

CATALOGUE OF INNOVATIVE CONCEPTUAL SOLUTIONS

within the framework of the IN4BLUE project

„Social impact INcubators FOR strengthening the capacity of
Adriatic region to support the sustainable industry
transformation of the BLUE economy sector“

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IN4BLUE project aims to establish a cross-border systemic support network of key development stakeholders in order to strengthen the skills and capacities of local actors, enabling them to actively participate in the digital and green transition. The project fosters positive synergies in terms of employment, innovation, resilience, and sustainable competitiveness within the Adriatic region. IN4BLUE enhances the entrepreneurial, digital, and green capacities of cultural and creative industries, small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) within the blue economy value chain, and other social stakeholders. Its objective is to stimulate innovation and the co-creation of more sustainable products and services, while integrating social actors into the innovation process. The project builds upon existing business support infrastructure and the organisational capacities of the project partners to deliver a cross-border incubation programme focused on the digital and green transition of coastal tourism and maritime transport, addressing priorities relevant to both countries.

IN4BLUE project is implemented under the Interreg Italy–Croatia Programme 2021–2027. The project commenced on 1 March 2024 and will run until 31 August 2026. The Lead Partner is the Istrian Development Agency – IDA Ltd., while the Institution INOVAcija participates as a project partner alongside four additional partners from the Adriatic regions of Italy and Croatia. The total project budget amounts to EUR 1,390,779.00, of which EUR 183,000.00 is allocated to the Institution INOVAcija. The project is co-financed by the European Regional Development Fund with a co-financing rate of 80%.

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Foreword

Within the framework of the IN4BLUE project, the Institution for the development of competencies, innovation and specialization of Zadar County organised a co-creation workshop on 13 and 14 January 2026, focused on developing innovative solutions to challenges in the field of the blue economy. During the two-day creative and interactive process, participants from various sectors, including business, public administration, education, civil society organisations, and the professional community, jointly identified key development challenges and, through a structured methodological approach, formulated concrete solution proposals. The workshop provided a space for open exchange of knowledge, experience, and perspectives, fostering interdisciplinary collaboration and the development of innovative thinking.

Two priority challenges were identified as follows:

1. Insufficient Level of Awareness Among Blue Economy Stakeholders

There is an insufficient level of awareness among stakeholders in the blue economy, particularly entrepreneurs, craftspeople, and associations, regarding opportunities to enhance their business operations through European Union funding instruments, as well as opportunities for networking and collaboration.

This challenge results in missed development opportunities, reduced competitiveness, and the underutilisation of available financial instruments. As an innovative solution, **the development of an online platform** was proposed, designed to provide information, facilitate networking, and enable the exchange of knowledge and experience in the field of effective access to EU funding.

2. Insufficient Implementation of Sustainable Solutions in Tourism

There is an insufficient level of implementation of sustainable solutions in tourism, one of the most significant economic sectors of Zadar County. Despite growing awareness of sustainability, there remains a lack of a systematic and coordinated approach to integrating **regenerative principles into tourism business models**.

In response to this challenge, a concept for an innovative regenerative tourism approach was developed, aimed at transforming tourism practices towards a model that reduces negative impacts, actively contributes to environmental restoration, strengthens the local community, and generates long-term economic value.

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The outcome of the workshop consists of two conceptual solution prototypes, which provide a foundation for further development, testing, and implementation. In addition to concept development, the workshop enabled the identification of organisations and stakeholders interested in continued collaboration and in advancing the proposed solutions.

The purpose of the Catalogue of Innovative Conceptual Solutions is to address the identified challenges within the field of the blue economy and to formulate concrete, feasible, and locally grounded proposals that create opportunities for new forms of cross-border cooperation. The Catalogue serves as a strategic tool that connects the needs of local stakeholders with regional and international development trends, establishing a clear roadmap for future partnerships, innovation initiatives, and joint projects.

Blue Economy 2.0 – An Innovative Information and Networking Platform

Context and Challenge

Entrepreneurs, craftspeople, and associations operating within the blue economy sector face a range of structural barriers that limit their growth, innovation capacity, and long-term competitiveness. One of the key challenges is the **insufficient level of awareness regarding available EU funds, calls for proposals, and support programmes**, as well as limited access to relevant information on partnerships, projects, and collaboration opportunities.

Information on funding is often fragmented, dispersed across multiple sources, and presented in a manner that is not tailored to the specific needs of micro and small enterprises. At the same time, the lack of structured networking channels results in weaker collaboration, limited knowledge exchange, and missed opportunities for joint projects.

This situation leads to:

- underutilisation of available EU funding,
- slower innovation dynamics,
- insufficient stakeholder connectivity,
- limited development of the local entrepreneurial ecosystem.

In response to this challenge, the development of a digital solution titled **Blue Economy 2.0 – An Innovative Information and Networking Platform** is proposed.

Description of the Solution

The proposed solution is a centralised and interactive digital platform designed to strengthen the capacities of blue economy stakeholders through information, education, and networking.

The platform will function as a single digital *connecting point* linking:

- entrepreneurs and craftspeople,
- associations and civil society organisations,
- local and regional self-government units,
- research and educational institutions,
- development agencies and EU funding experts.

The objective of the platform is to consolidate information, increase the visibility of funding opportunities, and stimulate collaboration and joint project development within the blue economy sector.

Key Platform Functionalities

1. Up-to-Date Information on EU Funds and Calls

The platform will enable automated monitoring of relevant national and European funding sources. The system will filter and display calls according to:

- type of applicant (micro and small enterprises, associations, public bodies),
- sector of activity,
- eligible activities,
- application deadlines.

This will provide users with a personalised overview of funding opportunities, accompanied by simplified explanations of application requirements.

