

D.4.2.2 TESTEAT Strategy



Italy – Croatia



DELIVERABLE SUMMARY	
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The TESTEAT STRATEGY

TESTEAT is not only about preserving gastronomic heritage. It is about creating the knowledge, partnerships and governance needed for that heritage to remain alive, relevant and accessible for future generations.



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1. Why this Strategy and Action Plan?

The TESTEAT Legacy Framework: Translating the Strategy into Concrete Actions

The TESTEAT Strategy and Action Plan has been developed, shared and approved by Partners to ensure that the knowledge, methodologies and collaborative experience generated throughout the project continue to create value beyond the project's lifetime. Rather than representing the conclusion of the project, this document marks the transition from experimentation to long-term implementation by providing a common strategic framework for the future development of sustainable and inclusive enogastronomic tourism in the Italy-Croatia cooperation area.

TESTEAT does not end with the conclusion of the project. The Strategy and Action Plan has been developed to ensure that the project's knowledge, partnerships and methodologies continue to inspire sustainable territorial development, capacity building and cross-border cooperation long after the project has been completed.

The Strategy builds upon all the outputs produced during TESTEAT—including territorial analyses, research activities, the Blueprint, the innovative Recipe Book, stakeholder consultations, Innovation HUBs, pilot events and cross-border exchange programmes. Each of these activities has contributed to generating knowledge, testing innovative solutions and strengthening cooperation among stakeholders. **The present document brings these experiences together within a coherent framework that translates project strategic principles and results into practical guidance for future action.**

Rather than introducing new concepts, the Strategy consolidates the lessons learned during the project and identifies common priorities, shared values and operational directions that can guide future initiatives at local, regional and cross-border level. In this perspective, **the Action Plans prepared by the project partners represent the first practical application of the Strategy, demonstrating how its principles can be adapted to different territorial contexts while maintaining a common vision.**

The document is therefore intended to serve not only as a project deliverable, but also as a **living reference framework** capable of supporting future cooperation, policy development, capacity building and sustainable tourism planning. It is addressed to public authorities, educational institutions, tourism organisations, HORECA operators, local producers, destination managers, cultural organisations, local communities and all stakeholders interested in preserving and enhancing the shared enogastronomic heritage of the Programme area.

Table 1. The TESTEAT WP4 Key deliverable



Deliverables	Main Function	Long-term Role
 Strategy and Action Plan	Defines the common strategic vision and operational priorities.	Identifies principles; guides governance, future actions and territorial cooperation.
	Defines the operational actions for the continuation of TESTEAT.	
 Manifesto	Consolidates the shared TESTEAT values and principles developed by the partnership.	Inspires stakeholders and promotes a common culture of sustainable enogastronomic tourism.
 Transferability Plan	Identifies stakeholders, networks and dissemination pathways supporting continuity.	Ensures replication, policy uptake and long-term sustainability of TESTEAT results.

1.1 How to Use this Strategy and Action Plan

The Strategy and Action Plan should be considered a practical reference for the continuation and transfer of the TESTEAT approach. In particular, it can be used to:

- support the design of sustainable and inclusive tourism initiatives based on local enogastronomic heritage;
- inspire local and regional policies addressing tourism, education, culture and territorial development;
- guide the preparation of future Action Plans and collaborative projects;
- strengthen cooperation among public institutions, tourism stakeholders, educational organisations and local communities;
- promote capacity building and professional skills aligned with emerging tourism trends;
- facilitate the transfer and replication of the TESTEAT model in other territories and European cooperation initiatives.

As tourism continues to evolve in response to environmental, social and market changes, this document should be regarded as a dynamic framework rather than a static report. Its implementation should therefore be supported by continuous stakeholder engagement, periodic review and the progressive adaptation of actions to emerging challenges and opportunities, ensuring that the TESTEAT legacy remains relevant, resilient and capable of generating long-term benefits for both local communities and visitors.



1.2 Looking Beyond the Strategy

The Strategy and Action Plan represents the central strategic framework for the long-term implementation of TESTEAT. However, it forms part of a broader set of complementary outputs specifically designed to ensure the continuity, dissemination and transferability of the project's results beyond its formal conclusion.

