to contact the owners. The advantages of buying, among other things, quality, nutritional value, functionality, the possibility of buying 365 days, direct communication with the manufacturer.

2.2.2.5.8. Restaurants and catering facilities

There is a diverse catering offer that includes restaurants, pizzerias, and cafes.

Restaurant "In" Žepče Location: Next to Hotel "In", Ravne Donje. Offer: Wide selection of food and drinks, including local and international cuisine. The restaurant also has a banquet and congress hall. Opening hours: Monday - Sunday: 07:00 - 23:00.

FACE Pizzeria & Restaurant Location: Novo Naselje Bb, Žepče. Offer: Focus on pizza and various dishes (breakfast, lunch, dinner), often with an emphasis on local cuisine and desserts. Opening hours: The kitchen is open from 09:00 to 22:00.

Motel Hanovi Location: Golubinja, along the M-17 main road. Offer: A hospitality facility with a diverse selection of food and beverages and accommodation capacities (Kosić, 2026).

Hotel Kavalir Location: Golubinja, along the M-17 main road. Offer: A hospitality facility with a diverse selection of food and beverages and accommodation capacities. Opening hours: Always open (Kosić, 2026).

Restaurant "Rijeka" Location: Begov Han, by the Pepelarska River. Offer: A family restaurant with tradition, specializing in fresh fish (trout) from its own pool, along with other various dishes. They have a summer garden overlooking the river. Opening hours: Tuesday - Sunday: 12:00 - 23:00 (Closed on Mondays).

The Best Location: Kralja Stjepana Tomaševića b.b, center of Žepče. Offer: Catering facility with a diverse offer, including an excellent selection of beer and coffee. Opening hours: Monday - Sunday: 07:00 - 23:00 (Friday and Saturday until 03:00).

Pizzeria Moretti Location: Kralja Stjepana Tomaševića bb, Žepče town centre. Offer: A hospitality facility with a diverse selection of pasta dishes, pizzas, and other grilled dishes. Opening hours: Monday – Sunday: 08:00 – 23:00 (Kosić, 2026).

In addition to restaurants, there are many cafes in Žepče that are central places of social life: Caffe bar "Centar": Located in the city center and a popular place to socialize. KOKA Grill&Bar: Offers bar and grill services. Caffe bar Futura: Another of the more popular cafes in the city.

Fast food “Pero Ždero” Location: Stjepana Radića bb, Žepče city center. Offer: fast food (burgers, tortillas, and pizza). A popular spot during the day for students, and on weekends known for being open in the evening hours. (Kosić, 2026)

Cafe opening hours are generally flexible and often open until late in the evening, especially on weekends.

2.2.3. Culture

In modern tourism, culture is no longer just an "add-on" to a vacation, but a key resource and the main motive for travel for millions of people. Its role differs significantly depending on whether we view it through the prism of cultural or creative tourism. In the broadest sense, culture is a "complex whole" that includes knowledge, beliefs, art, morality, law, customs and all other habits that an individual adopts in a community. According to the Croatian Encyclopaedia, it represents the totality of material and spiritual goods that humanity has created. In classical cultural tourism, culture is the object of observation and admiration. Here, the tourist is mainly a passive consumer of the offer. Place: Culture is found in monuments, museums, galleries, archaeological sites and historic city centres. Role: Identity: Defines the authenticity and "brand" of a destination Educational: Visitors learn about the history, tradition and art of a people. Protective: Tourism generates the funds necessary for the preservation and restoration of cultural heritage. Creative tourism represents the evolution of cultural tourism. Here, culture is not static, but becomes a living and interactive process. Place: Culture moves from the stage and walls of museums to workshops, kitchens, studios, and direct contact with local people. Role: Participatory: Tourists actively participate in the creation of culture (e.g. local cooking classes, folk handicrafts, language courses). Developmental: Encourages the development of cultural and creative industries (CCIs), which creates new jobs and stimulates innovation. Social cohesion: Connects tourists and local people on a deeper level, reducing feelings of "consumerism" and alienation.

Feature	Cultural tourism	Creative tourism
Tourist role	Observer (passive)	Participant (active)
Main resource	Heritage and history	Skills and creativity
Objective	Sightseeing and learning	Self-improvement and experience

It is estimated that around 40% of international travel includes some cultural component, making this sector one of the fastest growing in the tourism industry. In the context of tourism, these components are divided into tangible and intangible heritage: Tangible heritage: Immovable: Archaeological sites, historic centres, castles, religious buildings.

Movable: Works of art, museum exhibits, manuscripts. Intangible heritage: Traditions and customs: Festivals, rituals, oral tradition and folk tales. Gastronomy: Traditional recipes, wine roads and culinary skills. Performance arts: Music, dance and theatre performances specific to the region. Creative components: Contemporary culture: Design, fashion, film industry and new media. Skills: The possibility of learning traditional crafts or contemporary artistic techniques (key to creative tourism). According to the World Tourism Organization (UN Tourism), these components together form a set of recognizable material, intellectual and emotional characteristics that motivate tourists to visit a destination. Some of these components have been identified above. It is necessary to focus on ensuring synergy in their operation.

2.2.3.1. Culture institutions

A true treasury of cultural heritage is the Local Heritage Collection of the Public Institution "Žepče Public Library," which 400 books of diverse themes by authors from the Žepče area, as well as publications and journals about Žepče or those in which Žepče is mentioned in text and images. The collection also includes 198 rare books (1885 to the mid-20th century), 35 works of art and several museum exhibits. Throughout the year, numerous cultural, sports, entertainment, and other events are organised, with the Public Institution "Žepče Cultural Centre" acting as the main organiser (International Theatre Days, Žepačko Ljeto, within which events such as *Sevdah Returns to the City*, *Prvi Pljesak*, the International Rock Festival, and the Evening of Traditional Music *Žepački Pleter* are held). In addition, around ten cultural and artistic associations are actively involved in promoting and preserving the cultural heritage.

The main objective of the Public Institution Žepče Cultural Centre is the development and enhancement of culture, cultural and artistic creativity, cultural life, and activities. Within the Žepče Cultural Centre operates the LDF Dance Section, which includes modern, sports, and classical dance styles. The premises are used daily for programmes and activities by members of various associations and NGOs, such as the Youth Centre Putokazi, the Association of Citizens "Žepački studenti", the Centre for Social Development CEDRA Žepče, and the cultural and artistic association KUD Slovo o Žepču[42]. Since 2023, the institution has also been home to Kino Žepče, the first digital cinema in the area.

The building of the Cultural Centre also houses the Public Institution Žepče Public Library. As early as 1880, a reading society with 30 members was established in Žepče. In 2005,

[42] https://zepce.live/o-nama/

the Library founded a Local Heritage Collection, comprising works by authors from the Municipality of Žepče as well as artistic works by local artists. Since 2003, the Library has been operating as a public institution. The Žepče Public Library holds approximately 26,593 library units covering all fields, primarily adapted to the needs of school-age readers[43] /[44]. (Municipality of Žepče, Partnership with the Diaspora, 2016).

2010, the Ljerka Njeriš Gallery was opened in Žepče. The academic painter was born in Begov Han, Žepče municipality, and now lives and works in Zagreb. The exhibition of exhibits (40 paintings, ceramics, and glass) in the Gallery was arranged by art historian Prof. Marta Marjanović and academic painter Kristina Kramer, and some of the works were gifted by the artist to her hometown. The gallery is located on the ground floor of the Cultural Center. (ljerkanjers.com/galerija-ljerke-njers-zepce-bih/)

There is a certain gap in the matrix of cultural institutions (native (land) museum (public, private, in public-private partnership, galleries (private and public), HUB of cultural and creative industries, etc.)

2.2.3.2. A civil sector[45] that focuses on culture an the one that gives life to culture and identity

The civil sector that focuses on culture and that financially and in other ways supports the Municipality has numerous and important roles in the development of cultural and creative tourism (participants and organizers of events, those who tell stories/legends, who promote the heritage of Žepče on their travels, etc.). The civil sector of the Municipality focuses on culture, sports, recreation, youth, agriculture, beekeeping, etc. For illustration purposes, the following is an overview taken from RAŽ documents (more than 40 organizations, associations, societies). More information on www.opcina-zepce.com and https://razepce.com)

The artists of Žepče were also discussed earlier in the text. It is necessary to define the status of a prominent artist of the Municipality and other forms of support for individuals from the cultural and creative sector who contribute to the development of the Municipality based on the valorization of culture and heritage.

[43] https://zepce.ba/opca-biblioteka-zepce/

[44] https://www.facebook.com/opcabiblioteka/videos/njegovanje-zavi%C4%8Dajne-knji%C5%BEevnosti-%C5%BEep%C4%8Da/608009153960428/

[45] https://www.razepce.com/dokumenti/Na%E7e%20publikacije/2016%20Brosura%20Partnerstvo%20s%20dijasporom%20-%20Zepce.pdf

2.2.3.3. Media

The media space of the municipality of Žepče is covered by the radio signal local radio station „Radio Žepče“ (88.2 and 101.6 MHz), whose programs can also be listened to via the Internet www.rzepce. Com. (Municipality of Žepče, Partnership with Diaspora, 2016). The media, as part of the cultural and creative sector, have a special place in the development of cultural and creative tourism.

2.3. Resume

An overview of natural and cultural values, social and economic circumstances can be mapped at the locality level and in the following way.

Figure 33 Mapping of natural, cultural, and other peculiarities at locality level.



It can be concluded that there is potential for the development of cultural and creative tourism based on the demand of tourists from the gravity region and the diaspora. This is necessary, but not sufficient for development based on culture and creativity. The first step is the formal and actual protection of natural and cultural values, and the second is consensus at the level of the Municipality on values, vision and strategic goals.

B&H, despite its extremely high level of biological and landscape diversity, is among the countries with the smallest share of protected areas in Europe. Although it has committed to international obligations to protect at least 30% of its territory by 2030, the actual coverage of protected areas is about 3%. The situation in the Zenica-Doboj Canton is even more unfavourable, since the only formally protected area – the Tajan Nature Monument – occupies less than 1.5% of the Canton's area. This disproportion is especially

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pronounced if you consider that forests and forest land make up almost 65% of its territory, which clearly indicates an inadequate level of institutional protection in relation to the real natural values of the area.

The area of the municipality of Žepče occupies a special place in this context because it is characterized by an exceptional diversity of geological substrates, pronounced relief breakdown and a mosaic of forest and open habitats. Such conditions favoured the development of biogeographically extremely valuable flora and fauna, including many endemic, rare and endangered species, which ranks the municipality of Žepče among the most floristically significant areas of central Bosnia and Herzegovina. Near Žepč, in the zone of very dynamic relief and old volcanic rocks in refugia of tertiary flora and fauna are represented (KEAP ZE-DO 2025):

Ecosystems in rock crevices and on culverts Serpentine rock ecosystems with Halacsya sendtneri
Ecosystems of serpentine seeps with a yawn Ecosystems of relict pine forests with black pine
Ecosystems of thickets with hornbeam, hornbeam and black ash
Ecosystems of thermal springs

Previous research confirms the presence of at least 24 endemic plant species in the territory of the municipality of Žepče, which are recognized as such according to international standards. In addition, a total of 45 plant species from the Red List of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina were recorded, of which 19 are endemic, including four stenoendems (local endemics). These data clearly indicate an extremely high degree of biological specificity and sensitivity of habitats, and the need for their long-term and systemic protection.

