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PROJECT

***PROTEUS-Protecting EU Values and
Fundamental Rights through Public
Participation and Civil Society Assistance in
Central Europe***

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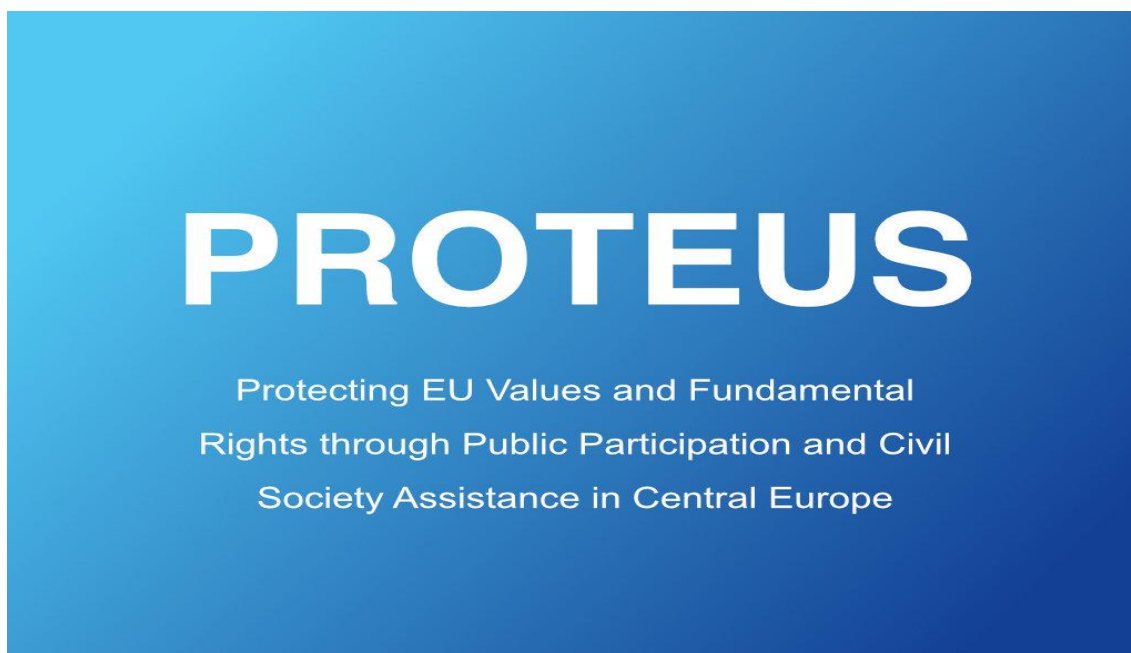
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The potential for the development of civil society organizations in different parts of Croatia

Brochure created as part of the project „*PROTEUS-Protecting EU Values and Fundamental Rights through Public Participation and Civil Society Assistance in Central Europe*“.



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Authors:

Prof. Gojko Bežovan, PhD

Vesna Totić, univ. spec. act. soc.

Ana Zadelj Kovač, mag. polit. soc.

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Content

Glossary	1
About the PROTEUS project	2
Project activities.....	3
Co-financed projects (micro-grants)	5
Challenges and approaches to solutions.....	16
Project outcomes	17
Lessons learned from the micrograntees perspective:	18

Glossary

CERV - the Union's centralized Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values program, programmatically and financially managed by the European Commission, and operationally implemented by the Directorate General for Justice and Consumers (DG JUST) and the Agency for Education and Culture (EACEA), which cooperate with national contact points.

Engaging Central Europe (ECE) - GMF's Central Europe program – a dedicated mechanism of civil society support and democracy assistance for the heart of Europe. ECE supports the easternmost members of the European Union and NATO in the fight against illiberal and authoritarian tendencies.

European Executive Agency for Education and Culture (EACEA) - a catalyst for projects in education, training, youth, sport, audiovisual media, culture, citizenship and humanitarian aid. On behalf of the European Commission, the EACEA seeks to support innovation in these areas, always in a spirit of cross-border cooperation and mutual respect.

European Commission – The main executive body of the European Union, responsible for promoting the general interests of the European Union, proposing legislative acts, implementing decisions of the European Parliament and the Council of the EU, respecting the treaties of the European Union and implementing the EU budget. Headquartered in Brussels (Belgium).

German Marshall Found of United of States (GMF) - a nonpartisan organization dedicated to the idea that the United States and Europe are stronger together. The Transatlantic Foundation is a registered subsidiary of GMF in the EU.

Civic activism - denotes the intensive advocacy of the goals or beliefs of a motivated person/organization in various areas of social life. It is a key component of civil society, which describes through formal and informal activities of citizens with the aim of advancing common interests at various levels, from recreation to social and political interests.

Consortium - an association of two or more persons, companies, organizations or governments with the intention of participating in joint activities or using common resources to achieve a common goal. The PROTEUS project brings together 8 consortium partners led by Transatlantic Foundation (TF), of the European branch of GMF.

Micro-support – smaller amount of the grant which is provided to individual civil society organizations as part of prescribed calls, and which includes a shorter period of time for the implementation of project activities.

Civil society organizations (CSO) – organizational structures whose members have the same goals and responsibilities of general interest and which act as mediators between public authorities and citizens.

Peer to peer - exchange of experiences and knowledge between two or more members who are at the same level in terms of experience and knowledge.

Capacity building workshop - the process of developing and strengthening skills, abilities, processes and resources that are important for civil society organizations to strengthen their own capacities.