To reinforce this long-term perspective, the Strategy is complemented by two additional deliverables. The **TESTEAT Manifesto** translates the shared vision and values developed by the project partnership into a common declaration of principles, intended to inspire stakeholders, strengthen awareness and promote a shared culture of sustainable, inclusive and innovative enogastronomic tourism. At the same time, the **TESTEAT Transferability Plan** identifies the key local, national and international stakeholders, networks and multipliers capable of supporting the dissemination, adoption and replication of the TESTEAT approach. By mapping potential users and strategic partnerships, the Transferability Plan provides the operational framework for extending the project's impact across the Italy-Croatia Programme area and beyond.

Together, these three complementary documents—the **Strategy and Action Plan**, the **Manifesto** and the **Transferability Plan**—constitute the long-term legacy of TESTEAT. While the Strategy defines *what* should be pursued, the Manifesto explains *why* it matters, and the Transferability Plan identifies *how* the project's vision can continue to grow through new partnerships, wider dissemination and future cooperation initiatives.



2. The TESTEAT Project

TESTEAT (Enhance enogastronomy hEritage to eSTablish and Expand sustainAble Tourism) is a project co-funded by the **Interreg VI-A Italy-Croatia Programme 2021-2027** under the priority dedicated to **Culture and Tourism for Sustainable Development**. Its overall objective is to strengthen the role of enogastronomic heritage as a driver of sustainable socio-economic development, territorial cohesion and cross-border cooperation in the Italy-Croatia programme area.

The project is based on the recognition that traditional gastronomy is not only an expression of local identity but also a strategic resource for enhancing destination attractiveness, supporting local communities and increasing the competitiveness of tourism SMEs. Through a joint cross-border approach, TESTEAT promotes the valorisation of Italian and Croatian enogastronomic heritage by developing innovative tourism products, strengthening professional skills and fostering cooperation among public authorities, educational institutions, tourism operators and local producers.

A distinctive feature of TESTEAT is its focus on adapting traditional enogastronomy to contemporary market trends and visitor expectations. The project addresses emerging challenges such as changing dietary needs, sustainable consumption, circular economy practices and digital innovation, while preserving the authenticity of local food traditions and territorial identity in peripheral rural and urban coastal areas. Particular attention is given to the upskilling of both the current and future tourism workforce—including students, chefs, waiters, destination managers and tourist guides—through joint educational activities and practical learning experiences.

The project also establishes two cross-border **Enogastronomy Innovation HUBs** (multi-stakeholder territorial Communities of Practice), one in Italy the other in Croatia, bringing together public and private stakeholders to co-design strategies, action plans and pilot initiatives aimed at ensuring the long-term sustainability and transferability of project results. In parallel, TESTEAT develops digital tools and innovative methodologies to support accessible, inclusive and sustainable gastronomic tourism across the Adriatic area.

The core values underpinning TESTEAT are **cross-border cooperation, sustainability, innovation, inclusion, capacity building and the preservation of local heritage**. By combining these principles, the project contributes to the European priorities for the green and digital transition, strengthens regional value chains and promotes resilient tourism destinations capable of responding to evolving visitor expectations while safeguarding the cultural identity of the Italy-Croatia cooperation area.

Figure 1. TESTEAT Partnership across the Italy-Croatia Programme Area





2.1 Partners

TESTEAT can count on a diverse and complex partnership consisting of public and private entities and educational institutions, in order to better respond to cross-border challenges and develop joint solutions. The project's originality is showcased through the TESTEAT online tool for creating innovative tourism offers tailored to contemporary consumer/tourist behaviours and needs.

To ensure the active participation of stakeholders in project activities and in the co-design of results, the partners created two innovative enogastronomic HUBs. The HUBs are composed of key public and private actors from the tourism and culture sectors who are involved throughout the project's implementation.

1 AZRRI - Agency for Rural Development of Istria Ltd. Pazin

AZRRI - Agency for Rural Development of Istria Ltd. is a regional public development agency dedicated to fostering sustainable rural development by connecting agriculture, gastronomy and tourism. Its core mission is to support and coordinate development programmes that enhance the value of local agri-food products, particularly those with added value and autochthonous origin, while strengthening cooperation between public and private stakeholders. The agency has extensive experience in implementing EU-funded projects and in promoting innovative approaches to the valorisation of intangible cultural and enogastronomy heritage. Education and capacity building represent a key pillar of AZRRI's activities, particularly through the Educational Gastronomy Centre of Istria, which serves as a regional hub for knowledge transfer and skills development.



