

INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT

INTERVIEWEE: Mia Hrnić, DURA – Dubrovnik Development Agency - project manager of Testeat project

Location: Dubrovnik, DURA

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Camera: Antea Žuvela

Transcript

Tonka:

Can you introduce yourself and your role in the TESTEAT project?

Mia:

My name is Mia Hrnić. I hold a degree in agricultural engineering and work at DURA as an advisor for EU funds and rural development. In the TESTEAT project, I work as the project manager.

Tonka:

What are the most important results achieved so far in the Dubrovnik-Neretva County?

Mia:

There are several.

First, the education of young people, specifically the training of chefs from the Dubrovnik Tourism and Hospitality School.

Then we organized a **pilot action**, which was a trial activity after completing the previous project phases. We organized two dinners, one round table discussion, and three days of educational workshops for school and preschool children aged 6 to 10.

During those dinners, the food was prepared by the students who participated in the project.

We also developed **10 traditional recipes** that were innovatively adapted for people with special dietary needs. This is the core topic of the project. Today, in the tourism market, we increasingly encounter people with various dietary requirements. These may be health-related, but not necessarily. They include vegetarianism, veganism, celiac disease, diabetes, lactose intolerance, and similar needs. There are more and more people with such requirements, and this project took traditional recipes from our region and adapted them to meet those needs.

Tonka:

What are the biggest challenges in implementing the project, and how do you address them?

Mia:

The biggest challenge at the beginning was to clearly define the activities that would be carried out within the project because they had to be implemented both in Croatia and in Italy. Although both countries are Mediterranean, their gastronomic traditions differ.

Another challenge was aligning these activities with the project budget.

For me personally, the biggest challenge is **public procurement**. Preparing procurement procedures takes a long time.

Another challenge is coordinating all project partners, since the project involves several institutions.

Finally, there is the challenge of coordinating the team on our side — organizing the work and ensuring that all tasks are carried out efficiently within the team.

Tonka:

How do you plan to use the results after the project funding ends?

Mia:

We will use the models and results developed through the project for **future project applications**.

We will also use them to **strengthen the local economy**.

Another goal is to **raise awareness** among people about the existence of special dietary needs.

During the workshops we encountered different opinions. Some participants support adapting traditional recipes, while others believe that if traditional recipes are modified, then they are no longer the same dish.

Lucija:

In your project, you initiated a HUB. Can you explain what the HUB is?

Mia:

A hub is a **group of stakeholders**.

It includes hospitality professionals, the tourism and hospitality school, the tourist board, the City of Dubrovnik, and other stakeholders whom we consider closely connected to this topic and able to provide useful input.

The hub is essentially a meeting where we invite these stakeholders, ask them questions, and discuss their opinions about how certain activities should be organized. We collect their suggestions, implement the activities, and then meet again to analyze what worked well and what could be improved.

Throughout the project, every activity was communicated with the hub, both through meetings and via e-mail.

Lucija:

How would you describe the TESTEAT project in one sentence?

Mia:

The TESTEAT project is a cross-border initiative that, through international cooperation, develops sustainable and innovative models focused on gastronomy, tourism, and local food production.

Lucija:

What is your favourite part of this project?

Mia:

My personal favorite part of the project is the education of young people, especially the workshops we organized with them. At the end of the program, the students traveled to Italy, where they participated in a competition and cooked alongside Italian students. This gave them valuable experience and the opportunity to see where they stand — whether they are stronger or weaker in certain areas — and to grow by stepping into something new.

Lucija:

What message would you send to young people who want to participate in projects like this in sustainable tourism?

Mia:

My message would be to be brave. By taking part in projects like these, you will certainly learn something new from different perspectives and gain meaningful experience.