Rural/peripheral areas include different types of settlements (villages, transitional settlements, small towns); everything that is not in the center, depending on what is considered the center, so the periphery can be an entire region, but also parts of a continent, and even entire parts of the world, depending on the angle of observation. Important indicators for monitoring rural/peripheral areas in the Republic of Croatia are: The development index of counties, cities and municipalities and areas of special national interest.

Transatlantic Foundation (TF) - The Transatlantic Foundation is the European and EU-registered branch of the German Marshall Fund of the United States (GMF) with its headquarters in Brussels.

About the PROTEUS project

The general objective of PROTEUS is to strengthen civil society organizations (CSOs) and citizens' initiatives, as well as to empower citizens' activists, so that they are able to protect, promote and raise awareness of European values and fundamental rights: above all, democracy, the rule of law, human rights, equality between men and women, non-discrimination of members of minorities, and the rights of EU citizens contained in the European Union [Charter on Fundamental Rights](#) of the European Union. Specific objectives of the project: supporting democratic participation, public discussion and inclusion; strengthening the resilience of CSOs in a narrowed area of activity; protection, promotion of EU values and fundamental rights, with special emphasis on peripheral and rural areas; supporting civic activism in peripheral and rural areas. The project contributes to the achievement of goals by providing targeted grants (microfinancing) and customized capacity building to Croatian CSOs and by increasing their capacity for fundraising, management and advocacy, with a strong focus on civil actors in peripheral and rural areas.

Why? Civic activism and civic participation are among the fundamental values of the EU, and a strong and resilient civil society is a prerequisite for Europeanization and democracy. The current situation of civil society and the environment is one of distrust towards CSOs, and the lack of capacity of CSOs to monitor, act and pursue pressure. An example of the state of the civil society environment is the lack of adoption of the National Strategy for Creating an Enabling Environment for the Development of Civil Society, while for the period from 2017 to 2021 it is still being drafted, i.e. without progress and resonance in the public. A reflection of the state of civil society is the lack of timely and continuous tenders, and the lack of mention in the public space of the contribution of civil society to the development of local communities and society in general, especially in the context of elections. This is increasingly reflected in the shrinking policy space for CSOs to operate, their participation in the decision-making process and the implementation of policies.

Organizations that represent different target groups, point out some specificities for smaller/rural environments (such as the role of politics in local programs, social exclusion, lack of available services for the elderly and new social risks, the problem of domestic violence, migrants, women, children, etc.), therefore we are faced with the fact that civil society mainly remains an urban phenomenon of more developed parts of the country. This has led to the need for targeted activities to strengthen the potential of organizations from rural/peripheral areas of Croatia. This brochure contributes to informing and raising awareness of the general public about the issues and challenges of some smaller/rural or peripheral areas of Croatia, and by highlighting some examples of good practice of co-financed projects, it encourages the development of further activities and targeted calls for tenders for projects implemented by civil society organizations in rural/peripheral areas of Croatia.

Project beneficiaries? The EU Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values (CERV) PROTEUS project consortium – led by the Transatlantic Foundation, the European branch of the German Marshall Fund (GMF) – focuses on the above-mentioned civil society challenges in eight Central European countries (Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Croatia, Hungary, Poland, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia). The project was implemented in Croatia by Center for the Development of Non-Profit Organizations – CERANEO. Civil society organizations from 8 different countries detected similar challenges, which they approached based on their own insights into their environments. Representatives of CSOs from the consortium regularly exchanged challenges they encountered and approaches during the implementation of the project in joint meetings, thereby contributing to the strengthening of their own implementation capacities. CERANEO employees Ana Zadelj Kovač and Vesna Totić regularly participated in consortium meetings for the purpose of proper implementation, exchange and learning from the experience of others.

Implementation period and financing method? As a CERV project, PROTEUS is co-funded by the European Commission and covers the period from January 2023 to December 2025.

Project activities

As a contribution to the implementation of a co-financed European project PROTEUS – Protecting EU Values and Fundamental Rights through Public Participation and Civil Society Assistance in Central Europe, CERANEO – Centre for development of non-profit organisations implemented project activities through the following calls:

- [Poziv organizacijama civilnog društva za sudjelovanje u izgradnji kapaciteta za podršku građanskom aktivizmu i uključivanju u ruralnim područjima \(012023\)](#)
- [Poziv na akcije ili inicijative za podršku građanskom aktivizmu i inkluziji u ruralnim područjima \(022023\)](#).

As part of the first set of capacity-building activities to support civic activism and inclusion in rural areas, a total of 6 online workshops were conducted through 5 thematic units:

1. ***Increase public awareness of EU law and policies with particular emphasis on the protection of EU values and fundamental rights, as well as civil society in general*** – The first such thematic workshop was held on November 7, 2023. The expert part of the workshop was conducted by Prof. Gojko Bežovan, PhD, with many years of experience in civil society research in the country and abroad, as well as EU policies. The workshop was attended by 15 representatives of different profiles and CSO organizations.
2. ***Improve personal advocacy skills of CSO activists in rural or peripheral areas to facilitate engagement with local authorities*** – held on December 12, 2023. The professional part of the workshop was conducted by Snježana Petrušić - Executive Director of the Center for Sustainable Development with extensive experience in preparing and implementing projects and monitoring advocacy in the field of civil society in the country, especially in rural areas. The workshops were attended by a total of 22 representatives of various profiles and CSO organizations.
3. ***Improve CSO fundraising skills to strengthen their financial sustainability*** - held on February 27, 2024. The professional part of the workshop was conducted by Prof. Gojko Bežovan, PhD, with many years of experience in civil society research in the country and abroad, EU policies and planning methods and ways of raising funds for CSOs. The workshop was attended by 38 representatives of various profiles and CSO organizations.
4. ***Strengthening activist and volunteer management skills of CSOs: new forms of governance and social entrepreneurship*** – held on April 25, 2024. The professional part of the workshop was conducted by Assoc. prof. Danijel Baturina, PhD – Associate Professor at the Faculty of Law, University of Zagreb, Study Center for Social Work. He has been actively studying the topic for many years, and teaches the course Social Economy and Social Entrepreneurship at the faculty, and has also published a book of the same name. He is an active member of various organizations, participating in numerous international and domestic scientific and professional projects. The workshop was attended by 23 representatives of various profiles and CSO organizations.
5. ***Strengthen online communication, advocacy and awareness raising skills of activists*** - held on June 11, 2024. The professional part of the workshop was conducted by Andrea Vodanović – Head of EU Policy at URANIA Media, who successfully runs her own marketing agency in Brussels. She gained experience working in domestic and foreign organizations in various positions, including as a PR consultant. The workshop was attended by 32 representatives of different profiles and CSO organizations.