In addition to floristic values, the area of Žepča is characterized by the presence of numerous rare and endangered species of fauna, including birds of prey, bats, as well as a significant number of species of insects and fungi, some of which are newly discovered in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and potentially new to science. The preservation of these values is partly the result of the inaccessibility of certain terrains, but also the traditional attitude of the local population towards nature.

Overall, the combination of extremely valuable endemic flora, the presence of species from the Red List, preserved forest ecosystems of high conservation value (HCVF) and a

relatively low degree of habitat fragmentation confirms that the municipality of Žepče represents an area of high national and regional importance for nature protection. These findings clearly justify the need for strengthening institutional protection, defining special purpose zones, establishing long-term monitoring and planned management of natural resources, as a basis for sustainable development and responsible use of space.

A significant number of endemic and subendemic taxa have been registered in the area of Žepč, among which the following stand out: Scabiosa leucophylla, Rubus tomentosus var. zvornikensis, Halacsya sendtneri, Iris reichenbachii var. bosniaca, Euphorbia montenegrina, Euphorbia gregersenii, Viola beckiana, Potentilla carniolica, Symphyandra hofmannii and Daphne blagayana. The presence of these species indicates the long-term continuity of favorable habitat conditions and the high value of space in the context of preserving the genetic and biogeographic diversity of the flora of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

From the point of view of the degree of endangerment, the critically endangered (CR) species Stachys chrysophaea Panč stands out. (syn. Stachys recta subsp. baldaccii var. chrysophaea), whose populations in the area of Žepče (Orlovik, Ljeskovica) are extremely fragmented and spatially limited. This species represents one of the most significant floristic conservation elements of the area, whose preservation requires strict habitat protection measures and long-term monitoring.

In the category of endangered (EN) species, Viola stagnina Kit., recorded in the fields around Žepče, was recorded. Its presence in anthropogenically altered landscapes further emphasizes the vulnerability of this species, especially in the context of changes in land use, agricultural intensification, and loss of traditional extensive habitats.

The category of vulnerable (VU) species in Žepče includes Euphorbia fragifera Jan, whose populations are registered in the vicinity of Maglaj and Žepč. This species is related to specific ecological conditions and is sensitive to changes in the structure of the habitat, especially to successional processes and degradation of open areas.

The most numerous groups consist of almost endangered (NT) species, among which are Viola beckiana (Smolin near Žepče), Euphorbia gregersenii (Žepče – Kamenica, serpentine), Halacsya sendtneri (Žepče – Boljak, Kik and Ljeskovica) and Symphyandra hofmannii. This group of species clearly indicates the existence of a wider complex of sensitive habitats, the conservation of which requires a preventive approach to spatial management, even before a serious decline in population numbers occurs.

The presence of the species Orobanche salviae, recorded at the Smolin locality, deserves special attention, and is classified as insufficient data (DD). This finding points to a

pronounced deficit of systematic floristic research, but also to the potentially high scientific significance of the locality, given the possibility of the existence of rare or locally differentiated populations.

Although Calamintha (Calamicromeria) hostii is classified as a Least Concern (LC) species, its presence in the wider area of Žepča additionally contributes to the overall floristic diversity and confirms the ecological heterogeneity of the area.

Overall, the combination of critically endangered, endangered, vulnerable, near endangered and endemic plant species confirms that the area of the municipality of Žepče has an extremely high floristic and conservation significance. These findings justify the need to integrate the area into wider nature protection plans, define special protection zones, limit degradation activities, and establish long-term monitoring of endangered plant populations.

In addition to the exceptional floristic wealth, a significant number of rare and endangered species of fauna, as well as valuable species of fungi, some of which are newly discovered in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and potentially new to science, have also been recorded in the territory of the municipality of Žepče. The inaccessibility of certain terrains, complex relief structure and limited intensity of space use, as well as the existence of forests of high protection value (HCVF), which are not intensively managed, contributed to the preservation of these components of biodiversity. An additional role in the preservation of natural values was played by the traditionally responsible relationship between the local population and the users of the space.

The geological structure of the area, characterized by igneous and impermeable rocks, has resulted in a developed network of springs, streams and smaller watercourses, creating a specific hydrological system of particular ecological importance. However, local evidence of the drying up of some springs due to previous intensive deforestation further confirms the sensitivity of this system and the need for its long-term protection.

The value of the area has been confirmed through many years of scientific research and field camps, during which many species from the FBiH Red List were documented, including rare and endangered plants, mushrooms, bats, and species from groups of insects and amphibians important for the Natura 2000 network. These results represent a strong professional basis for strengthening institutional protection and establishing an adequate management system.

In this context, the development of tourist and recreational activities in the territory of the municipality of Žepče should be strictly conditioned by previous nature protection measures, to prevent habitat degradation and preserve the ecological functions of the

area. Sustainable tourism, developed in parallel with protection measures, can generate long-term economic, educational, and social benefits for the local community, without endangering the natural values that represent its basis.

The cultural and historical heritage of the Municipality of Žepče covers a very long historical period, includes many objects, historical events, personalities associated with their origin, construction, renovation, arrangement, use, cultural and religious customs, traditions, as well as stories/legends. There are interesting connections with historical figures from all areas and areas (Rome, Dubrovnik, Turkey, Austria-Hungary, etc.), of various professions (merchants, rulers, military leaders, architects, researchers, artists, writers, apothecaries, bakers, builders, ...). There are also stories about families, relationships in families, women, mothers, their status, progress, and disappearance. The above and much more related to the past is a potential for interpretation and valorisation through cultural and creative tourism. This presupposes real knowledge, continuous holistic research and (re)interpretation, and the involvement of all members of the local community. It is a process in which there are no irrelevant details (objects, materials, structures in space and society, construction techniques, people, culture of living, housing, nutrition, business, communication, story, legend, feelings). A creative local community and every individual in that community can valorise everything, every detail, through tourism and the cultural and creative industry.

The following are proposed for inclusion in the DWR:

- Stećci in the area of Pazarić and Novi Šeher localities.
- Sites of Roman houses in the area of Novi Šeher;
- The Orthodox Church dedicated to the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary was built in 1894.
- Jewish cemetery over 300 years old in the immediate vicinity of the city,
- Ferhad Pasha's mosque, built in 1568, was built by Ferhadbeg, who was called Ferhad Pasha in Žepče;
- Alibeg's mosque, built at the beginning of the 16th century, was built by Alibeg in Žepč at a place called Trzna. It was declared a national monument of Bosnia and Herzegovina. (RAŽ, 2025)

On the supply side, the Municipality has exceptional natural values, rich cultural, architectural and historical heritage, exceptional historical figures (including figures from stories, songs and legends), cultural and religious manifestations, research and other camps, cultural and creative potential in the Municipality and the diaspora, resources, economic structure, tourist and entrepreneurial infrastructure, as well as a strategic orientation towards sustainability, culture, creativity, tourism. The demand for

developing destinations is based on the diaspora, which is well situated, organized and educated, has the means and the time it wants to use in Žepč. Another key source of demand is tourists coming from the cities of the gravity region (distance about 60 minutes by car). These are families with children, but also other groups. They need space for recreation, walking, rest, sports activities, education, cultural and religious facilities, clean air, healthy (medicinal) water and herbs, organic food. Space without smoke, plastic, chemicals, waste, dust emissions, gases. Possibility of purchasing directly from the producer on the farm, at the source (on Sundays, holidays).

The potential for the development of cultural and creative tourism is:

- exceptional natural values of forests, springs, flora, fauna
- very valuable cultural and historical material (objects) and intangible (stories, legends, songs, music, customs, ...) heritage
- existing food production (vegetables, fruit, honey, milk, meat, medicinal herbs)
- water sources of high value for drinking and treatment
- geo-traffic position
- 52 cultural, religious, sports and other events during the year (from 1 to 9 events, an average of 4.3 events per month)
- excursionists from the gravitational region within a radius of up to 60 minutes' drive
- a diaspora that numbers about 25,000 people and that has knowledge, economic power, and is interested in implementing certain services related to health, vacation, recreation, culture, sports, religious/spiritual life and business
- can successfully promote the values
- diaspora which is interested in investing in the economy and tourism of the Municipality, but at the same time in being a user of these services and animating other users from abroad.
- existing tourist infrastructure
- space to offer excursion packages that include healthy food, medicinal water, recreation, walking, cultural and religious content for the population in the gravity zone and thus fill a certain gap in the FBiH tourist market.
- the possibility of organizing trainings, workshops, research

- production of souvenirs and other wooden products for the needs of the Municipality, the Canton, but also for the needs of the DWR and the Danube Macroregion
- civil sector interested in research, protection, culture, education

