



## **Activity 2.1**

Setting the vision and goals of tourism cross-border collaboration  
between different inner areas

**D.2.1.1 - BRICS Strategy Vision**



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### Introduction - shared vision for cross-border tourism

The BRICS Strategy Vision aims to establish a unified tourism vision for the inner areas within the Italy–Croatia Programme area, the Basso Ferrarese region in Emilia, the Matese area in Molise, and the Municipality of Dugopolje in Split-Dalmatia County. Initiative is designed to create a shared understanding of the challenges and opportunities regions face in tourism development and to foster cross-border cooperation. To inform the development of the strategy, PP3 has distributed and collected responses to unified questionnaire. Previous activities and deliverables, as well as the responses provided valuable insights into the tourism assets of each region, including underutilized resources, potential market segments, and innovative approaches to tourism promotion. This information are analyzed and summarized in this report, highlighting key findings, common challenges, and opportunities for collaboration. Based on this collected data, the BRICS Strategy Vision document is developed, outlining a common framework for tourism promotion across the regions. The document focus on promoting the cultural and natural assets of the inner areas, identifying synergies between the regions, and defining shared strategic goals. It addresses how areas can effectively position themselves in the broader tourism market, emphasizing sustainable practices and long-term growth.

### Tourism assets in inner areas: cultural and natural highlights

**The Union of Municipalities of Biferno springs** in Molise is distinguished by a range of tourism assets. The region's landscapes, natural protected areas in Matese Mountain, quaint villages, and varied ecosystems offer a significant attraction base, with the Biferno River area recognised for its rich biodiversity. Natural resources support a variety of outdoor activities (including trekking, biking in the mountain areas, as well as fishing, rafting, canoeing and nature walks on the riverbanks), allowing tourists to experience the natural environment in diverse ways. Also, in winter, ski resorts like Campitello Matese attract tourists for skiing and snowboarding. The availability of these activities enhances the area's attractiveness and support ecotourism opportunities, making it a destination for nature-based tourism. The historical and archaeological wealth of the Biferno River area adds a compelling dimension to its tourism offerings. Ancient sites such as the Archaeological Site of Altilia Saepinum and historical landmarks enable visitors to engage with the region's heritage and to understand its cultural significance and legacy. The cultural identity of Molise is as well reflected in its traditions, local festivals, and artisanal crafts, while local museums (e.g. Museum of the City and Territory – Sepino, Museum of Brigandage in Roccamandolfi) offer deeper understanding of the history of the area. The local cuisine, marked by traditional dishes and regional specialties, such as truffles, olive oil, and the Molise wine, Tintilia, serves as a gastronomic attraction. Culinary tourism is increasingly influential in this area, with visitors drawn to the unique flavors and traditional preparation methods that highlight the cultural richness of Molise, while agritourism is well developed and some farms offer tours, tastings, and farm-to-table dining experiences.



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**Dugopolje Municipality** positioned near the city of Split, and in the hinterland of coastal agglomerations is distinguished by its natural and cultural assets, positioning itself as a promising destination for sustainable tourism. Among its natural attractions, Mount Mosor enhances Dugopolje’s appeal with its northern landscape, rich in endemic flora and fauna, featuring diverse karst formations such as peaks, sinkholes, and pits. One of the most representative formations is the King’s Furnace, a natural phenomenon with a accessible entrance and terrain, offering adventurous experiences for nature enthusiasts. Vranjača Cave stands out as a protected geomorphological monument on Mount Mosor’s northern slopes, offering visitors a unique geological experience within a pristine karst environment. The entire region is well-networked with hiking trails, offering extensive access to the scenic landscapes and connecting key natural sites. Dugopolje’s cultural heritage is also noteworthy, with the Roman Road—a well-preserved hiking trail extending over two kilometers along the boundaries of Dugopolje and Klis. This historic trail provides a tangible link to the region’s ancient past, making it a valuable asset for cultural tourism. Additionally, the municipality is home to seven significant sacral buildings, adding spiritual and historical dimensions that appeal to a wide array of visitors. Modern facilities support Dugopolje’s tourism potential, with the Visitor’s Centre “Hidden Dalmatia” serving as an innovative multimedia and educational hub that interprets the inner Dalmatia natural heritage, with a particular focus on Mount Mosor.