In addition to participating in thematic workshops, participants had the opportunity for **help desk or online consultations** with experts related to the highlighted areas. In total, **111** different stakeholders representing civil society organizations from across Croatia participated in the Call for Civil Society Organizations for Participation in Capacity Building to Support Civic Activism and Inclusion in Rural Areas (012023), some of whom participated in multiple activities.

Evaluation? Considering the great interest, all interested parties were able to participate in the workshops, and we would like to thank the experts who conducted the workshops for their flexibility. The CERANEO team encouraged all participants to verbally express their satisfaction at the end of their workshops and to complete the EU evaluation feedback survey.

As part of the Call for actions or initiatives to support civic activism and inclusion in rural areas (022023) micro-grants were awarded to civil society organizations with an emphasis on peripheral/rural areas of Croatia, an online peer-to-peer event and field visits of micro-grants beneficiaries by the CERANEO team were carried out. A total of 23 project applications from Croatia were received through the Call for Actions or Initiatives to Support Civic Activism and Inclusion in Rural Areas. **Applications for microgranting** were conducted over two rounds. Applications were available to everyone via the website www.ceraneo.hr, so anyone interested who met the conditions prescribed by the competition published on the website could apply, regardless of participation in other project activities. By selecting applications that did not fulfill the administrative criteria and those that did not exceed the points threshold, the project applications with the greatest potential were selected, over two rounds, a total of 10 projects. The selection process was evaluated by external evaluators with the support of the CERANEO team. The following criteria were particularly evaluated: Quality and relevance of the application; Financial efficiency; Rural-peripheral area; Project impact on the organization and target groups, commitment to the sustainability of project results; Experience and potential of the applicant and partner. Total value of the call: EUR 25,000.00, the value of individual projects is between EUR 500.00 and EUR 2,500.00. Information workshops were organized for the recipients of micro-grant support during the project and regular telephone and online consultations and implementation support were available.

From September to November 2024, CERANEO representatives conducted a **field visit** to representatives of each micro-grant recipient, visiting: Beli Manastir, Čakovec, Hvar, Kastav, Knin, Mljet, Novi Marof, Osijek, Pakrac, Sinj. An online **peer to peer event** was also organized for the micro-grant recipients. 11 CSO representatives attended the event, representing different CSO profiles. The goal of the event was getting to know each other better the micro-grant recipients, present their work, the beneficiaries they most often work with, and the specifics of the community in which they operate. Also, share experiences of successful work, challenges they face, and find common solutions. Field visits and peer to peer events contributed to the development of a quality relationship of trust and a learning process for the micro-grant.

Project **visibility activities** enabled the printing of promotional materials, the holding of a final project conference, and the printing of a manual with project results, along with regular postings on social networks and the ceraneo.hr website.

Representatives of CSOs from the consortium regularly exchanged challenges and approaches during project implementation in joint meetings, thereby contributing to strengthening their own implementation capacities. CERANEO employees Ana Zadelj Kovač and Vesna Totić regularly participated in **consortium meetings** for the purpose of proper implementation and learning from the experience of others, such as the meeting in Warsaw in February 2023, the meeting in Bratislava in November 2023, the meeting in Sofia in November 2024 and, by agreement, in 2025, as well as other regular online meetings.



Co-financed projects (micro-grants)

As part of the PROTEUS project, 10 civil society organizations from different rural/peripheral parts of the Republic of Croatia were financially supported through the allocation of micro-grants for various projects that contribute to solving local challenges. Supported organizations under the PROTEUS micro-grants cover areas throughout Croatia, especially rural/peripheral areas. Thus, the northern, southern, eastern and western regions of Croatia are covered (cities and municipalities: Čakovec, Novi Marof, Pakrac, Beli Manastir, Bogdanovci, Virovitica, Knin, Sinj, Jelsa, Mljet and their surrounding areas). All projects of micro-grants recipients were implemented during 2024.

Micro-grantees & project names:

- ❖ Center for Support and Development of Civil Society "DELFIN" & project ***RESPONSIBLY: RURAL WOMEN KNOW HOW!***
- ❖ Fisheries and aquaculture local action group Dunav Sava & project: ***ECOAdventure***
- ❖ Peace Group Oaza Beli Manastir & project ***We live with dignity***
- ❖ Youth for Marof & project ***We live together, we plan together!***
- ❖ Goats of Mljet & project ***Ask me what I want!***
- ❖ Čakovec Community Centre Platform & project ***Paths of integration***
- ❖ Association ANCHOR- preschool teachers in the protection of children rights in preschool & project ***Encouraging the minds of gifted children – a pilot project for empowering gifted children in kindergartens and their parents***
- ❖ The Association for civil society and quality of life Srma & project ***ART OF INCLUSION***
- ❖ Association for children and youth "Magical world" & project ***Laboratory of ideas 2***
- ❖ Association for the Promotion of Culture "Jelsa" & project ***Opening new horizons - culture as a driver of the island community***



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Name of the organization: Youth for Marof

Residence: Novi Marof

County: Varaždinska

Contact: <https://www.mzm.hr/>

<https://www.facebook.com/MladiZaMarof/>

Project name: *We live together, we plan together!*

Project implementation period: 19.2.2024.- 19.6.2024.