Figure 34 Summary of natural, cultural, and other values

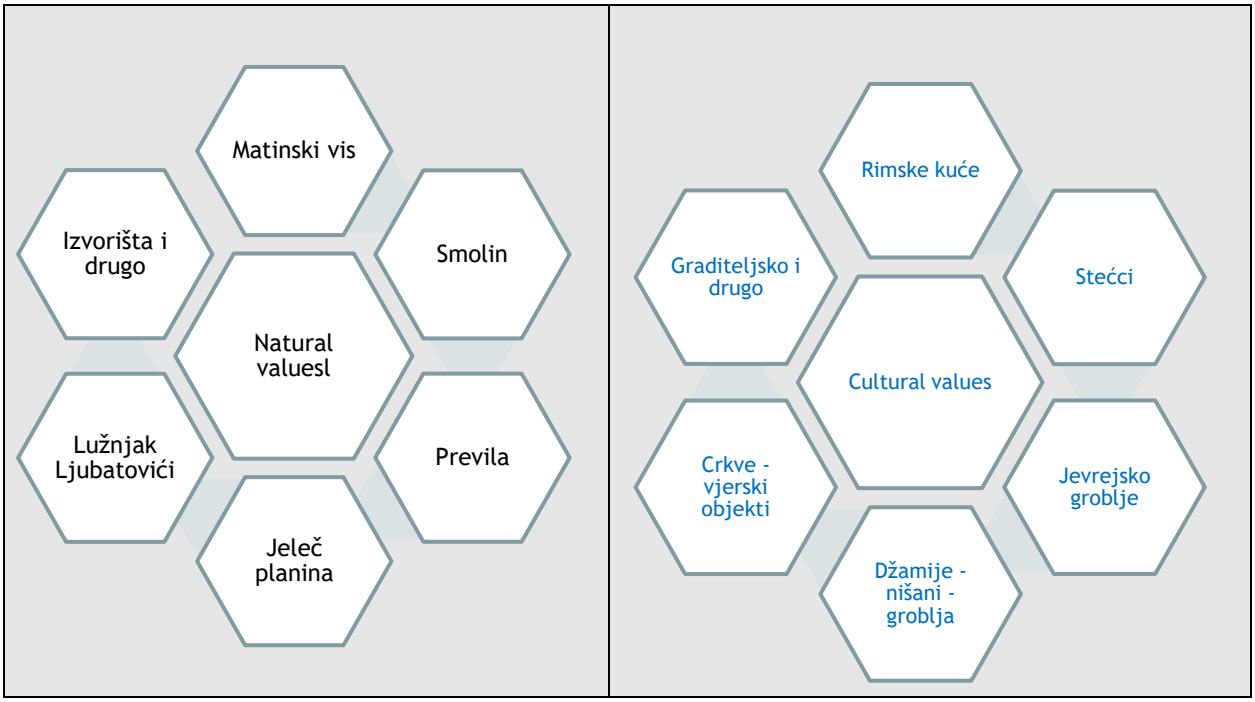


Figure 35 Tourist infrastructure

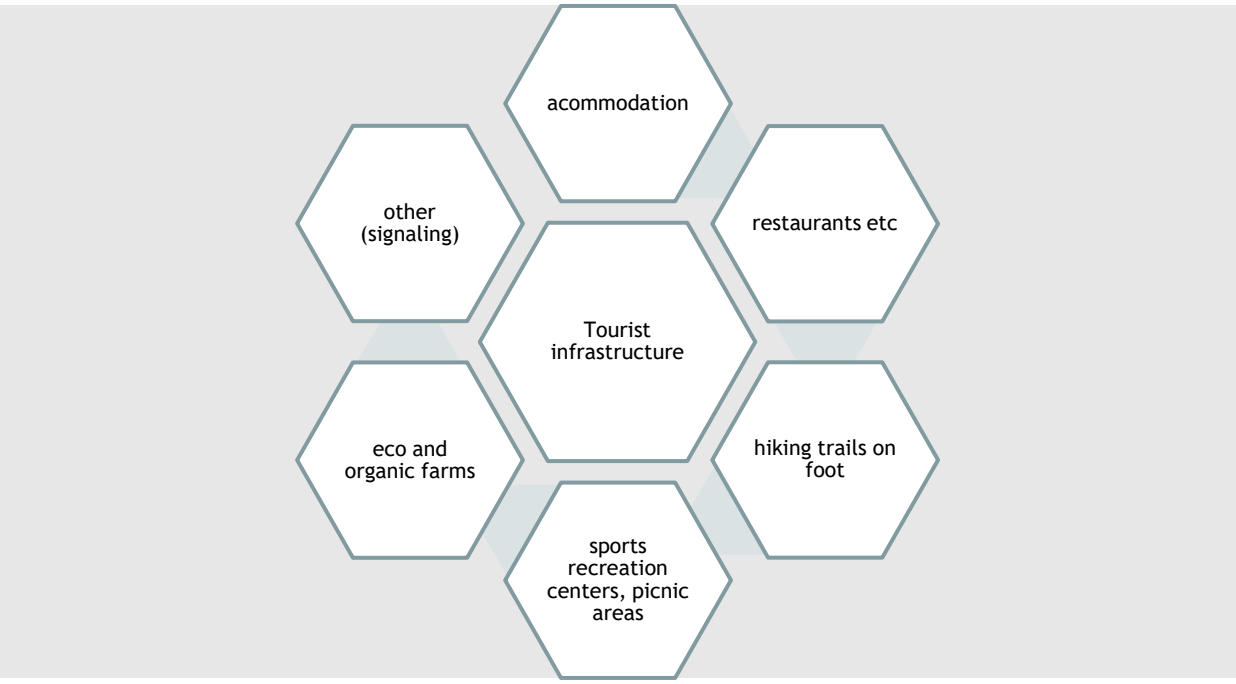
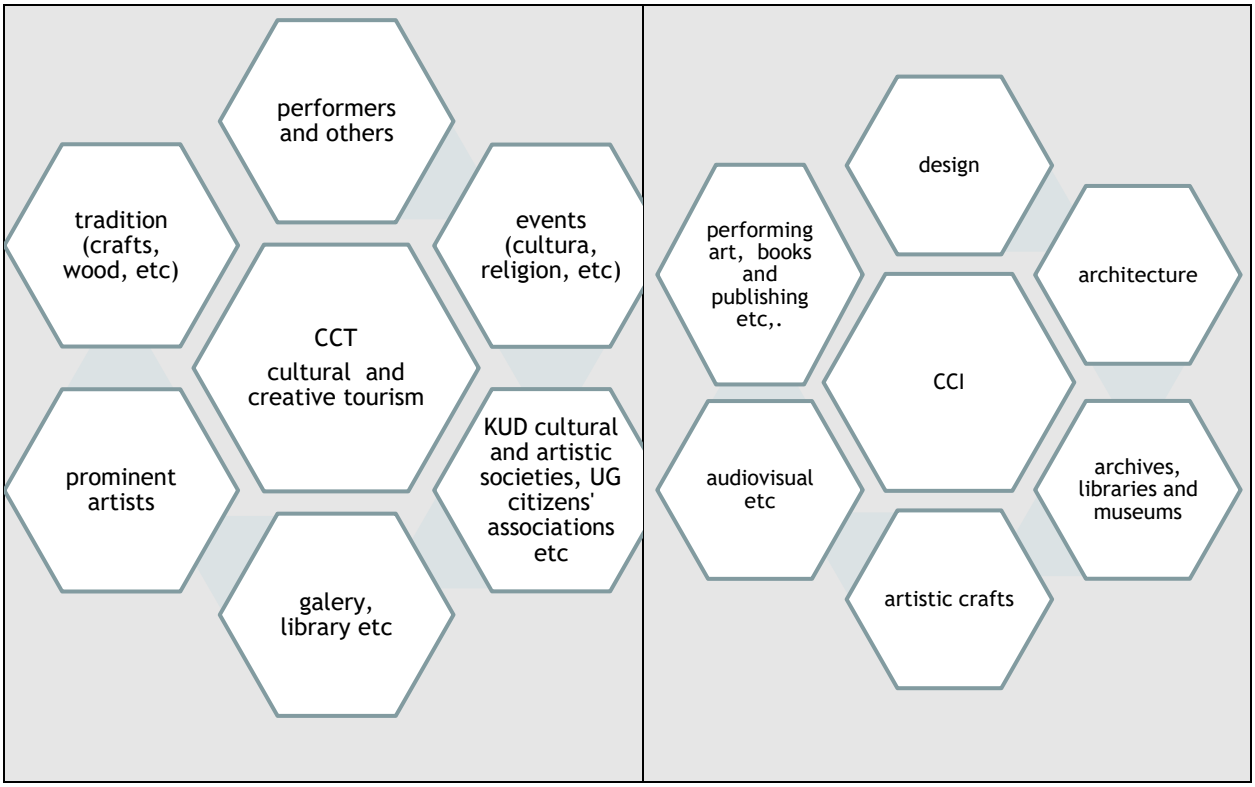


Figure 36 Assumptions for cultural and creative tourism supporting CCI



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Focus on demand (diaspora, tourists, others) In addition to a few elements on the supply side, key groups have been identified on the demand side.

Figure 37 Focus on demande

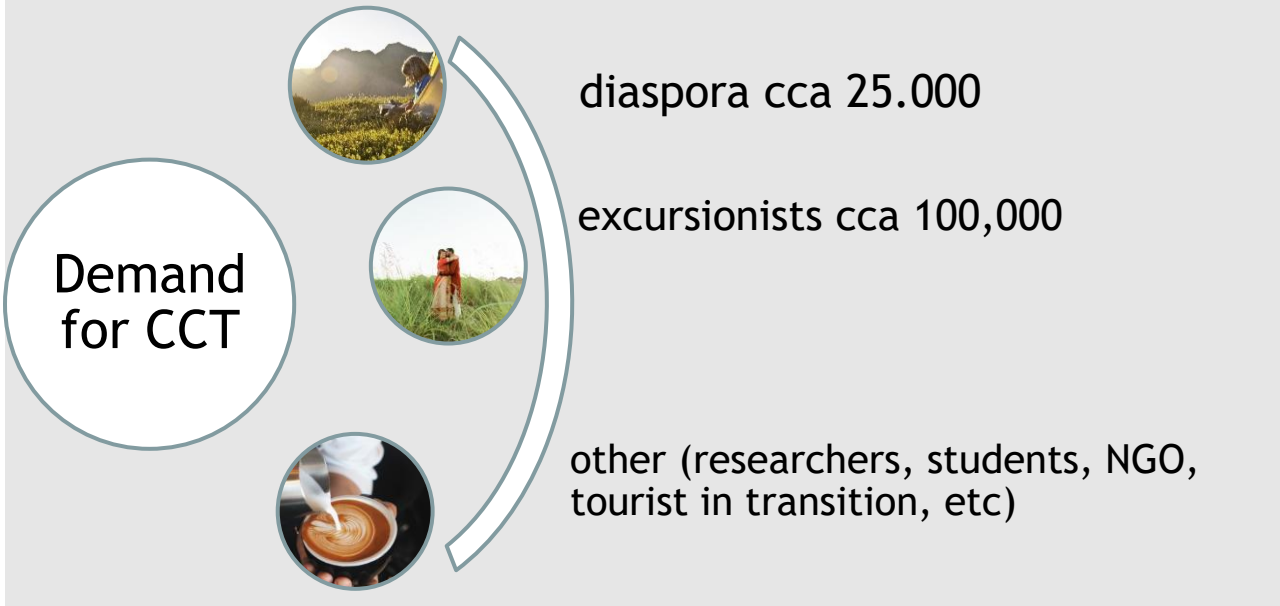
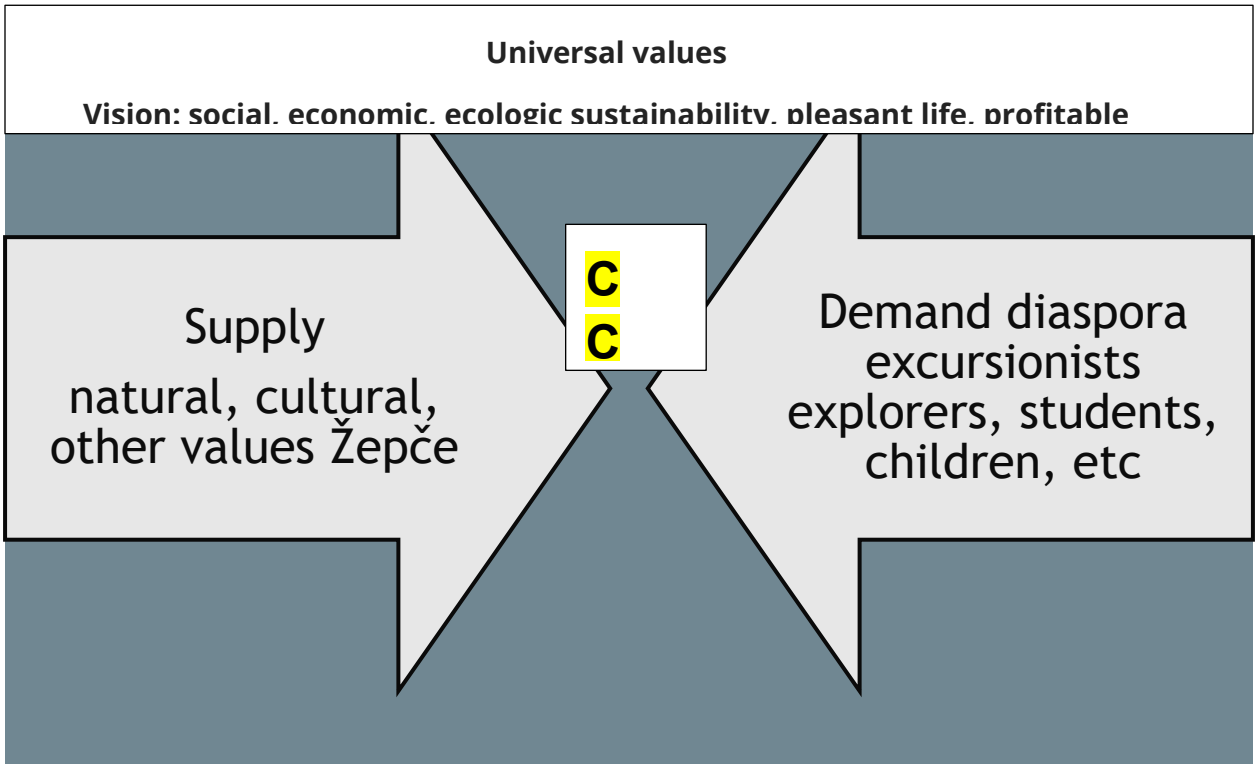


Figure 38 Summary of supply and demand CCT - CCI



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There is also the willingness and interest of all three sectors (public, private and civil) of Žepča to diversify the economic structure by including and/or strengthening cultural and creative industries (CCIs), especially cultural and creative tourism, as well as to ensure synergy with already realized domestic and international projects (three cities, three national nature parks, etc.)