Role in the project



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Within the TESTEAT project, AZRRI acts as the Lead Partner, ensuring overall project coordination, management and smooth implementation of activities. It played a strategic role in guiding the partnership towards achieving project objectives related to the valorisation of enogastronomy heritage and the development of an integrated, sustainable tourism model at cross-border level.

AZRRI was responsible for the development of the TESTEAT Online Tool, aimed at supporting the creation of innovative tourism offers adapted to contemporary consumer behaviour and dietary needs. In addition, AZRRI contributed to the establishment and coordination of TESTEAT HUBs, engaging key stakeholders and facilitating knowledge exchange between partners and sectors.

Furthermore, the agency designed and implemented a pilot action in Istria in the form of a regional eno-gastronomy day, actively contributing to the testing of the integrated tourism model. AZRRI also participated in the implementation of vocational education and training activities, supporting the upskilling of tourism professionals and strengthening competencies in areas such as circular economy, digitalisation and adaptation to modern food choices. Through these activities, AZRRI contributed to the development of transferable cross-border solutions linking enogastronomy heritage with sustainable tourism development.

2_City of Venice

The City of Venice, capital of the Veneto Region, is a unique historic centre renowned worldwide for the exceptional richness of its cultural heritage, comprising an extraordinary historical, architectural and artistic legacy closely intertwined with its lagoon environment.

Listed as a UNESCO World Heritage Site since 1987, “Venice and its Lagoon” combine centuries of history with a strong commitment to sustainability, innovation and international cooperation. Through its active participation in European projects, the City of Venice promotes inclusive development, environmental resilience and the exchange of good practices.



Role in the project

The City of Venice took part in all phases of the TESTEAT project, contributing to its activities in close cooperation with the project partners. In particular, it was involved in mapping local food heritage and in developing creative and innovative approaches to make it more accessible, inclusive and sustainable, exploring new ways to connect traditions with contemporary needs.

At the local level, a key moment was the organisation of the “SAOR – Saperi e Saperi Veneziani in Festa 2025” festival, which represented an opportunity to put project ideas into practice. Through SAOR, the City engaged a wide range of local stakeholders - including tourism operators, agri-food producers, restaurant owners, schools, public authorities, cultural institutions, associations and citizens - creating a shared space for participation and exchange.

This experience highlighted the importance of a bottom-up approach, rooted in the active involvement of local stakeholders and in the valorisation of territorial specificities. It also reinforced the need to connect project actions with local needs and perspectives, ensuring that initiatives are meaningful, relevant and supported by the community.

Building on these experiences, the City of Venice coordinated, together with all project partners, the development of the TESTEAT Strategy and Manifesto. This work translates the lessons learned during the project into a shared framework and a set of common directions for the future.



3 Juraj Dobrila University of Pula, UNIPU

The Juraj Dobrila University of Pula (UNIPU) is a public higher education and research institution strongly oriented towards sustainable development and the valorisation of cultural and natural heritage. With a multidisciplinary structure and close links to the local community, UNIPU plays a key role in connecting academic knowledge with real-world challenges in tourism and regional development.



Faculty of Economics and
Tourism "Dr. Mijo Mirković"

Role in the project

Within the TESTEAT project, UNIPU acted as the leader of Work Package 1, focusing on research, analysis and the development of innovative frameworks. The University was responsible for mapping intangible enogastronomic heritage and conducting market research on contemporary tourist behaviour, food preferences, and emerging trends. These activities provided the foundation for designing innovative, sustainable tourism offers adapted to modern demand. In addition, the University supported educational and training activities, including workshops and student exchange initiatives, strengthening the skills of future tourism professionals.

Through its scientific expertise and strong regional engagement, UNIPU ensures that project outputs are evidence-based, innovative, and aligned with the needs of both the tourism sector and local communities.



4_Ca' Foscari University of Venice, UNIVE

Founded in 1868, Ca' Foscari University of Venice has long been a bridge between knowledge and real-world impact, with a strong focus on economics, management, and international perspectives. Within its Venice School of Management, the Agrifood Management and Innovation Lab brings together an interdisciplinary team of researchers working on the transformation of agri-food systems, combining scientific rigor with practical application.