**The Lands and Rivers Union** is distinguished by a rich array of cycling routes, cycle tourism trails, river excursions, and nature walks through verdant bays, thematically forming *Outdoor, environment and landscape* attractions. The Po River serves as the region’s defining natural feature, presenting a unique landscape of serene beaches, meandering riverbanks, and varied vegetation interspersed with poplar groves and wildlife habitats. Notable ecological and cultural attractions, as part of *Rural and historical heritage* of the region, include the *Mulino sul Po*, a floating museum and emblem of the region’s agricultural heritage, part of the Emilia-Romagna Museums of Taste network. This historic mill is both an open-air museum and a living symbol of the area’s productive traditions. The walking paths along the Great River provide visitors with views of the surrounding landscape, showcasing floodplains, cultivated fields, and riverbanks that extend for miles. The setting is further enriched by the presence of traditional rural buildings and country estates, thoughtfully dispersed across the horizon, embodying the area’s rustic charm and agricultural heritage. The region’s gastronomy showcases authentic local flavours, offering specialty dishes crafted from regional ingredients, such as *Salama Ferrarese*, handmade *Cappelletti* pasta, a selection of traditional desserts, and distinctive wines. Architectural heritage further enriches the region, with key sites like the iconic Delizia Tower, the Church of Saints Peter and Paul in Copparo, San Giacomo Church in Ro, the Church of Saint Apollinare and many others. Tresignana is a well-preserved example of rationalist architecture with its Tresigallo, the “Metaphysical City” par excellence. These landmarks, with their marble colonnades, towers, arches, and geometric forms, embody the region’s enduring aesthetic and blend with the natural landscape.



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### Challenges and opportunities in tourism development

#### Common challenges

Tourism development in project areas faces several common challenges, particularly in leveraging natural and environmental resources to their full potential. Although nature tourism promotion has recently increased across all three regions, the natural attractions remain less recognized compared to more popular nearby tourist areas. Thus, it is crucial to ensure that tourism growth aligns with the preservation of natural resources. Slow, experiential, and community-based tourism forms remain insufficiently promoted and supported. For example, in the Union of Municipalities of Lands and Rivers, cycle tourism routes are underutilized due to the lack of a distinct brand or clear market positioning. This is also partly due to the lack of a comprehensive network that coordinates operators and processes to deliver high-quality services to tourists. All three areas report inadequate resources and limited training for staff, who need skills to engage the region in tourism planning and to adapt to a dynamic, ever-evolving market.

The integration of local craftsmanship and authentic products, such as those in Dugopolje municipality, is lacking, as these products are rarely incorporated into tourism packages. Similarly, while historical, cultural, and architectural heritage are recognized as valuable resources, their interpretation remains underdeveloped in all three areas. Additional barriers stem from the small size and fragmentation of communities, compounded by the challenges of tourism seasonality, which can lead to economic instability. On a local level, deficiencies in tourism governance, such as insufficient collaboration among stakeholders, need to be addressed. Many stakeholders operate independently, which limits synergy and collective impact. Financial constraints further restrict promotional campaigns, participation in international events, and the establishment of a cohesive marketing strategy.

Moreover, tourism management is weakened by limited human resources, inadequate skills in tourism, scarce economic resources, an ambiguous promotion strategy, and bureaucratic barriers that hinder the implementation of innovative approaches. International tourism remains underdeveloped due to low awareness of these inner areas globally. Cultural limitations, weak coordination, and a lack of established territorial supply chains also limit the participation of civil society, the private sector, and other stakeholders in tourism governance mechanisms, while allocating resources for education and training—such as workshops, seminars, and initiatives on tourism management and governance—to build the skills of local communities and stakeholders remains a key challenge. Supporting community-led initiatives that actively engage local residents and businesses in decision-making is essential to strengthening the tourism sector in these regions.



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### Opportunities

As travellers increasingly seek authentic, engaging experiences, inner areas present valuable opportunities to promote sustainable tourism that benefits both visitors and local communities. The three areas each offer unique tourist attractions, which can be broadly grouped into two main themes: Nature and landscape, and Art, history, and architecture. Regions also share several key elements that can be used to craft a cohesive narrative, slogan (e.g. *Discover the heart within*) and promotional strategy. These include the presence of water features—such as rivers, waterfalls, and the proximity to the sea.

These shared elements offer opportunities for creating an integrated tourism offerings aligned with current market trends. Nature and culture complement each other well in Green and Slow tourism packages, where cycling and hiking serve as sustainable modes of transport to explore the regions. Eco-tourism—focused on nature, authentic rural experiences, distinctive food and wine products, rooted in traditional agricultural practices and escape from urban life—is a niche common to all three areas, as is the potential for developing cultural heritage tourism. Additionally, the potential for developing cultural heritage tourism is a shared priority. To further strengthen these efforts, measures such as the implementation of small-scale tourist infrastructure, including themed walking and cycling trails constructed with natural materials and powered by renewable energy sources, should support sustainable tourism growth. Accessibility practices should also be prioritized, ensuring that tourism facilities and trails are inclusive and accessible to people of varying abilities, thus reinforcing a positive and welcoming image across borders. Establishing eco-certifications or sustainability standards also provides a valuable opportunity to incentivize local businesses to adopt responsible tourism practices.

These overlapping interests create a foundation for collaboration in joint promotional campaigns, cross-border advertising, and encouraging citizens of both countries to explore these regions. The target market for these areas includes ‘Heritage & Nature Seekers’—travelers who are interested in natural and cultural sites, wildlife, forests, landscapes, and local traditions. For example, the Union of Municipalities of Lands and Rivers recognizes the importance of emphasizing the value of returning to one’s “roots”—both in terms of rediscovering ancestral lands and revitalizing local traditions.