2.4. Challenges and opportunities

RAŽ, in discussions with key participants in the development of cultural and creative tourism, identified the following challenges, namely:

- focus on the resources and needs of the local population - defining the protection regime and scope for the natural and cultural-historical values of the Municipality of Žepče, with a special focus on Matinski Vis and related sites, through the alignment of interests and needs of the public, civil, and private sectors at the local and wider territorial level
- complete, multidimensional mapping of all contents relevant to the development of cultural and creative tourism based on continuous research of the municipality's values and (re)interpretation of those values in the context of the development of cultural and creative tourism. In other words, it is necessary to take a step further compared to recent reviews of natural and cultural, architectural, and other values (focus on every plant, every animal, every m2 of space, every object, every person, idea, event and that through the time before Rome, Rome, and through 1458 to the present day)
- focus on the diaspora and tourists - identifying the needs of the diaspora and potential tourists in relation to the contents of cultural and creative tourism. The diaspora is estimated at around 25 thousand people. When it comes to the gravitational area that could generate excursionists, the number of inhabitants in the cities of the gravitational region is estimated at around 340 thousand within a radius of up to 60 minutes, as well as an additional around 500 thousand within a radius of up to 100 minutes. redesigning accommodation, trails, signage and other facilities and facilities in the context of the development of cultural and creative tourism
- redesign of accommodation facilities, trails, signage and other amenities and infrastructure in the context of developing cultural and creative

- Tourists in transit, researchers, students, others
- focus on cultural and creative tourism - establishing a partnership with institutions and individuals who are engaged in the production of souvenirs, especially wooden souvenirs in order to work on strengthening the creativity of pupils, students, employees and other participants in the development of the Municipality. educating in the field of strategic planning, management, monitoring and evaluation of cultural and creative tourism business projects. motivating all participants in the development process to actively participate and take ownership of the process of developing cultural and creative tourism, which focuses on the needs and expectations of the diaspora and tourists, while at the same time respecting the reception capacity of the Municipality, its natural, cultural and other values
- focus on quality of life - about the transformation of the Municipality of Žepče into a local community without smoke, without plastic, without waste, without food waste, and with autochthonous food, medicinal waters and plants, areas for walking, rest, recreation, the opportunity to participate in cultural and religious life

The possibilities of developing cultural and creative tourism in the Municipality of Žepče are based on:

first, Diaspora and tourists

- about the diaspora and tourists from the area of gravity on the demand side
- about excess financial resources of the diaspora (excursionists) and the interest in placing them on the territory of the Municipality
- about the excess free time of the diaspora (trippers) and the need to use it
- about age and circumstances related to it
- needs related to diaspora identity (customs, birth, baptism, wedding, funeral, etc.)
- excursionists' needs related to recreation, educational trails (flora, fauna, stories, architectural heritage, galleries, music, customs), religious ceremonies, consumption and purchase of healthy food on the property and water at the source, sports activities (paragliding, tennis, swimming, fishing, hunting)

second, strategic orientation of the Municipality

- on the strategic orientation of the leaders of the Municipality and RAŽ on the development of cultural and creative tourism

- about the need to differentiate the economic structure
- about the interest of the population to activate creative potentials in the function strengthening the identity of the local community
- synergy with already implemented and future international projects (DWR) relevant for the development of cultural and creative tourism

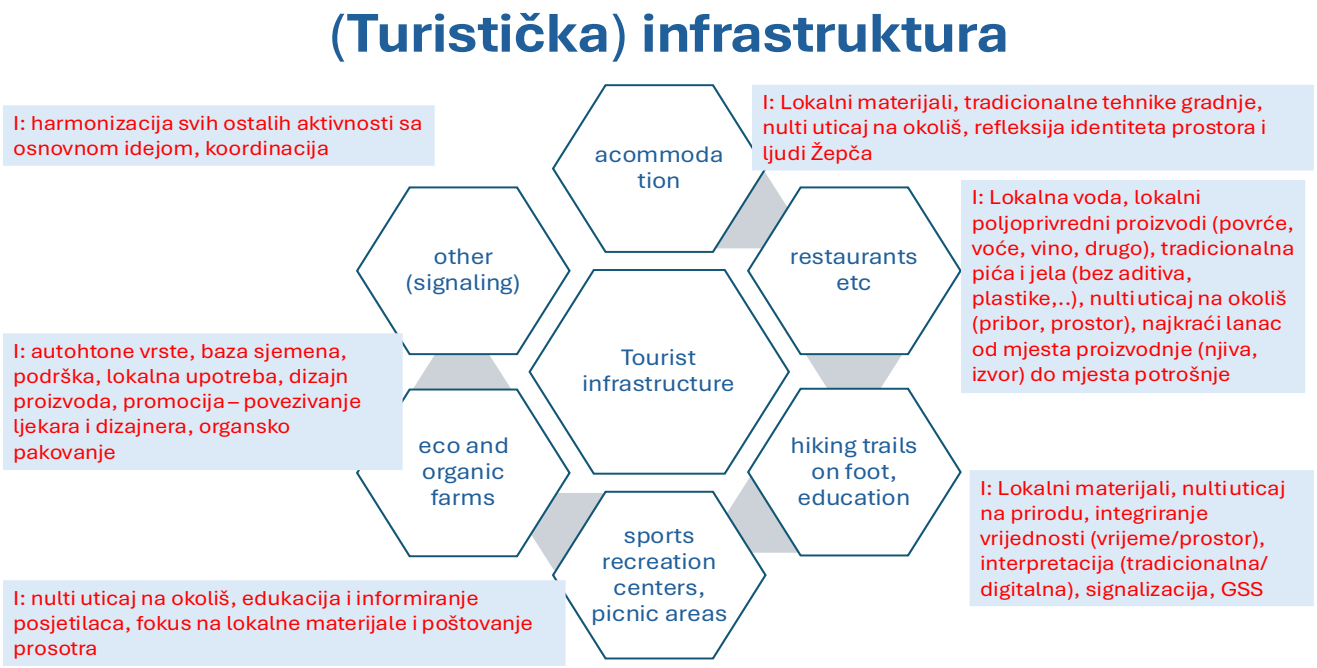
third, full and comprehensive identification and interpretation of the Municipality's resources

- natural, cultural, and other values on the supply side
- growing interest in the quality of life, which includes health, recreation, food, water, air, medicinal herbs, education, cultural and religious contents

fourth, valorisation of trends in the world

- healthy life based on clean air, water (especially medicinal or functional), organic food (food that has travelled 0 (as few) km), recreational opportunities (walking, hiking, fishing, ...), the possibility of living in healthy facilities
- life based on satisfying spiritual needs (culture, religion, meditation, art)
- local communities without tobacco smoke, plastic, waste (especially food), traffic that endangers.

Figure 39 Challenges of tourism infrastructure



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Figure 40 Summary of challenges for natural and cultural values

Prirodne i kulturne vrijednosti – izazov za KKT

Izazov: formalna i stvarna zaštita, upravljanje zaštićenim (JUZDK ili JUOŽ); financiranje (budžet ZDK, OŽ, drugi, turistička taksa/doprinos); harmoniziranje interesa javnog, civilnog, privatnog sektora (kontinuitet aktivnosti), cjelovito evidentiranje, sistematiziranje, proučavanje, interpretacija; prihvatni kapacitet; mjesto i uloga RAŽ (tko će biti ključna institucija – čuvar interesa?)

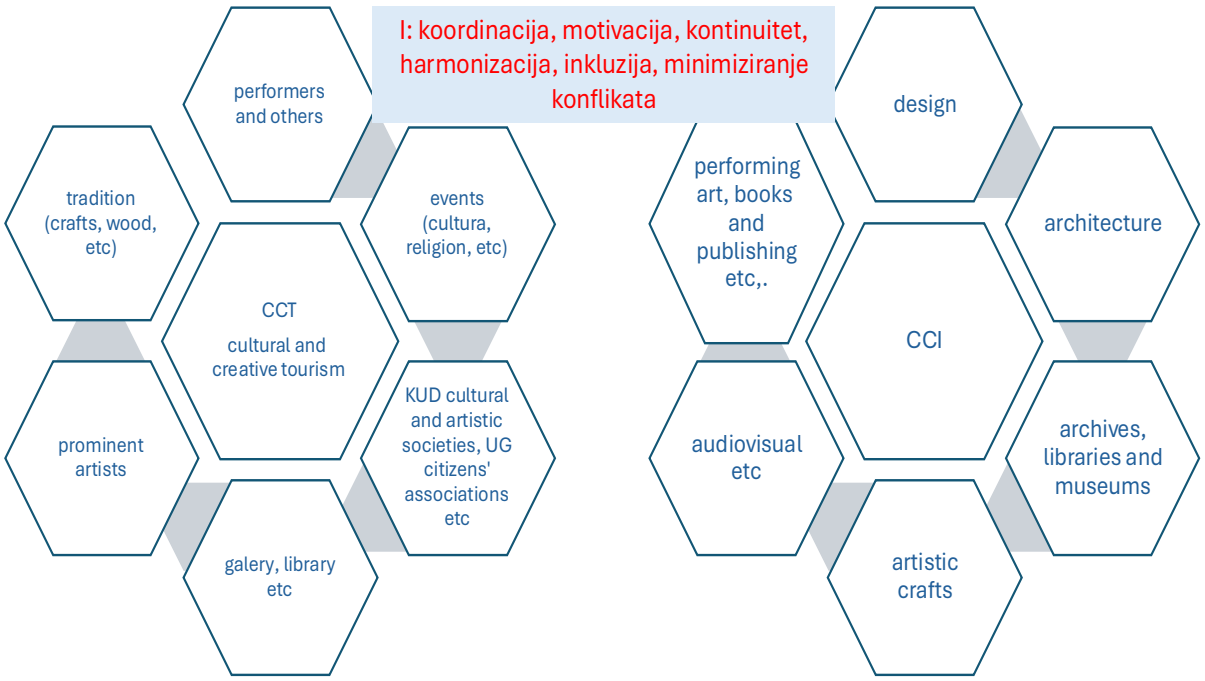
Prirodne
- Geo-promenti položaj
- Biodiverzitet
- Vode – izvori, ...
- Šume
- Prijedlog za u DWR
- Ljeko-bilje
- Poljoprivredno zemljište

...