The Lab explores innovative business models, local food systems, and the twin transition—digital and sustainable—while actively engaging with territories, industries, and communities. Gastronomic tourism, especially in regions such as Veneto, is a key area of expertise, where research meets cultural heritage and economic development.



Ca' Foscari
University
of Venice

Role in the project

Within the TESTEAT project, Ca' Foscari has played an important role as a scientific partner. It has contributed by structuring knowledge, analyzing case studies across partner regions and supporting the development of shared frameworks and action plans. Ca' Foscari has led co-design workshops, fostering dialogue among stakeholders and contributed to the creation of innovative an enogastronomy Hub in Venice.

In addition, Ca' Foscari has supported training activities and cross-border exchanges, helping to build skills and perspectives for the tourism workforce. Through these actions, the University has not only generated knowledge but also activated connections, turning research into a driver for sustainable and inclusive territorial development.

5_Municipality of Ston

The Municipality of Ston is a historic coastal community located in southern Croatia, well known for its rich cultural heritage, traditional gastronomy, and centuries-old salt production. Ston is widely recognized for its medieval walls, oyster farming in Mali Ston Bay, and its strong connection to authentic local food and wine traditions, making it an ideal setting for initiatives focused on sustainable tourism and eno-gastronomy.



OPĆINA
STON

Role in the project

Within the TESTEAT project, the Municipality of Ston played an important role as one of the pilot locations where eno-gastronomic days were organized from October 16 to 18, 2025. These activities aimed to promote local products, traditions, and the overall gastronomic identity of the area.

Additionally, the Municipality of Ston was responsible for organizing a training program for staff working in hospitality establishments. This two-day workshop focused on key topics such as marketing strategies, evolving food consumption trends, and ways to adapt to modern market demands while preserving authenticity and local identity. Through these activities, the Municipality contributed to strengthening local capacities and enhancing the quality of the tourism offer in the region.



6_Scuola Centrale Formazione

Scuola Centrale Formazione ETS (SCF) is a national network of vocational education and training (VET) providers and a private non-profit association officially recognized by the Italian Ministry of Labour. For over 50 years, SCF has been promoting innovation, social inclusion and educational well-being through high-quality vocational training and support for the transition to employment.

The network includes 53 member organizations managing 132 accredited VET centres across 12 Italian regions, involving more than 2,000 staff members and serving over 30,700 learners every year. SCF delivers more than 1,900 training programmes, mainly in the fields of hospitality and food services, automotive, hair and beauty, agrifood and agriculture.

SCF's activities cover vocational education and training, lifelong learning, training for trainers, education and career guidance, transition to work and social inclusion. The organization cooperates with over 220 partners in 26 European countries and with additional partners worldwide, promoting international mobility and participation in European projects.

SCF focuses on six strategic areas: inclusion, teaching innovation, educational well-being, work, internationalization and sustainability. Particular attention is given to vulnerable groups, including people with disabilities, migrants, refugees, unaccompanied minors, prisoners and unemployed individuals, through personalized learning pathways and integrated support services.

Since 2013, more than 2,000 trainers have been involved in professional development programmes on skills-based learning, digital technologies, educational robotics, inclusive methodologies and artificial intelligence.



Role in the project

Within the project, Scuola Centrale Formazione acted as Communication Manager, leading the development and implementation of the Communication Strategy adopted by all project partners and managing the project's official website. In addition, it was responsible for the training of trainers and the delivery of learning activities for students, while also playing an active role in the organisation and implementation of the student exchange programme. Through these activities, Scuola Centrale Formazione contributed to strengthening knowledge sharing, fostering transnational cooperation and promoting the active engagement of learners and educators across the partnership.

7_CIVIFORM

CIVIFORM is an accredited vocational education and training provider based in north-eastern Italy, operating since 1955 through its centres in Cividale del Friuli and Trieste. Its mission is to support young people and adults in acquiring the competences, autonomy and employability needed to access, re-enter and progress within the labour market. Its training offer covers a broad range of professional sectors, including hospitality and food service, pastry and bakery, ICT and graphic design, beauty and wellness, social care, electrical installations, mechanics, gardening and green maintenance, tailoring, as well as transversal and soft skills that are essential for personal development and occupational inclusion.