Amount of support: 2.500,00 EUR

Project objective: The project "We live together, we plan together" will bring together the citizens of Novi Marof, members of various associations, clubs, institutions, crafts and family farms, with the aim of actively participating in the processes of sustainable development of their own local community. Networking will enable more rational use of shared resources, improve cross-sectoral cooperation and conduct quality public forums on topics of great importance to the local community.

Target group: all active associations from the Novi Marof area.



Project outcomes: Gained insight into the current state of the civil sector in the city, learned about the main problems of associations, educated and motivated several associations to cooperate with each other and coordinate local activities. An initiative to establish a Network of Associations was signed.

Number of beneficiaries involved in the project: 89

Success stories:

The final conference of the project "We live together, we plan together!" marks the end of a good, innovative and progressive initiative in Novi Marof that will reach its culmination in the coming months. Namely, by connecting almost all civil society organizations and citizen associations based in the Novi Marof area, local activists are launching a new advocacy website with which they want to increase the share of citizen participation in that city. At the public forum that was part of the final conference, we opened the topic of the role of associations in the future of local communities, as well as the importance of their networking and joint performance. „ I am keeping my fingers crossed for the old and seasoned activist Dario Žmegač that the initiative will succeed. If needed, we are here to help! Just keep going strong and bravely!"



Name of the organization: Goats of Mljet

Residence: Babino Polje, island Mljet

County: Dubrovačko-neretvanska

Contact: https://www.facebook.com/people/Mljetske-koze/61556934732371/?_rdr

Project name: *Ask me what I want!*

Project implementation period: 1.3.2024.- 1.4.2024.

Amount of support: 1.000,00 EUR

Project objective: The project will use a survey to examine the satisfaction of the population with existing facilities in the areas of sports, recreation, culture, entertainment, education and similar activities related to spending free time and increasing the quality of life on the island, as well as to obtain additional views on the needs for certain facilities. The survey will lay the foundation for creating new and improving existing facilities for the community in accordance with its needs, expectations, preferences and wishes.



Target group: inhabitants of the island of Mljet.

Project outcomes: A survey was conducted with a total of 103 participants. The results of the survey, which identified the needs for improving the quality of life of the inhabitants of the island of Mljet, were sent to the competent institutions to which the Municipality of Mljet belongs: the Municipality of Mljet, Dubrovnik-Neretva County, the Ministry of Regional Development and EU Funds, the Mljet Primary School and the Dubrovnik Diocese, and the local and general public were informed.

Number of beneficiaries involved in the project: 103

Success stories:

One of the respondents proposed a solution to the housing issue for young people that would accompany the improvement of the demographic picture on the island: "The possibility of buying one's own property, a planned settlement where it is possible to buy a property for all those who want to live on Mljet that can support at least double the number of current residents without any consequences. A targeted demographic policy that is missing, along with the indispensable encouragement of the arrival of professional staff (school teachers, doctors, lawyers and professional associates in the Municipality and the National Park) who can only be permanently retained, i.e. attracted to the island with a permanent apartment that they would receive for permanent use after, for example, 20 years of use and work in a Mljet school or institution. Every initiative and every action on Mljet is difficult to implement precisely because of the lack of people, which can be achieved through the demographic policy of the Municipality with the support of the National Park. Old schools that have been lying empty for years are a good start for 30 or so staff apartments that would mean the arrival of 30 or so families on Mljet who, if they honor a contract of, for example, 20 years of continuous work on Mljet, would become owners of that apartment."



Name of the organization: Peace Group Oaza Beli Manastir

Residence: Beli Manastir

County: Osječko-baranjska

Contact: <https://oaza-bm.hr/> ; https://www.facebook.com/mirovnagrupaoaza/?locale=hr_HR

Project name: *We live with dignity*

Project implementation period: 1.7.2024.- 31.12.2024.

Amount of support: 2.490,00 EUR

Project objective: Through the organization of various activities adapted to the elderly, reduce their social exclusion as a vulnerable group, provide them with the opportunity for a dignified life and participation in the social and cultural life of the community as fundamental principles of the EU Charter.

Target group: elderly people, over 60 years of age.

Project outcomes: The implementation of project activities reduced the social exclusion of older people and gave them the opportunity to participate in the social and cultural life of the community. A total of 44 workshops for older people were held (22 art and creative workshops and 22 board game workshops), 3 excursions were held in the area around Beli Manastir and 2 performances were seen in Beli Manastir.

Number of beneficiaries involved in the project: 37

Success stories:

The evaluation showed the success of the excursion for seniors, and one answer to the question "What did you particularly like?" stood out - one of the users answered:

" Everything - It's important to me to socialize so I'm not alone."





Name of the organization: Center for Support and Development of Civil Society "DELFIN"

Residence: Pakrac

County: Požeško-slavonska

**Contact: <https://delfin-pakrac.com/press/> ;
<https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=61552681453280>**

Project name: RESPONSIBLY: RURAL WOMEN KNOW HOW!