Kulturne, povijesne, graditeljske ...
- Kulturne, povijesne, graditeljske vrijednosti
- Ljudi i njihov trag u prostoru kroz vrijeme
- Mahale – kultura stanovanja i življenja
- Drugi sadržaji (Titov muzej, oldtimeri, ...
- Drvo i kulturno, historijsko, graditeljsko nasljeđe

Figure 41 Challenges for shaping cultural and creative tourism

Elementi oblikovanja i razvoja kulturnog i kreativnog turizma općine Žepče

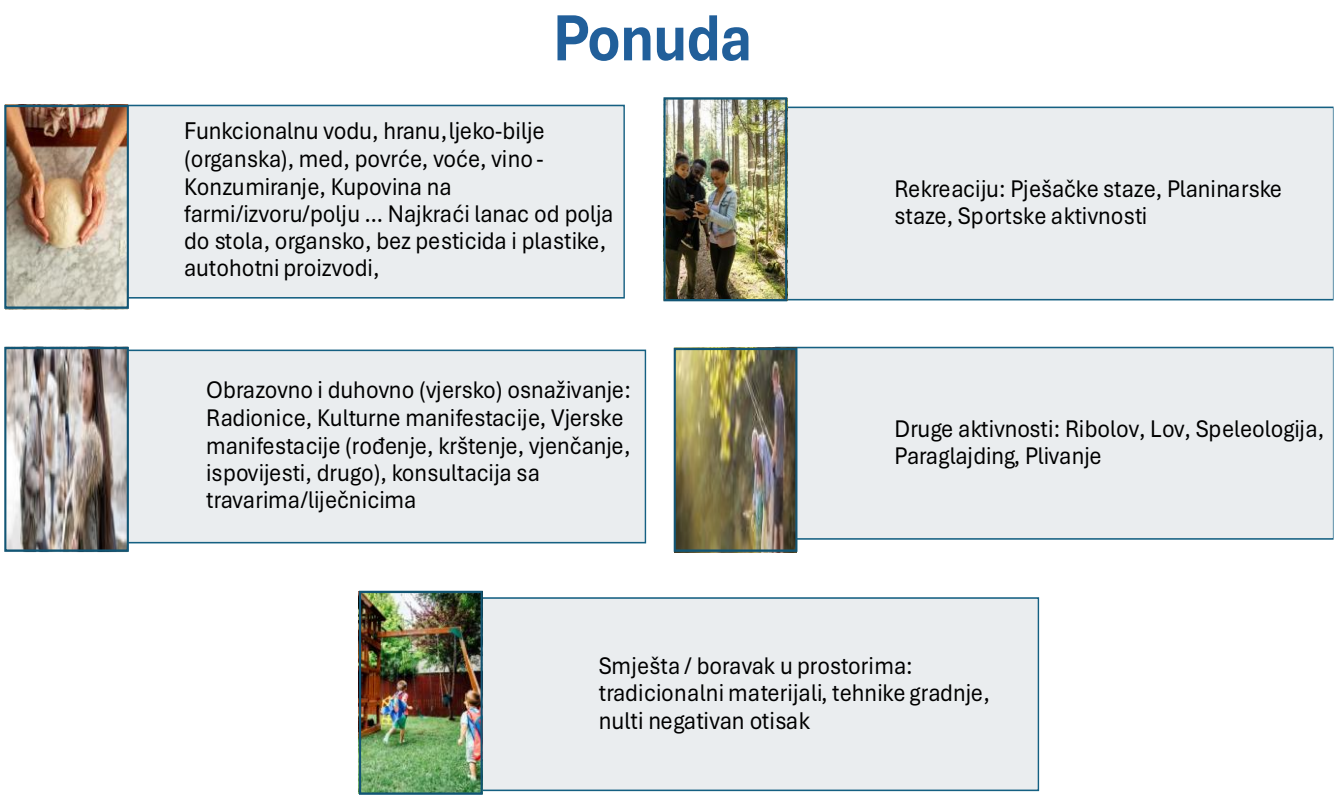


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Figure 42 Focusing the offer on excursionists and the diaspora



Figure 43 Designing the structure of the offer



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3. Strategic framework

The strategic framework for the development of cultural and creative tourism in the Municipality of Žepče is determined by vertical values, principles, strategies and projects at the global level, at the level of the Danube Macro Region, the DWR Project, Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Zenica-Doboj Canton and the general strategies and spatial plan of the Municipality of Žepče from top to bottom and local initiatives of the civil, private and public sectors from the bottom up.

The strategic framework for tourism development of the municipality of Žepče in 2026 relies on the integration of local resources into broader European and regional flows, primarily through the EU Strategy for the Danube Region (EUSDR) and specialized projects such as DW(s)R (Danube Wood(s) Route). The development of tourism in Žepče follows the priorities of EUSDR, especially within Priority Area 3 (Culture and tourism). Key elements include:

Joint promotion: Žepče positions itself as part of the wider tourist offer of the Danube basin, promoting natural and cultural heritage through transnational routes.

Sustainability: The focus is on the protection of biodiversity and the sustainable use of natural resources (mineral waters, nature parks) in accordance with the ecological goals of the region.

Connectivity: Strengthening mobility and tourist infrastructure that facilitates access to destinations within the macro-region

The Danube Wood(s) Route (DW(s)R) project, implemented by the Žepče Development Agency (RAŽ) within the Interreg Danube program, is a key operational tool in 2026. The goal is to develop tourist routes based on wood as a material and resource, connecting traditional craftsmanship, forest areas and creative industries. Focus groups are excursionists, diaspora, researchers, pupils, students. The project promotes cultural tourism as an opportunity for economic growth through the innovative use of local traditions. The strategic framework of Žepče is closely related to broader initiatives: "3 cities, 3 nature parks" project: Žepče, together with Maglaj and Zavidovići, is developing a joint strategy focused on nature parks such as Matinski vis. Integrated strategy 2018–2027: This umbrella document directs resources (mineral springs, forests) towards tourist and recreational purpose.

Specific Objective 1: Setting the strategic framework for Danube Wood(s) cultural route

To prepare a comprehensive overview over existing forest related natural assets, the cultural heritages and assets as well as usable touristic structures.

To identify local and regional stakeholders for implementing the project activities.

To achieve agreement among all project partners on overall strategy, specific detailed measures and regional action plans that presents the basis for implementing project activities.

Specific Objective 2: Empowerment and capacity building to trigger the "Danube Wood(s) cultural route" development

To develop and test transnational trainings/workshops scheme for enabling the start up/operation of the transnational wood route.

To set up initial elements of the cultural route of wood and to enable the actors in the regions of concern

To further develop and establish new structures, instruments, and services in eco tourism resulting in the triggering sustainable regional development.

Specific Objective 3: Visibility of the Danube Wood(s)cultural route

To improve visibility of the richness/variety of Danube forests and its cultural heritage.

To support transnational cultural wood-route with establishement of the Danube Woods cultural route network.

To foster resilience, innovation spirit in eco tourism and valorize wood assets.

Figure 44 Strategic framework - supply and demand confrontation

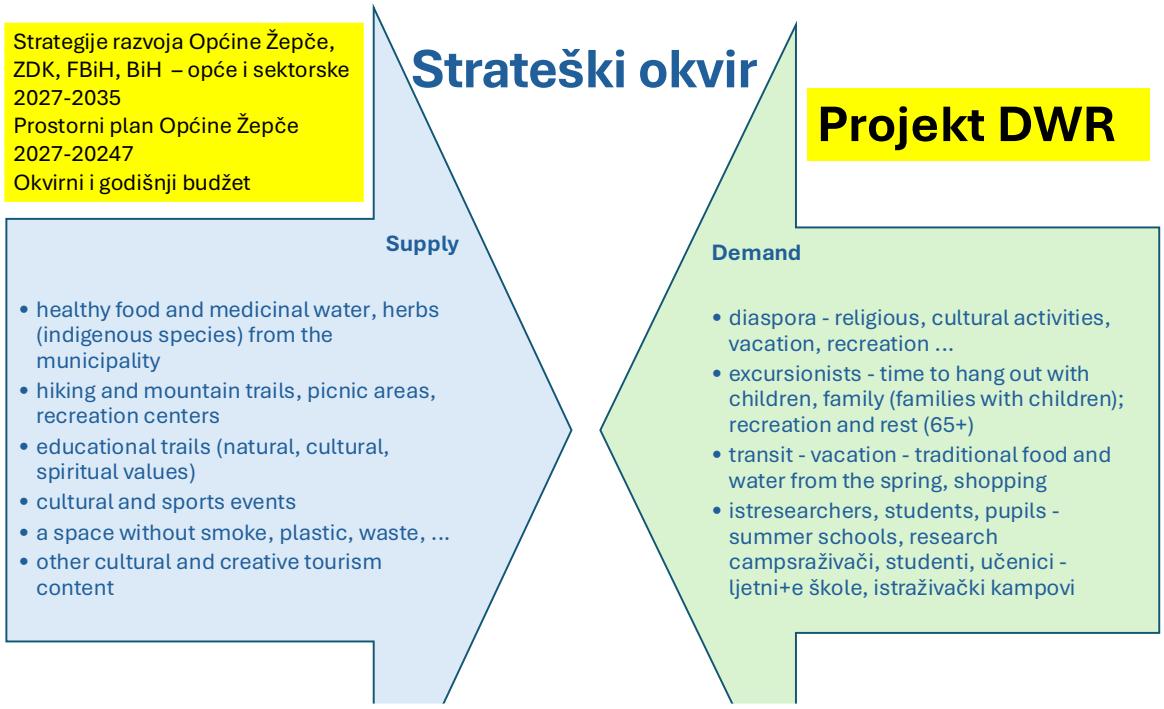


Figure 45 Elements of the strategic framework



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The basic elements of the strategic development of cultural and creative tourism in the municipality of Žepče oriented towards the diaspora, and in the context of using the possibilities and potential of DWR, are: Strategy of DWR, then the Integrated Development Strategy of the Municipality of Žepče 2017-2027. year, Gender Action Plan of the Municipality of Žepče 2025-2027. year, Youth Strategy of the Municipality of Žepče for the period 2024-2027. year, Spatial plan of the Municipality of Žepče 2007-2027. year, Environmental Protection Action Plan of the Municipality of Žepče 2021-2025. year, international and other projects in which the municipality has participated through RAŽ, such as the project of three cities - three national parks, the cooperation of the municipality with the diaspora, whose number is estimated at around 25,000 successful, well-educated and organized Zepčaks who value all dimensions of their identity. (Municipality of Žepče, Integrated Development Strategy of the Municipality of Žepče 2017-2027, 2018) (Municipality of Žepče, GENDER ACTION PLAN OF THE MUNICIPALITY OF ŽEPČE 2025 – 2027, 2025) (Municipality of Žepče, STRATEGIES FOR THE YOUTH OF THE MUNICIPALITY OF ŽEPČE FOR THE PERIOD 2024-2027, 2025) (Municipality of Žepče, Spatial plan of the Municipality of Žepče 2007-2027, 2007) (Municipality of Žepče, Action plan for environmental protection of the Municipality of Žepče 2021-2025, 2025)