2. Interactive Map of Projects and Stakeholders

The platform will include a digital map of existing projects, organisations, and initiatives within the blue economy. This functionality will enable:

- identification of potential partners,
- visibility of successful projects,
- overview of competencies and resources of individual organisations,
- encouragement of cross-border and cross-sector cooperation.

3. Virtual Workshops and Advisory Services

The platform will provide space for:

- online training on EU project preparation and implementation,
- expert advisory sessions,
- mentored digital collaboration,
- thematic webinars on current calls and policies.

This functionality ensures continuous capacity building regardless of users' geographic location or time availability.

4. Forum and Collaboration Network

The platform will function as a digital knowledge community, enabling:

- exchange of experiences among users,
- submission of questions and sharing of solutions,
- publication of project idea summaries and partner search (matchmaking),
- networking according to thematic interests.

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This functionality strengthens horizontal cooperation and stimulates the formation of innovation partnerships.

5. Strategic Objective

The main objectives of the innovative platform are to:

- increase the level of awareness among blue economy stakeholders,
- improve access to EU financial instruments,
- stimulate cooperation and joint project development,
- strengthen the innovation and entrepreneurial potential of Zadar County.

The platform represents a tool for digital and blue transformation of the sector, integrating technology, knowledge, and collaboration into a unified support system.

Key Benefits

The implementation of the platform is expected to result in:

- increased stakeholder competitiveness through improved readiness for EU funding applications,
- faster and simpler access to financing through centralised and tailored information,
- strengthened cross-sector collaboration and partnerships,
- greater visibility of projects and innovations within the blue economy,
- development of users' digital competencies,
- long-term strengthening of the local community and innovation capacity of Zadar County.

Long-Term Potential

Blue Economy 2.0 has the potential to become a permanent infrastructural support mechanism for blue economy stakeholders, with opportunities for future upgrades such as an expert database, an AI assistant for identifying funding opportunities, or tools for preparing project concept notes.

The platform therefore represents not merely an information tool, but a foundation for building a strong, connected, and innovative blue economy ecosystem.

Regenerative Tourism – Sustainable Transformation of a Tourist Destination

Context and Challenge

Tourism represents one of the most important economic sectors of Zadar County. However, its prevailing development model, based primarily on mass tourism and seasonal concentration, increasingly reveals structural limitations. The intense concentration of visitors during summer months leads to environmental pressure, increased water and energy consumption, strain on coastal areas and marine ecosystems, and negative impacts on the quality of life of local residents.

Such a growth model is not sustainable in the long term. While it generates short-term economic gains, it simultaneously reduces the natural capital of the destination; the very resource upon which tourism depends. **The insufficient integration of green and innovative practices further hinders the transition toward a more resilient and competitive tourism model.**

The key challenge is therefore to develop a new approach to tourism that will:

- reduce negative environmental impacts,
- actively contribute to ecosystem restoration,
- empower local stakeholders,
- ensure long-term economic sustainability.

To address this challenge, the development of a **Regenerative Tourism – Sustainable Transformation of a Tourist Destination.**



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Description of the Solution

The proposed solution introduces a new tourism model in Zadar County based on preservation of marine ecosystems, valorisation of local resources and active community participation.

Regenerative tourism goes beyond traditional sustainability. While sustainability aims to minimise negative impacts, regenerative tourism is founded on the principle that tourism must actively contribute to the restoration of natural, cultural, and social systems.

Tourism is thus viewed not as an isolated economic activity, but as a tool for positive transformation of the destination; protecting the environment, empowering the community, and strengthening the local economy simultaneously.

Core Principles of Regenerative Tourism

1. Ecosystem Restoration

Tourism activities should contribute to the preservation and restoration of marine and terrestrial ecosystems. This includes reducing resource pressure and implementing revitalisation practices (e.g., education on responsible anchoring, protection of Posidonia seagrass, sustainable fisheries management).

2. Local Participation and Empowerment

The local community must be an active participant rather than a passive observer. This includes involving fishers, family farms, craftspeople, and associations in designing and delivering tourism products, ensuring added value remains within Zadar County.



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3. Holistic Approach

Regenerative tourism integrates nature, people, culture, and economy into a unified system. The development of tourism activities is viewed through the interconnection of ecological, social and economic impacts and the retention of added value within Zadar County.

4. Long-Term Value Over Short-Term Profit

The focus shifts from single-season profit to intergenerational value. The guiding question becomes: What does the destination gain in 10 or more years? Regenerative tourism fosters the stability, resilience and sustainable competitiveness of a tourist destination.

5. Transformative Tourist Experience

Tourism becomes a tool for personal growth and education. Guests do not consume a destination, but actively participate in its understanding and preservation – through learning about local culture, ecology and tradition, and participating in authentic experiences (e.g. responsible fishing tourism, educational tours).

6. Operational Model

The proposed model includes:

- practices that give back more to the destination than they take,
- active local community involvement,
- education of tourists and stakeholders on responsible behavior,
- development of blue infrastructure (eco-friendly moorings, sustainable fisheries),
- integration of tourism with local products and traditions,
- pilot projects such as responsible fishing tourism.

Key Benefits

Implementation is expected to deliver:

- environmentally responsible tourism that actively protects marine and coastal areas,
- reduced environmental impact and more rational resource use,
- strengthened local economy through traditional knowledge and local product valorisation,
- increased resilience to seasonality and market fluctuations,
- greater differentiation of the tourist destination in the international tourism market,
- long-term competitiveness and reputation of the region as an innovative and responsible destination.

Long-Term Potential

Regenerative tourism has the potential to become a next-generation development model of the blue economy in Zadar County. Through systematic implementation, education, and stakeholder networking, the destination can position itself as a best-practice example within the Adriatic region. This solution represents not merely a tourism innovation, but a structural transformation opportunity for the entire regional economy.



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