Project implementation period: 1.7.2024.- 31.10.2024.

Amount of support: 2.500,00 EUR

Project objective: Improve cooperation between women's associations at the local level and work on raising the level of knowledge and capacity through education while promoting and respecting diversity.

Target group: associations of women from the wider area of the city of Pakrac of different ages, education and professions, employed, unemployed, as well as people with disabilities (blind and partially sighted people of the Women's Section of the Pakrac-Lipik Association of the Blind).



Project outcomes: By implementing the project, participants worked on increasing their level of knowledge and developing specific knowledge and skills for proactive civic action at the local level through education, i.e. they gained the opportunity to provide mutual assistance and support, which is a prerequisite for implementing joint activities and greater visibility of the work of associations.

Number of beneficiaries involved in the project: 53

Success stories:

„And through role-playing and games I learned.“

„Each workshop is particularly interesting, I enjoy being a participant in it.“

„As a social worker, I thought there was nothing I didn't know. These workshops showed me that I still needed to learn.“



Name of the organization: Association for the Promotion of Culture "Jelsa"

Residence: Jelsa, island Hvar

County: Splitsko-dalmatinska

Contact: <https://www.facebook.com/udrugajelsa>

Project name: *Opening new horizons - culture as a driver of the island community*

Project implementation period: 1.7.2024.-30.9.2024.

Amount of support: 2.430,00 EUR

Project objective: The project Opening New Horizons - Culture as a Driver of the Island Community responds to the expressed need of island populations (in this case the municipalities of Jelsa, Hvar) for cultural and educational content that would activate and inform citizens and raise the quality of cultural life and civic engagement of the local community.

Target group: general population and young people from the municipality of Jelsa.



Project outcomes:

The implementation of the project activated and informed the citizens of the Municipality of Jelsa, and the implementation of various cultural activities raised the quality of the cultural life of the local community.

Number of beneficiaries involved in the project: 302

Success stories:

The Small Free Library activity has encouraged new collaborations in the local community, preliminary discussions have been held with the head of the Jelsa Municipality library in order to continue these initiatives and possibly expand them with new activities and collaborative projects in the future. The project has shown us that there is certainly interest in this type of activity, and the association has continued to implement this idea after the project ended.

The response to the DJ workshop was acceptable, and the beneficiaries themselves became interested in further work and, in agreement with the president of the association, agreed to organize a similar type of workshop in the winter months at another location in Jelsa.



Name of the organization: Association for children and youth "Magical world"

Residence: Knin

County: Šibensko-kninska

Contact: <https://carobnisvijet.hr/> ; https://www.facebook.com/udrugacarobnisvijet?locale=hr_HR

Project name: *Laboratory of ideas 2*

Project implementation period: 1.8.2024.- 31.12.2024.

Amount of support: 2.500,00 EUR

Project objective: Children and youth will attend all project activities together in order to positively influence connections, develop tolerance and cooperation, and reduce discrimination, which directly affects social inclusion and strengthens intercultural dialogue.

Target group: children and youth of primary and secondary school age from the area of the city of Knin, the municipalities of Kijevo and Kistanje.

Project outcomes: The project empowered youth from Knin, Kijevo and Kistanje through education on civil and human rights. Workshops were held, a trip to Zagreb was organized and an online brochure was created. Participants gained knowledge about democracy, active citizenship and EU values.



Number of beneficiaries involved in the project: 38

Success stories:

„The European Union is a group of countries that agree equally and fight for the same rights, have the same goals and values. Croatia is also part of the European Union. I am very happy that we all have the opportunity to hang out together at workshops, both we from Knin and the children and young people from Kijev.“, Josip, 11 years old

„Tolerance is important because without it, many groups of people in different places would be less accepted. Here in Šibenik-Knin County it is important because of the different religious, ethnic and national groups, and especially in the EU because of the diversity of countries.“, Lucia, 15 years old

„Critical thinking is the thinking that we build by gathering information from books, the internet, or other sources. Although everyone is entitled to their own opinion, a person must be able to support their opinion with facts if they want to be taken into account. The right to critical thinking exists because of the right to freedom of speech that is guaranteed to us through democracy, one of the values of the European Union, of which Croatia is a member.“, Lucia, 15 years old.



Name of the organization: Fisheries and aquaculture local action group Dunav Sava

Residence: Lovas

County: Vukovarsko-srijemska

Contact: <https://flag-dunavsava.hr/> ; <https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=61555486383222>

Project name: ECOAdventure

Project implementation period: 1.9.2024.-31.12.2024.

Amount of support: 2.451,52 EUR

Project objective: The ECOAdventure project aims to empower children in environmental protection through an innovative approach to eco-activism, encouraging creativity, innovation and empathy. The implementation of project activities that combine artistic expression, interactive workshops and gamification will result in encouraging children to become active participants in solving environmental challenges. The project focuses on promoting rights and values towards the EU, a gender-inclusive approach and achieving sustainable change through cooperation with local organizations and authorities, with the aim of encouraging a change in the mentality of children so that they become responsible citizens who care about the future of the planet.



Target group: students from 1st to 4th grade of elementary school, students of Dragutin Tadijanović Elementary School – Bogdanovci Branch School and Lužac Branch School.

Project outcomes: The project encouraged environmental awareness and creativity in children, empowered them to actively participate in environmental protection, increased community cooperation, and raised awareness among local authorities about the importance of eco-activism through a public exhibition and promotional campaign.