The first determinants of the strategy focus on the diaspora

- According to estimates, the diaspora has around 25,000 people in a large number of countries, mostly European
- The Žepča diaspora also lives in the countries of the Danube macro-region (Slovenia, Croatia, Austria, Hungary, Czech Republic, Serbia, Germany, France etc.) and prefer Žepča forests as part of DWR forests
- She is well educated, economically very successful.
- It is particularly successful in business, higher education, medicine, culture and art, public administration and sports
- There is a synergy of two simultaneous orientations: the Municipality towards the Diaspora and the Diaspora towards the Municipality
- There is an interest of the first, second and third generations of the diaspora for longer and/or shorter vacations/stays throughout the year in Žepč
- There is an interest of the diaspora in participating in numerous cultural and religious events in Žepč
- There is interest in organizing/celebrating numerous birth-related events in Žepč. baptism, religious education, weddings, vows, death, commemoration of family members
- There is an interest in presenting Žepče to their business partners and friends to family members coming from other countries

- There is an interest in providing quality accommodation in Žepče that reflects the memory of childhood (ancestors) and the success achieved and the acquired status
- There is an interest in using natural, cultural, religious values to improve the quality of life (housing, air, water, food), vacation, work and status (getting acquainted with the values of the culture and tradition of Žepče, prominent personalities, place and role throughout history since Rome)

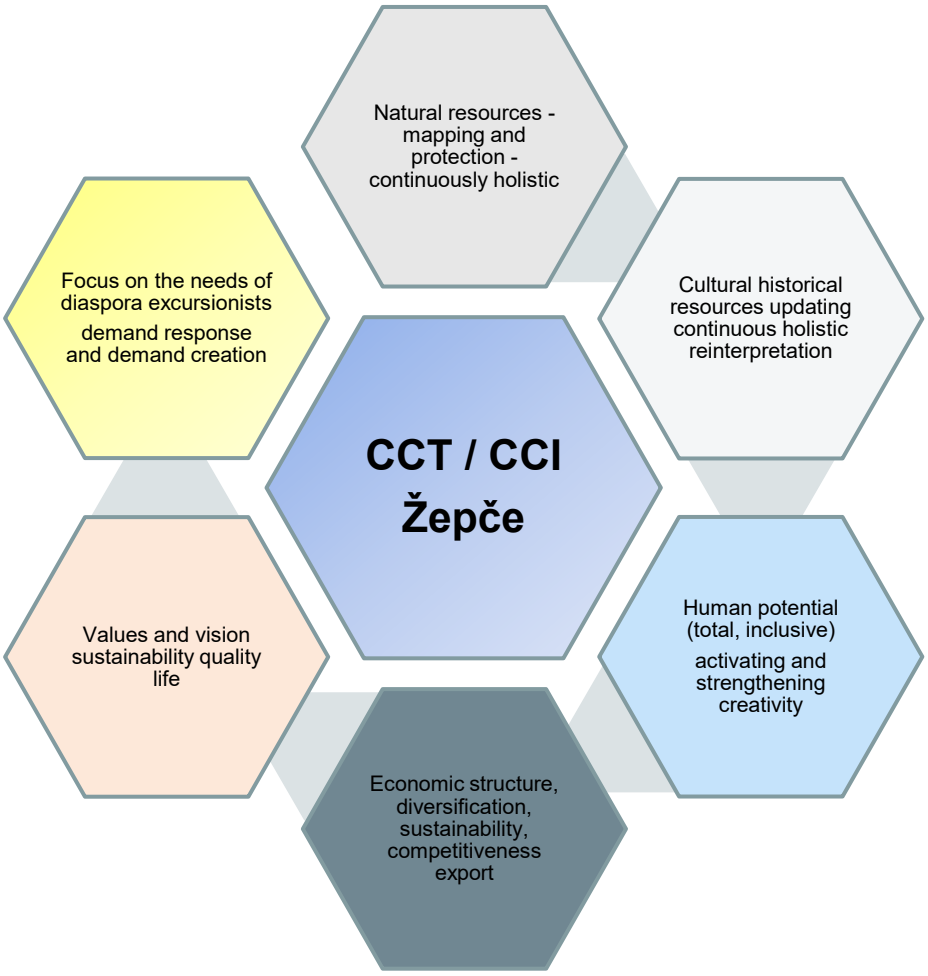
The second determinant is the focus on excursionists from the area within a 60-minute drive to Žepče who can enjoy the offer of cultural and creative tourism of Žepče based on natural and cultural values (healthy food, air, medicinal water, medicinal herbs, hiking and walking trails suitable for all ages, fishing, buying food and water at the spring and on the estate (they can pick and pour it themselves), active participation in religious events)

The third determinant, the value of cultural, architectural, natural and historical heritage is observed from the perspective of the diaspora, residents of Žepče, residents within a 60-minute drive. There is a very large potential for creating cultural and creative tourism that would satisfy or respond to the needs of target groups (diaspora, excursionists of the gravity area)

The fourth determinant, from this profiled strategic framework for the needs of this project, only two measures are highlighted that can be implemented within the given time and financial framework.

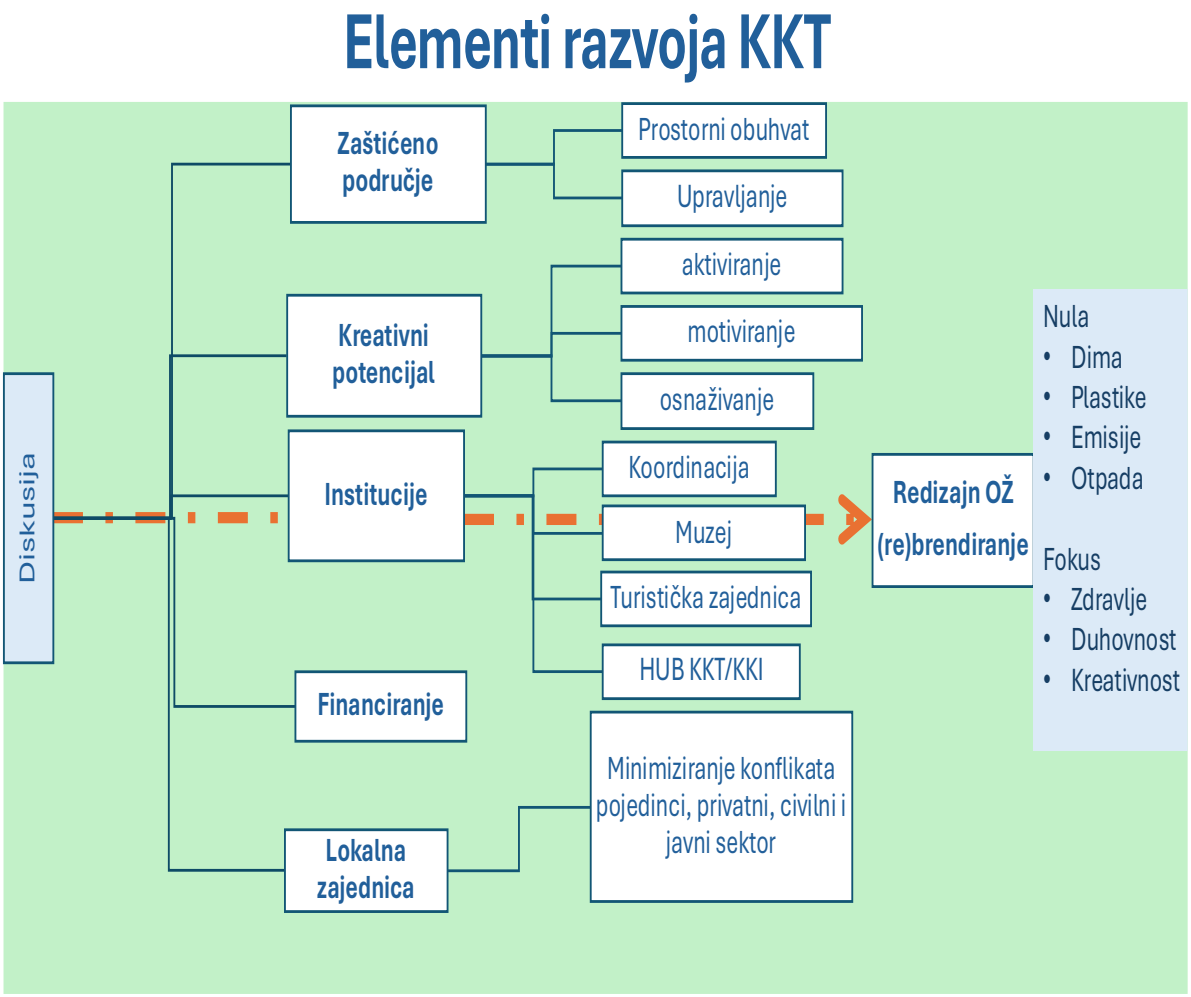
The full action plan for implementing the vision of the development of cultural and creative tourism of the Municipality of Žepče will be the subject of special work/engagement of RAŽ and its partners, especially in the context of developing a new integrated development strategy for the Municipality of Žepče for the period until 2035, the Spatial Plan of the Municipality of Žepče for the period 2027-2047. year, sector tourism development strategies of ZDK, Tourism Development Strategy of the Federation of BiH, Cultural Development Strategy of the Federation of BiH, and in accordance with the implementation of sustainable development goals in the period up to 2030 and the period after 2030.

Figure 46 Strategic framework



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Figure 47 Elements of development



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Figure 48 Measures to achieve the vision and strategic goals

V: Općina Žepče – prostor za porodicu, pojedince i grupe gdje se može provesti dan (vikend) u šetnji, rekreaciji, učenju, istraživanju, duhovnom i vjerskom osnaživanju, uz ljekovitu vodu, bilje i hranu, pri tome mogu se obaviti kupovine na farmi/izvoru, ali i konsultacije sa travarima, ljekarima, umjetnicima, obrtnicima bez dima, plastike, otpada, kemikalija, zagađenja ...