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Within initial VET, CIVIFORM provides 3-year pathways for learners aged 14 to 17 leading to EQF level 3 professional qualifications, with the possibility of progressing to a fourth year in order to obtain an EQF level 4 diploma. These pathways are complemented by personalised support measures for learners with difficulties, re-engagement and guidance actions for those at risk of educational disengagement, and dedicated programmes for unaccompanied foreign minors combining Italian as a second language, citizenship education and vocational training. In continuing VET and adult learning, CIVIFORM delivers vocational guidance, short qualification pathways, post-diploma and post-graduate training, apprenticeships, work-based learning opportunities, training for disadvantaged groups and tailored training for companies. CIVIFORM is also actively engaged in mobility and cooperation initiatives funded at regional, national and European level, as part of its wider commitment to innovation, inclusion and skills development.

Role in the project

In TESTEAT, CIVIFORM has been engaged from the very beginning and across the whole project cycle. It contributed to coordination, partner meetings and communication activities; in WP1 it carried out questionnaires and interviews, developed traditional and innovative recipes representing its territory; in WP3 it supported all planned activities and organised its regional enogastronomy day; and it continued contributing to WP4. Above all, CIVIFORM is the leader of WP2, focused on upskilling and reskilling the tourism workforce, a role fully aligned with its strong experience in vocational training, guidance and skills development.



8_Dubrovnik Development Agency DURA

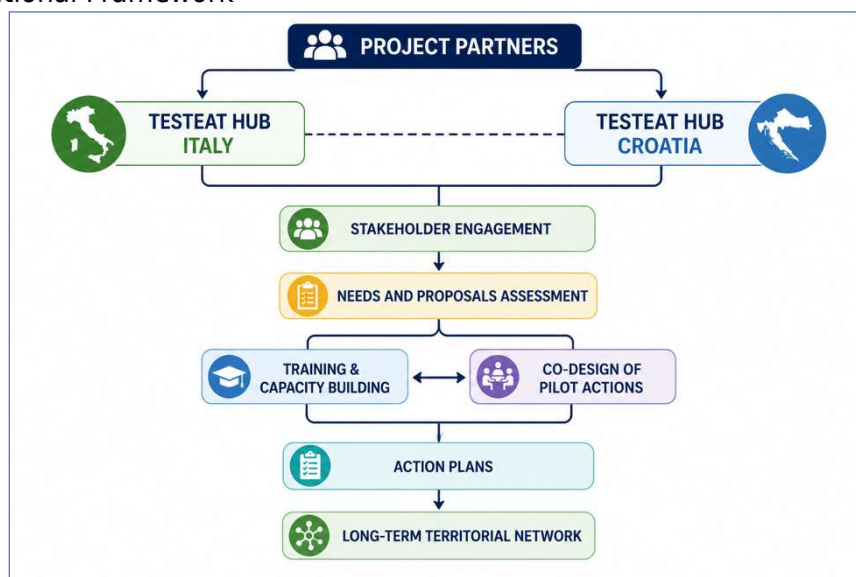
Dubrovnik Development Agency (DURA) is a professional, non-profit organization established by the City of Dubrovnik in 2007 with the mission to foster sustainable local development through the preparation and implementation of EU-funded and national projects. Acting as a strategic link between the City administration and relevant public, private and civil society stakeholders, DURA provides technical assistance in project design and management, supports entrepreneurship and NGOs, and contributes to the development of strategic documents. The Agency employs a multidisciplinary team of 17 full-time professionals and has successfully implemented over 50 projects across sectors such as sustainable tourism, cultural and creative industries, SME development, environmental protection, and the valorisation of cultural and gastronomic heritage.



Role in the project

Within the TESTEAT project, DURA participated as PP 8 and acted as the coordinator for Work Package 3, focused on the creation of an integrated cross-border tourism offer. Its role was to contribute to the valorisation of enogastronomic heritage by aligning it with contemporary tourism trends and sustainability principles. DURA led the development of methodological guidelines for integrated tourism products, coordinated the creation of an innovative enogastronomic framework for the Dubrovnik-Neretva County, and prepared an evaluation report based on pilot testing activities. Additionally, the Agency actively engaged key stakeholders through the local TESTEAT HUB, organised workshops (including those targeting students), and contributed to raising awareness among tourism actors and local communities. Through these activities, DURA supported the development of competitive, resilient, and experience-based tourism products adapted to evolving market demands.