Number of beneficiaries involved in the project: 30

Success stories:

„My name is Lovro, and I love nature, but I never knew how to protect it. The ECOAdventure project changed everything. At the 'Green Geniuses' workshop, we learned how small things, like recycling, can make a big difference. When we cleaned up the environment at our school, we found a lot of waste, and the most fun was when we made works of art out of it in the art workshop. I made a toy out of plastic bottles, and my friend made a flower out of old plastic. In the end, we showed all our works at the 'Our ECOAdventure' exhibition. I saw parents, teachers, and even some people from the Municipality looking at our works and talking about how they would also take better care of the environment. I was happy when the teacher said: 'You are real little eco-heroes!' Now everyone at school uses reusable water bottles and we are planning another clean-up campaign. I feel like we can really help nature.,,



Name of the organization: Association ANCHOR- preschool teachers in the protection of children rights in preschool

Residence: Kastav

County: Primorsko-goranska

Contact: <https://udrugasidro.hr/> ;

https://www.facebook.com/sidroodgojitelji/?locale=hr_HR

Project name: *Encouraging the minds of gifted children – a pilot project for empowering gifted children in kindergartens and their parents*

Project implementation period: 1.7.2024.- 31.12.2024.

Amount of support: 2.499,76 EUR



Project objective: to provide support to gifted children of kindergarten age aged five to six in the city of Virovitica. In cooperation with the Cvrčak Kindergarten Virovitica, which will provide access to the target group and professional staff, three workshops will be held with the aim of detecting gifted children and supporting these children and their parents. At the same time, the ANCHOR Association will also conduct an online campaign with the aim of promoting EU values and raising awareness about the importance of supporting gifted children and the lack of adequate support provided to them.

Target group: gifted kindergarten children aged five to six in the city of Virovitica, professional associates, educators, parents, local community and members of the SIDRO Association.

Project outcomes: Teachers at the Cvrčak Kindergarten in Virovitica were educated on how to approach and work with gifted children, and parents and the wider public (campaign) were better informed about the concept of giftedness, gifted children, signs of giftedness and ways to support gifted children. After the workshops, the children became more independent and showed interest in different topics and things.

Number of beneficiaries involved in the project: 262

Success stories:

One mother said: "I notice that she has become more independent, and she is trying more and more on her own, she surprised me the other day when she started reading in the store while passing by. Great, keep it up!" The mother points out that her child has developed an interest in school, which was not the case before. Moreover, she has shown great interest and has even started spelling in everyday life, for example in the store. Furthermore, the mother noticed that after the workshop the child is more oriented towards school, now has a lot of colors, letters and is more interested in socializing with older children. As for letters, she has previous knowledge, but until now she would only copy a few letters after which she would lose interest, but now she can write letters on her own initiative and independently. She has become more independent in her interests.



Name of the organization: The Association for civil society and quality of life Srma

Residence: Sinj

County: Splitsko-dalamtinska

**Contact: <https://www.udrga-srma.com.hr/> ;
<https://www.facebook.com/udruga.srma/?locale=hr> HR**

Project name: ART OF INCLUSION

Project implementation period: 1.7.2024.-31.12.2024.

Amount of support: 2.500,00 EUR

Project objective: improving health and social status, preventing antisocial and high risk behavior, increasing the inclusion of vulnerable groups and mitigating poverty and social differences, protecting rights - preventing social exclusion, protecting the rights and quality of life of the elderly, children and young people through social services, fostering social life, developing the local community through volunteer engagement of citizens as an important development resource of the local community, and improving the quality of life and preventing risky and antisocial behavior of children, young people and the elderly through volunteering programs, inclusive creative workshops.

Target group: Primary school children will be included in psychological counseling, involving families with children affected by poverty, people with disabilities, cancer patients, children and young people with developmental disabilities, and elderly people placed in nursing homes.



Project outcomes: The project activities improved the social status of users, mitigated social risks, reduced anti-social and risky behavior, they have additional life values and better quality, they are more satisfied and ready to cooperate for the inclusion of all citizens.

Number of beneficiaries involved in the project: 155

Success stories:

We experienced the importance of working with natural materials in nursing homes through a very touching gesture by one user who, after working with natural wool, rolled up a piece of untwisted natural wool and put it in her pocket, explaining that it would later remind her of her youth when she worked with such wool, spinning and knitting various items afterwards. When they completed their work, the beneficiaries felt very good, because it boosted their self-confidence and reminded them of the working-age period of their lives. Beneficiaries in art, creative and handicraft workshops emphasized how much they value socializing together through work and spontaneous conversations on various topics, so the workshops had an almost therapeutic effect for them.

PLATFORMA

Name of the organization: Čakovec Community Centre Platform

Residence: Čakovec

County: Međimurska

Contact: <https://pdckk.hr/> ; <https://www.facebook.com/pdckk.hr/>

Project name: *Paths of integration*

Project implementation period: 1.7.2024. – 31.12.2024.

Amount of support: 2.500,00 EUR

Project objective: The "Paths of Integration" project is focused on the integration of foreign workers from the so-called third countries who live and work in Međimurje County, many in rural areas. The focus is on workers from the Philippines, India and Nepal, with the aim of improving their social and work integration. Activities include trust building, detailed research of workers' needs, formation of mediation teams and analysis of collected data that will result in the development and implementation of guidelines and recommendations for employers and local authorities, thus ensuring more effective approaches to integration.



Target group: foreign workers from the so-called third countries (primarily from the Philippines, India and Nepal), employers employing foreign workers and the wider community.

Project outcomes: Research methodology defined and digital collection system established. 5 non-formal mediators from foreign worker communities activated. Analysis and interpretation of research results conducted, including guidelines for decision-makers. Project activities enabled better integration of foreign workers into the community.