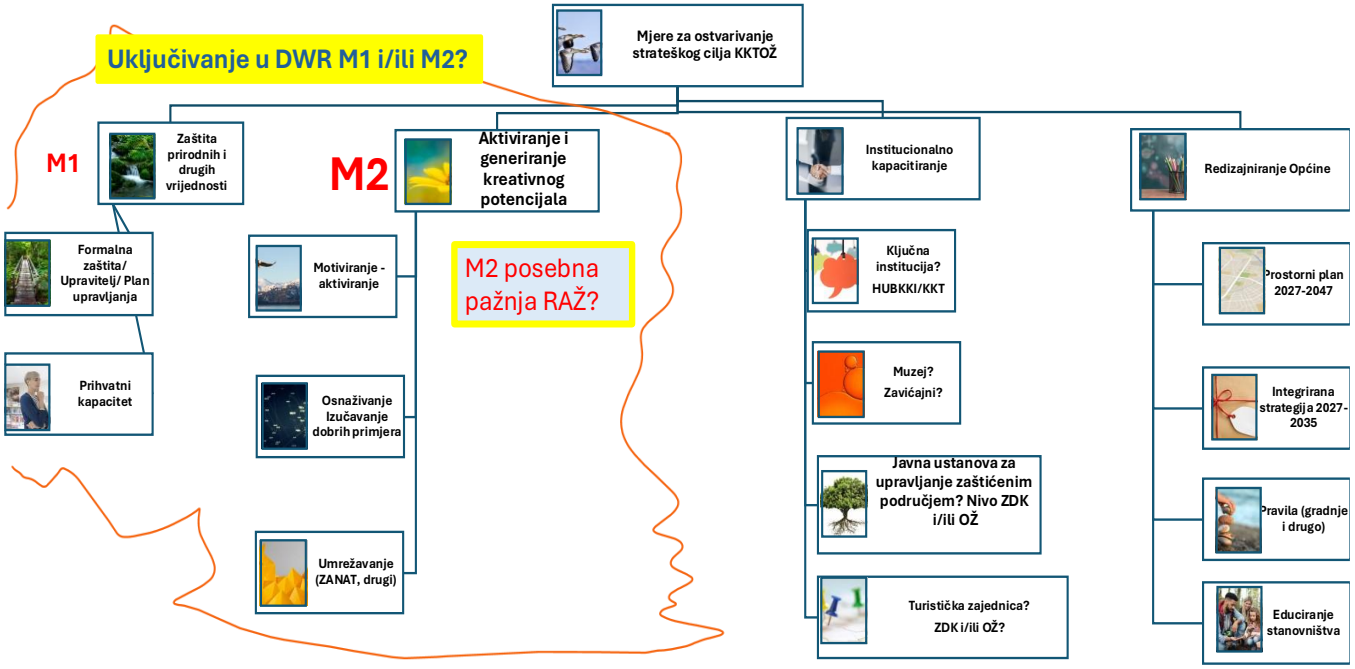
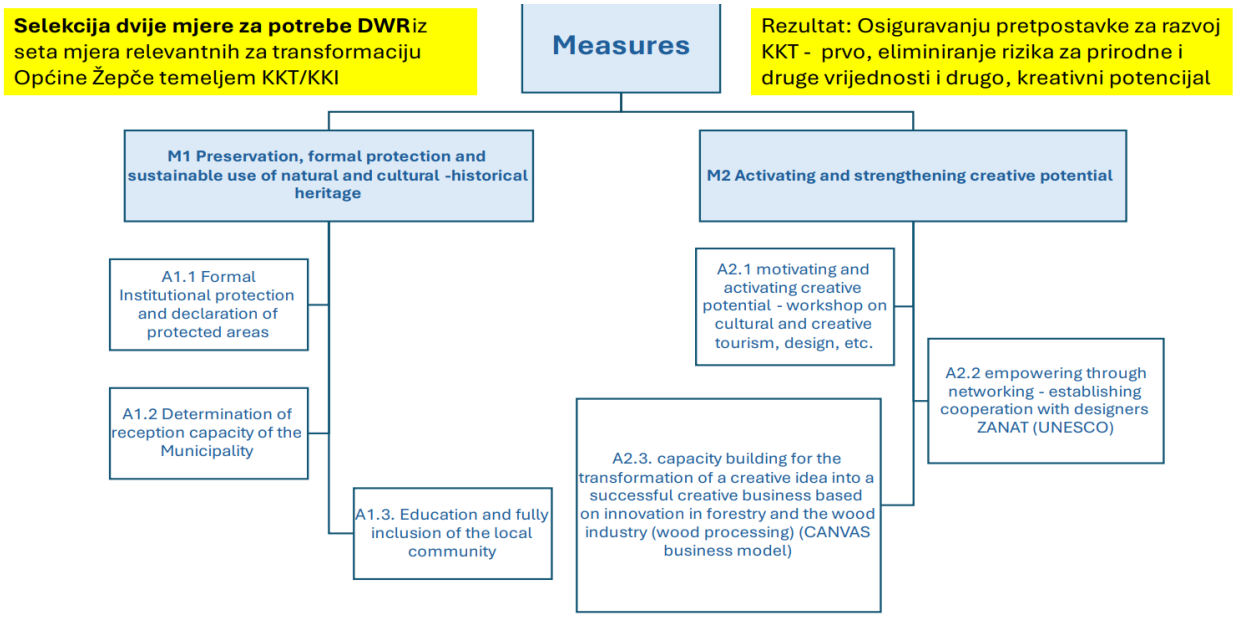
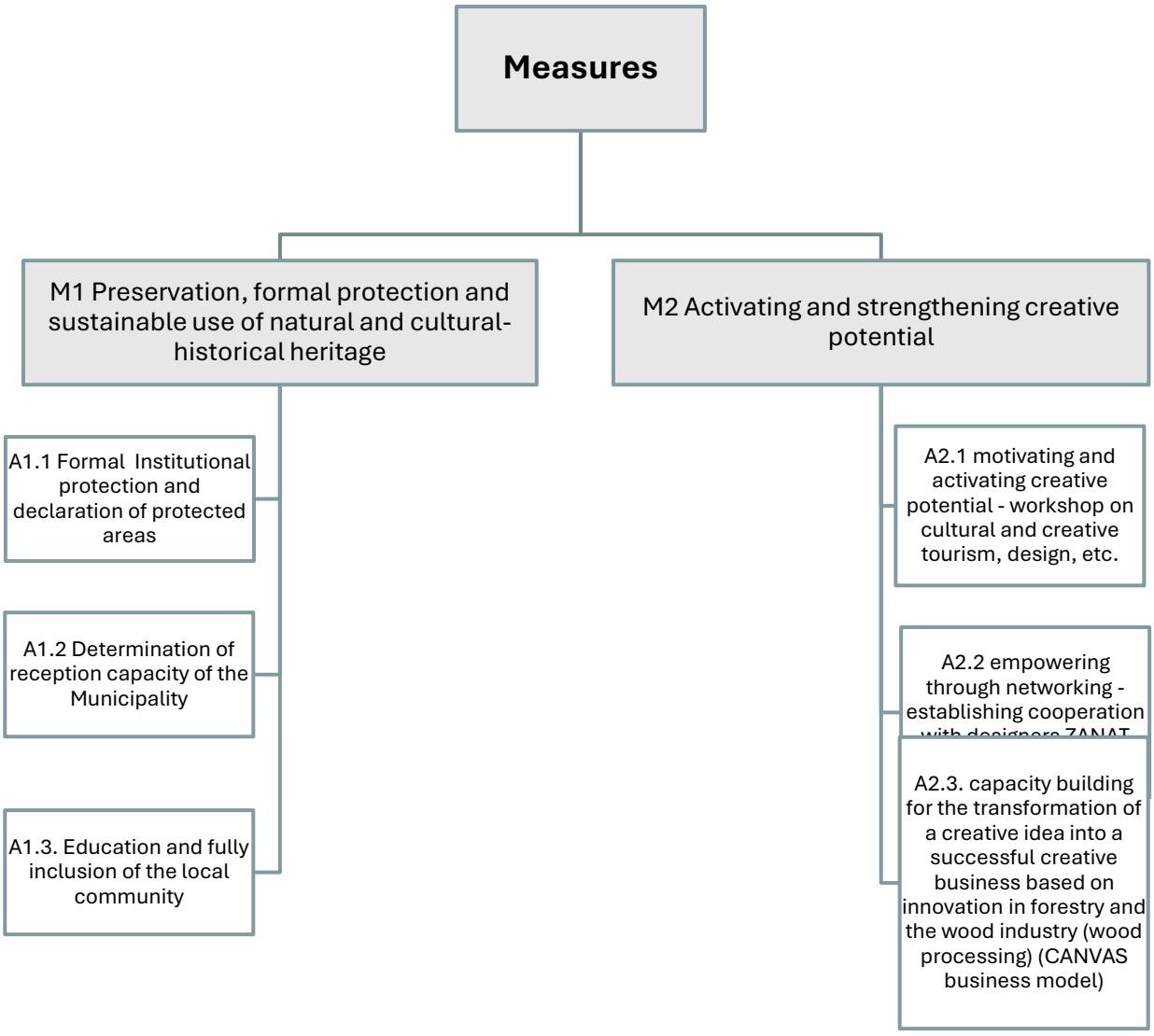


Figure 49 Selection of measures for the needs of the DWR Project



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4. Mesaures for DWR



From the set of measures to achieve the vision and strategic goal in accordance with the methodology, two measures are selected for the RAŽ Regional Action Plan within the Danube Wood(s) Route project, namely: first, Preservation and valorisation of natural and second, cultural-historical heritage and Activation and strengthening of the creative potential of the local Municipality.

4.1. Measure 1

Preservation and valorisation of natural

4.1.1. Relevance of the measure

This measure is a prerequisite for the development of sustainable cultural and creative tourism, aligned with universal values, principles of economic, social and ecological sustainability, quality of life.

4.1.2. The natura of the measure

- Documentation and informational nature Preventive and protective nature
- Integrative nature (environment, culture, spatial and economic development planning)
- basis for sustainable management of cultural and creative tourism

4.1.3. Activities within the measure

A1.1. Review of initiatives for preservation

A 1.2. Determination of reception capacity of the Municipality

A 1.3. Education and fully inclusion of the local community

4.1.4. Participants

RAŽ Development Agency Žepče - coordination

Municipality, its services, and public institutions (House of Culture, Library)

Civil sector (KUD, Mountaineering Society Vis, NGOs, others)

Private sector (diaspora)

4.1.5. Time frame

- January – June 2026.

4.1.6. Indicative costs

- about 50.000 euro
- Municipality budget
- Canton budget
- Federal budget

4.1.7. Output and result indicators

Outputs Identification and Valorization of Areas of Significance in the Municipality of Žepče
Results reduction of the risk of destruction, permanent damage and/or loss of resources • improvement of the quality of planning • increased awareness of participants or better understanding of the local community and investors about the values they have and their potential • basis for new investments

4.2. Measure 2

Activating and strengthening creative potential

4.2.1. Relevance of the measure

- Filling gaps in knowledge, skills, communications, networking
- Motivating, activating, and empowering the creativity of young people (students, members of the civil sector, employees)
- strengthening human capital (education, knowledge, skills, creativity, innovation, networking, teamwork, leadership, taking responsibility, entrepreneurial skills)
- increasing competitiveness

4.2.2. The natura of the measure

- educational and developmental

- interventional and transformational

4.2.3. Activities within the measure

Activity 2.1. motivating and activating creative potential - workshop on cultural and creative tourism, design, etc.