Moreover, the role of technology in tourism promotion is well recognised in all three regions. The development of promotional videos and virtual tours could enhance the visitor experience, offering insights into specific locations via interactive totems placed strategically or through virtual and augmented reality content, allowing potential tourists to explore the area remotely. Digital platforms and virtual tours with immersive features could offer a novel way for travellers to engage with the destination before their arrival. Innovative tourism solutions could also include home-based accommodation options and participation in local gatherings, such as dining experiences hosted in local homes, which would transform the travellers from a mere customer to an active participant in the local community. An integrated tourism information systems could further enhance accessibility and streamline trip planning, providing tourists with comprehensive details about the region. Virtual tours and events could give potential visitors a taste of the destination, sparking curiosity and anticipation. Cross-border marketing efforts could highlight the



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similarities among the areas, using digital tools to showcase regional specialties and underscore that all three hinterlands are full of hidden gems awaiting discovery. The project has created valuable opportunities for exchanging ideas and experiences, leading to the development of a shared vision for a cross-border tourism network that holds great potential for regional growth. By fostering stronger connections among stakeholders, the initiative can ensure greater economic benefits for the communities involved. A key step in this process is actively engaging local communities, making them integral participants in the tourism revitalization efforts. This involvement is crucial for building a sense of ownership and for integrating them into the governance structures that will drive sustainable and inclusive tourism development, addressing local challenges while unlocking new growth opportunities.

## Consolidating a Cross-Border Vision for Tourism

### Vision

Tourism has become an effective means of interpreting and preserving the area's historical and natural assets, while also promoting sustainable practices. The regions have capitalized on the growing interest in eco-tourism and slow tourism, attracting a steady stream of visitors seeking outdoor activities such as cycling, hiking, and nature exploration. Additionally, local traditions are now integral to the tourism experience, with hands-on activities such as grape harvesting, olive oil production, and traditional food preparation offering visitors an immersive, authentic connection to the local culture.

A collaborative governance model has been established, ensuring active involvement from local stakeholders, businesses, and community groups in the planning and execution of tourism strategies.

This approach has fostered stronger partnerships and improved the coordination of tourism management across the three regions. The results are unified regional identities, increased visibility in both domestic and international tourism markets, and enhanced effectiveness in the promotion and management of tourism resources.

As a consequence, the three regions have seen an increase in both the volume and quality of visitors, leading to greater economic benefits for local businesses and communities. At the same time, the regions have successfully balanced growth with sustainability, ensuring long-term, positive impacts on the environment, local culture, and economic development.

### Mission

The mission of the regions is to promote sustainable tourism development across the three project areas by establishing a cross-border network that showcases each region's unique cultural, natural, and historical assets. Through collaboration with local businesses, tourism operators, and community groups, we aim to enhance the visibility of these regions, attract responsible travellers, and provide



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authentic, nature-based experiences. The focus is on tourism that benefits both visitors and local communities, fostering local development, preserving cultural heritage, and ensuring long-term environmental sustainability. By fostering cross-border collaboration between different inner areas, we seek to create synergies that enhance the overall tourism offering, strengthening regional connections and offering an experience for tourists exploring multiple destinations.

### Key strategic pillars for cross-border tourism development

The BRICS Strategy Vision is founded on several key pillars:

- **Collaborative Networks,**
- **Promotion,**
- **Sustainability,**
- **Empowering,**
- **Digitalisation,**

aimed at promoting sustainable tourism development and strengthening collaboration between the inner areas of the Basso Ferrarese region in Emilia, the Matese area in Molise, and the Municipality of Dugopolje in Split-Dalmatia County.

- A central aspect of the vision is fostering strong cross-border partnerships between regions, as well as collaboration within key sectors across each region. This includes strengthening connections between local businesses, tourism operators, and community groups to create a unified tourism offering. Within each region, sectors such as cultural heritage, natural conservation, local gastronomy, and sustainable infrastructure are encouraged to work together to promote an integrated and authentic tourism experience
- The strategy prioritizes the presentation of the regions' unique cultural and natural assets, including the grandeur views of Matese mountains, the natural landmarks of Dugopolje, and the picturesque landscape along the Po River. Areas will provide visitors with enriching, educational experiences that highlight the regions' heritage and environmental value
- Ensuring that tourism is both responsible and sustainable is at the core of the strategy. This means developing tourism in ways that preserve the natural environment, promote eco-friendly practices, and allow local communities to thrive
- The strategy recognizes the importance of including local communities in the tourism development process. By involving residents in decision-making and offering economic opportunities, we foster a sense of ownership and pride that enhances the tourism experience for visitors





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- Technology is seen as important tool to engage prospective travellers through interactive maps, virtual reality experiences, and digital content. Tools could provide a virtual preview of the regions, enhancing the visitor experience even before arrival
- Investment in capacity-building initiatives are found of great importance to support sustainable tourism. This includes targeted training programs for local businesses, tourism operators, and community groups, equipping them with the skills needed to manage tourism growth effectively. Workshops, seminars, and other educational opportunities should empower stakeholders to contribute meaningfully to the region's long-term tourism success