Number of beneficiaries involved in the project: 216

Success stories: *Through the implementation of the 'Pathways to Integration' project, it has been shown that building trust in communities of foreign workers is crucial not only for the success of the project itself, but also for ensuring a lasting impact and the continuation of integration activities. During fieldwork and data collection, we established a network of contacts that enabled direct support for workers in situations of insecurity and vulnerability. One of the most striking examples comes from the case of a young Filipina woman who found herself in an extremely difficult situation due to job insecurity. She was employed by an employment agency, was suddenly fired, thus losing her right to accommodation and found herself on the street, with 4 euros in her pocket and another 30 in her account. The employer presented her with documents to sign that she did not understand (a voluntary termination of the employment contract, even a plane ticket for a flight to Manila that she would not physically be able to make), so on the same day we used the acquaintances we had made among employers and the girl found new accommodation and a job with a reliable employer, where she is still employed and happy today.*

Challenges and approaches to solutions

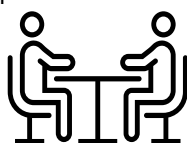
During the activities carried out to monitor the implementation of projects of micro-grant recipients within the PROTEUS project, as well as through field visits, peer to peer events and feedback from micro-grant recipients, the following challenges in rural/peripheral areas of Croatia were highlighted:

- ❖ **Sustainability of civil society organizations, mistrust, small communities and stigmatization, departure of youth, large turnover of people within organizations, lack of space for action.** The most common challenges faced by the beneficiaries of micro-grants as part of the PROTEUS project are: the problem of sustainability, mistrust on the part of other residents of the community, mistrust on the part of the local government, the problem of a small environment where everyone knows each other and where there is a risk of stigmatization of certain people, the departure of youth from their communities, excessive turnover of people within organizations, the absence of a common

In addition to highlighting the challenges that organizations in rural/peripheral areas of Croatia face, the micro-grant recipients highlighted some of their successes so far and highlighted what makes civil society organizations in the rural/peripheral areas they come from recognizable:

- ❖ **Recognizable results to date, quantitative and qualitative effects, authenticity, trust and cooperation of the local community, association.** Highlighting success is almost uncomfortable for some civil society organizations, since some organizations only have one or two employees and do not want to personally stand out and brag. The need to distinguish personal from organizational success is emphasized, and the necessity of highlighting it is necessary for the organization to be

physical space for the association's activities. Possible solutions include: a larger number of open tenders that would last at least 3 years, launching and maintaining economic activities, for example by applying for open public procurement tenders, greater specification of individual tenders that would be announced for certain types of organizations that deal with a specific area, mandatory financing by local communities, greater involvement of children and young people in volunteer activities. In this context, a larger number of micro-grant recipients participating in the peer to peer event expressed surprise that all micro-grant recipients within the PROTEUS project were from rural/peripheral areas. Most participants also emphasized the importance of the support received through the PROTEUS project and expressed the need for further announcements of such targeted tenders for civil society organizations, specifically for areas outside the main urban centers.

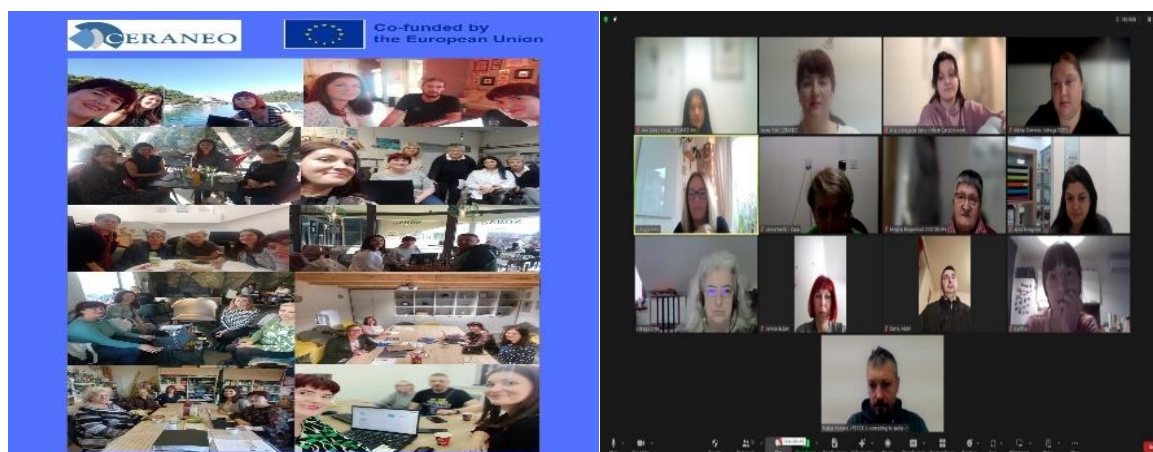


recognizable at other levels. Several organizations stated that their greatest success was that they had been working for more than 20 years, that is, that they had maintained an active civil society organization in such a small and rural area. Some of them emphasized that their success had already been that they were recognized in their communities as important and significant drivers of change and that they had the courage to speak out about the problems they had noticed and considered to be of exceptional importance to their community. Organizations with different experiences in terms of the number of years of existence, the number of volunteers, and the success of which some record national successes, for example in terms of moving legal regulations, while others do not record successes in a quantitative way, but rather prioritize the quality and change they have achieved in the local community - the impact.