Activity 2.2. empowering through networking - establishing cooperation with designers ZANAT (UNESCO

Activity 2.3. capacity building for the transformation of a creative idea into a successful creative business based on innovation in forestry and the wood industry (wood processing) (CANVAS business model)

4.2.4. Potential inclusion in DWR

- Inclusion of Žepč as a key point for making souvenirs for the needs of the DWR project and/or the Danube macro region
- Inclusion of Matinski vis and other areas of the Municipality of Žepče for organizing woodworking educations/workshops with a focus on design solutions

4.2.5. Participants

- RAŽ development agency Žepča
- primary and secondary school students
- members of the civil sector
- employees
- unemployed
- designers and other experts ZANAT
- Sarajevo Economic Institute
- Others

4.2.6. Time frame

- December 2025 - March 2026

4.2.7. Indicative costs

Funds for transporting students to the ZANAT workshop provided by the Municipality

Funds for the education of students by ZANAT were provided by the Sarajevo Economic Institute

Funds for other activities provided by RAŽ within the DWR Project

4.2.8. Outputs and results indicators

• three held modules/workshops with a minimum of 10 participants per module. • Catalog of ideas and concepts for new wooden souvenirs. • Souvenir prototypes: A minimum of 3 to 5 new, functional prototypes developed in collaboration with designers. • • Developed business models (CANVAS): Documentation that defines the path from production to market.
• Increased skill of students and local artisans: Adoption of advanced design techniques (Zanat brand influence). • Redesigning the Municipality based on activated and strengthened creative potential • • New jobs/self-employment: Potential for starting small "craft" businesses based on developed models.

Proposals for additional measures that would be implemented independently of the DWR (Janko, Samardžić, & Kosić, 2026)

Development and valorisation of local cultural heritage Continuous mapping and tourist valorisation of tangible and intangible cultural heritage (traditional customs, gastronomy, local stories, and identities) through interpretive content, thematic routes and cultural events. (Janko, Samardžić, & Kosić, 2026)

Development of cultural and creative tourism products (Janko, Samardžić, & Kosić, Prijedlog, 2026) Creation of innovative tourist products and experiences (traditional craft workshops, creative camps, festivals, art colonies, storytelling tours) that connect culture, creativity and the local community.

Digitization of cultural offer (Janko, Samardžić, & Kosić, 2026) Development of digital tools and content (virtual tours, digital archives, mobile applications, online exhibitions) for greater accessibility, visibility and promotion of the cultural and creative offer of Žepče.

Creation of thematic tourist routes - creation of cultural-historical, natural, religious and gastronomic-recreational routes through the municipality, which increases the number of visitors and facilitates the promotion of local attractions. Installation of information panels, interpretive boards and QR codes with additional information. (Janko, Samardžić, & Kosić, 2026)

Organization and promotion of local events and festivals - fairs, cultural evenings, gastronomic events or ecological workshops. (Janko, Samardžić, & Kosić, 2026)

Development of ecotourism and active tourism - arrangement of cycling and hiking trails, arrangement of the area along the Bosna River and natural picnic areas. (Janko, Samardžić, & Kosić, 2026)

To successfully reposition the Municipality, it is necessary to implement a comprehensive strategy that integrates the following proposals:

Integration into European Cultural Routes: Leveraging Bosnia and Herzegovina's membership in the Council of Europe's EPA to connect local sites with established international networks. This provides a prestigious quality seal and global visibility.

Design of Thematic Routes: Developing specialized trails (e.g., "The Path of Ancient Crafts" or "Traditional Flavors") that shift the focus from "sightseeing" to immersive storytelling.

Redesigning the Municipality: Improving urban and rural aesthetics through heritage-led regeneration. This includes better signage, restoring facades, and creating "creative hubs" in repurposed historical buildings.

Mapping the Cultural and Creative Sector: Conducting a detailed audit of local assets—identifying "sleeping heritage" (forgotten stories, crafts, and sites) and local stakeholders (artists, artisans, and entrepreneurs) who will drive the creative economy.

From "Resource" to "Product": Transforming raw cultural assets into market-ready experiences through professional interpretation and the Interpret Europe methodology.

Creative Tourism (Co-creation): Enabling tourists to actively participate in the creation of their experience, moving from passive observers to active participants in local traditions.

Horizontal Integration (Local Value Chain): Building a synergy between agriculture (family farms), arts, and hospitality to ensure that tourism revenue remains within the local community.

Digital Valorization: Implementing smart technologies and Augmented Reality (AR) to revitalize archaeological sites and enhance the educational aspect of the tour.

Access to EU Funds: Using the status of a Cultural Route member to apply for Creative Europe or Interreg grants for infrastructure and capacity building.

5. Implementation and monitoring plan

Discussion with all relevant participants and adoption of measures
The RAŽ director appoints a team for the implementation of measures and activities
The team within the RRA will implement the measures in cooperation with other relevant stakeholders.
A1.1. in the period 1-3, 2026
A1.2. in the period 1-3, 2026
A1.3. continuously
A2.1. December 2025
A2.2. January 2026
A2.3. March 2026
each activity is subject to evaluation by the participants (filling out the questionnaire)
The monitoring and implementation work is carried out by the director of RAŽ based on the submitted narrative and other reports

The RAŽ director monitors the inclusion of measures and their results in the budget of the Municipality, Canton, and Federation
Director RAŽ monitors the inclusion of measures and their results in the Municipal Development Strategy 2027-2035
Director RAŽ monitors the inclusion of measures and their results in the Spatial Plan of the Municipality 2027-2047

6. Potential financing opportuinties

- Municipal Budget
- Cantonal Budget
- FBiH Budget
- RAŽ Project Funds
- Other Funds

7. Conclusion

The action plan finalized after consultation with RAŽ. It will be presented at a workshop to key participants (representatives of the public, private and civil sectors of the Municipality) in the third or fourth week of January 2026. Remarks, suggestions, and proposals will be incorporated into the document before submission to RAZ.

Figure 50 Conclusion and next steps

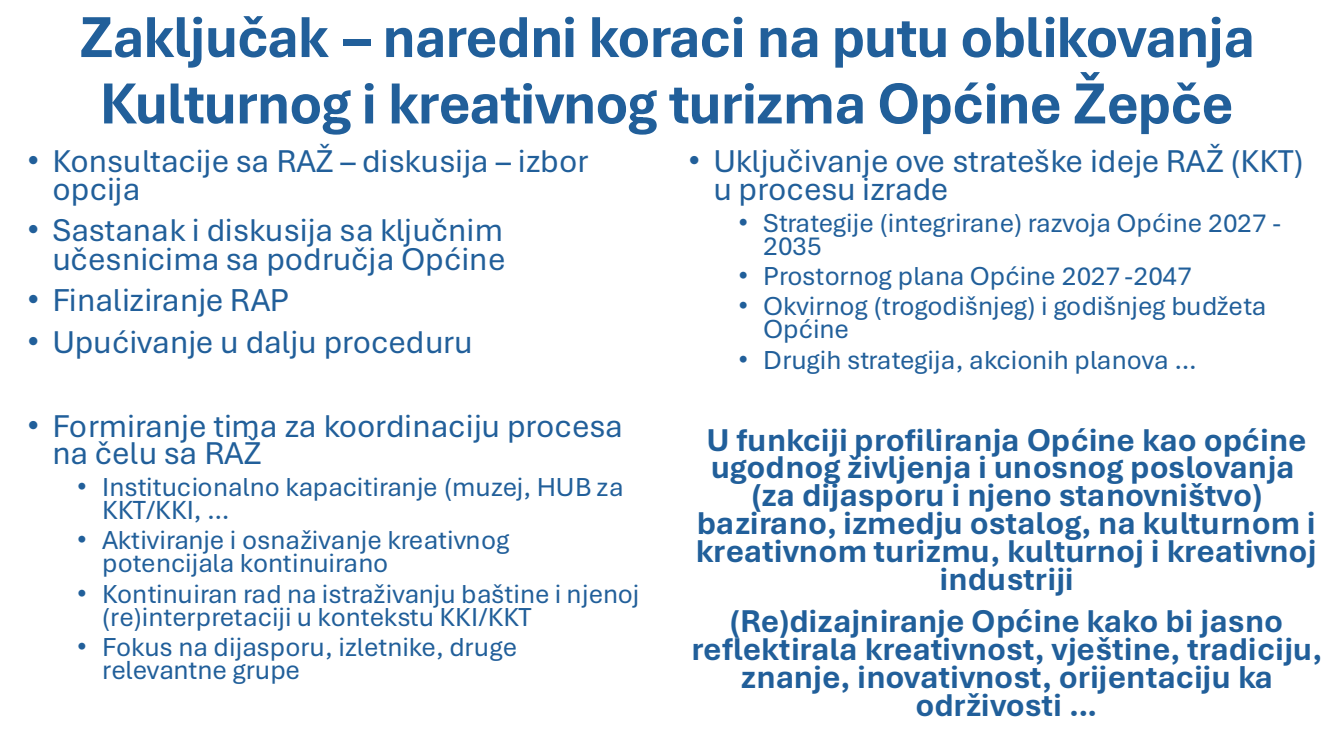
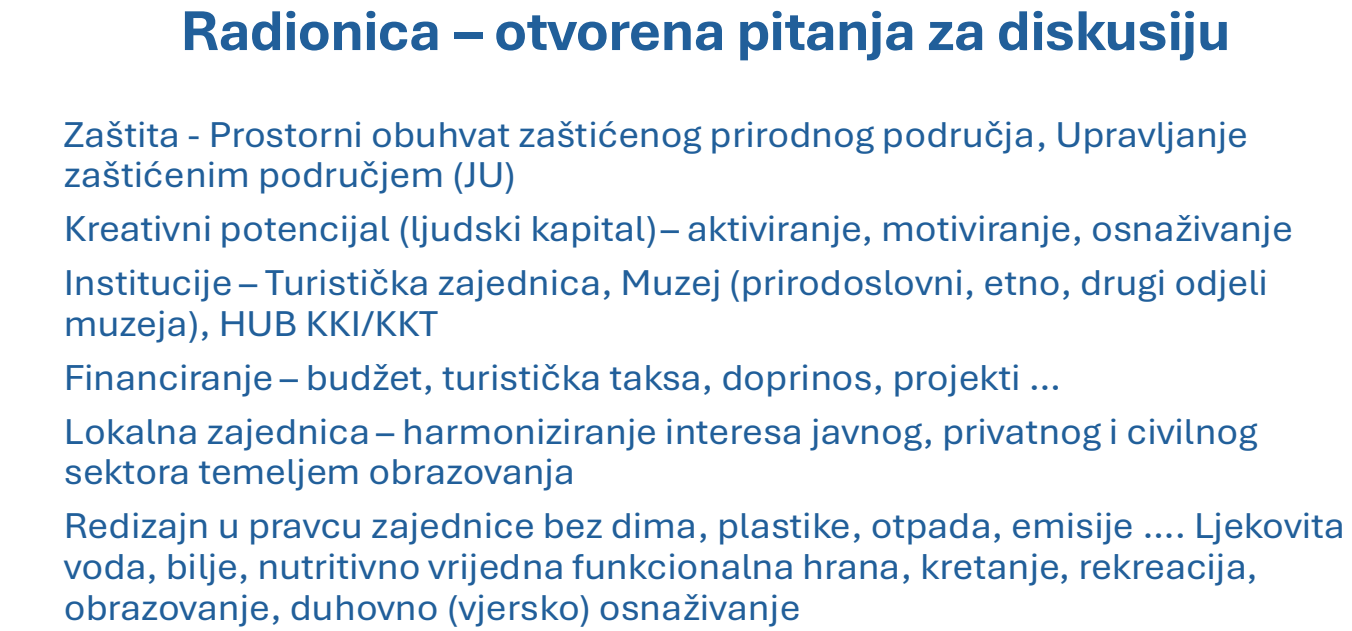


Figure 51 Open questions for workshop participants



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