Project outcomes

1. Improved fundraising skills of CSOs to strengthen their financial sustainability for 38 representatives of CSOs and their organizations from peripheral regions in Central Europe.
2. Strengthened activist and volunteer management of CSOs and compliance skills for 23 representatives of CSOs and their organizations from peripheral regions in Central Europe.
3. Strengthened online communication, advocacy and awareness-raising skills of activists for 32 representatives of CSOs and their organizations from peripheral regions in Central Europe.
4. Improved personal advocacy skills of CSO activists in rural or peripheral areas to facilitate engagement with local authorities for 22 representatives of CSOs and their organizations from peripheral regions in Central Europe.
5. Enhanced understanding of fundamental rights and EU values among 15 representatives of CSOs and their organizations from peripheral regions of Central Europe.
6. Expanded local civil society and expertise to promote civic activism and European values in peripheral areas of Central Europe.

10 supported micro-projects of civil society organizations, of which at least 70% from areas outside Zagreb, including rural/peripheral areas. Project activities taking place in Croatia during the grant implementation period were supported. Special emphasis was placed on the promotion and protection of rights and values under the EU Treaties and the Charter of Fundamental Rights, as well as a gender-inclusive approach at all levels of the proposed project implementation. 10 field visits to micro-grant recipients were conducted, and one peer-to-peer event was held for recipient organizations.



We conclude that certain changes can happen precisely when several citizens or organizations join forces for the same goal and only then can we act more successfully, especially when trying to influence more extensive changes, such as those in legislation. Then, the authenticity and trust in the community and the contribution to the services that civil society organizations provide were highlighted, the great contribution of local community cooperation (in some cases with support from local authorities, in others despite obstruction by them), the association of various stakeholders at the local and national levels around common goals, especially independent actors in accordance with their interests, cooperation with the media and professional staff, and the volunteer base as a result of the trust achieved. Success in terms of independence was highlighted - faithful to their visions and missions and independence from the influence of individual political authorities and individuals.

Lessons learned from the micrograntees perspective:

- in smaller communities, personal contact is very important for the purpose of involving local stakeholders and participants in project activities
- better quality information received live at gathering places of the local population
- greater logistics are required when a larger number of people are involved in the project
- more training is needed if project beneficiaries do not have the necessary prior knowledge for practical work
- the need for timely planning and a flexible approach due to the potential absence of a continuously offered cultural program in a smaller environment
- weather conditions (extreme heat/cold) can be a disruptive factor in the implementation of project activities, especially when working with the elderly, which is a good idea to plan in advance
- raise awareness of potential prejudices and insufficient knowledge about certain vulnerable groups
- expanded insights and knowledge about access and communication with blind and partially sighted people and other vulnerable groups
- well-planned activities that are in line with the interests of the local population are expected to yield good results
- challenging project implementation if the volunteer association members have their own regular jobs to do
- the importance of adequate and continuous monitoring of the implementation of activities, supporting documentation and cash flow in the implementation of projects in a smaller environment
- the importance and ways of showing donor visibility in EU projects
- gained insight into the perception of the EU and the role that Croatia has as its member from a child's perspective
- insights gained on how to ensure stable funding for the association
- successful project implementation requires careful planning, but also flexibility, adaptability and timely action to deal with sudden changes
- working with children requires an interactive and creative approach with the application of innovative work methods
- cooperation with local partners is crucial for the success of the project
- it is important to build strong support networks in the community to ensure sustainability and expand the reach of the project



- the key lesson relates to transparency and clarity in communication with donors. Regular reporting on the progress, challenges, and achievements of the project has helped strengthen trust and ensure ongoing support
- consider the possibility of challenges in acquiring specific goods/specialized materials needed for the implementation of activities.
- the implementation of activities with the elderly population requires a wide range of working methods, especially for individuals with reduced motor skills
- careful prior planning is necessary for the selection of adequate materials for conducting activities for working with specific vulnerable groups
- in a smaller community, the issue of motivating people to participate in workshops working with vulnerable groups, especially those suffering from chronic illnesses
- more preliminary work is needed with the beneficiaries
- an important building of trust among foreign workers in order to ensure their active involvement. Direct contact through non-formal mediators from the community itself has proven to be the most effective approach in overcoming initial distrust and ensuring continuity of participation
- flexibility in organizing activities, adapting communication methods, and using digital tools are key to facilitating access for participants who had limited opportunities to participate due to obligations
- there is a need for systematic and institutional support in the integration of foreign workers; its implementation requires long-term commitment and formalized support mechanisms
- the use of informal conversations, digital platforms, and reliance on community non-formal mediators have proven to be more effective ways to obtain relevant data.



CONCLUSION

Civil society organizations are key drivers of change in their communities, especially in less developed and peripheral areas. Interconnection among key stakeholders in the community is crucial for the sustainability of individual CSOs, their recognizability, and their success in implementing specific projects. Project implementation requires flexibility and adaptability to changes that may arise, and tailoring activities to specific beneficiaries and their needs is of utmost importance for the project's success. The use of digital tools and various platforms can be a good way to facilitate faster and more systematic work among different stakeholders from different parts of the country. The transfer of knowledge and experience among various representatives of CSOs plays a significant role in the development of their further possibilities for growth and sustainability.

DISPLAY OF THE ORGANIZATION HEADQUARTERS AREA UNDER THE PROTEUS PROJECT



A map of Croatia with marked locations of the headquarters and the corresponding logos of the organizations that provided financial support as part of the PROTEUS project.



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Project

***„PROTEUS-Protecting EU Values and Fundamental Rights through
Public Participation and Civil Society Assistance in Central Europe“***

CERANEO- Centar for development of non-profit organisations

Jakova Gotovca 1 Street, 10 000 Zagreb

OIB: 08955800596

www.ceraneo.hr

099 323 9787

01 4812 384

ceraneo@gmail.com

ceraneo@ceraneo.hr

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