Figure 2. The TESTEAT Operational Framework



3. Policy and Territorial Context Analysis

European food systems are undergoing a profound transformation driven by demographic changes, increasing consumer awareness, evolving lifestyles and the growing demand for healthier, more sustainable and inclusive food experiences. Alongside the increasing prevalence of medically diagnosed food allergies, food intolerances and coeliac disease, European consumers are progressively adopting new dietary patterns, including vegetarian, vegan and flexitarian diets. These developments are reshaping food production, hospitality services, gastronomic tourism and public policies, requiring destinations and food operators to respond to increasingly diversified dietary needs.

According to current scientific evidence, food allergies affect approximately 2–4% of the European population, while prevalence among children may reach around 8% in several European countries. Coeliac disease affects approximately 1% of the population and remains substantially underdiagnosed. At the same time, European consumers are increasingly adopting plant-based and "free-from" dietary choices, driven not only by medical requirements but also by growing awareness of health, sustainability and ethical consumption. These trends are creating new opportunities for innovation throughout the food, hospitality and tourism sectors, while reinforcing the need for transparency, accessibility and consumer protection (Main References: European Commission (2011) - *Regulation (EU) No 1169/2011 on the provision of food information to consumers*. European Commission (2020). *Farm to Fork Strategy*. European Commission (2022). *Transition Pathway for Tourism*. European Commission (2020). *European Skills Agenda*. EFSA. *Food Allergens*. GA²LEN. *Managing Food Allergy Guidelines*. Lebwohl B. et al. *Coeliac Disease*. The Lancet, 2022).

The European Union has progressively established a comprehensive policy framework supporting these developments. Regulation (EU) No 1169/2011 on the provision of food information to consumers introduced harmonised rules for allergen declaration and food labelling, strengthening consumer rights across the Single Market. Additional legislation concerning gluten-related claims, official food controls and food safety complements this framework, ensuring a high level of protection while facilitating the free movement of goods and services. These regulatory instruments are supported by the scientific activities of the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) and by broader policy initiatives promoting healthier and more sustainable food systems.

In recent years, European strategies such as the European Green Deal and the Farm to Fork Strategy have further expanded the policy perspective by linking food safety with environmental sustainability, innovation, circular economy principles and consumer empowerment. These initiatives encourage the development of food systems that are not only safe and transparent but also resilient, inclusive and capable of responding to changing dietary preferences. At the same time, research programmes such as Horizon 2020 and Horizon Europe continue to support innovation in food technologies, alternative proteins, digital traceability and personalised nutrition, contributing to the evolution of accessible and sustainable food services.

Within this context, gastronomic tourism is becoming an increasingly important component of regional development strategies. Visitors are no longer seeking only authentic local products but also food experiences that are safe, inclusive and adapted to individual dietary requirements. The ability of destinations to accommodate travellers affected by allergies, intolerances or specific dietary preferences is therefore becoming a quality indicator capable of enhancing competitiveness, visitor satisfaction and social inclusion. This challenge is particularly relevant for the Adriatic cross-border area, where gastronomy represents a strategic asset for local identity and tourism development.

The TESTEAT project addresses these evolving needs by promoting a more inclusive and sustainable interpretation of the shared gastronomic heritage of the Italy-Croatia Programme area. Rather than modifying local traditions, the project encourages their enhancement through improved accessibility,



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innovation and knowledge exchange. By supporting collaboration among public authorities, research organisations, tourism operators, SMEs and local communities, TESTEAT contributes to strengthening the capacity of destinations to offer authentic food experiences while responding to the growing diversity of consumer needs.

This policy and context analysis provides the background for the activities developed under Work Package 4, highlighting the European regulatory framework, the main dietary trends and the opportunities for improving food accessibility within the tourism sector. It also underlines the strategic role of cross-border cooperation in developing shared methodologies, innovative tools and transferable good practices capable of enhancing both the competitiveness and the inclusiveness of the Adriatic gastronomic destination.

3.1 Tourism Overview: Europe, Italy and Croatia

Tourism remains one of the European Union's key economic ecosystems, supporting regional development, employment and cultural heritage. From 2023 to 2025, EU tourist accommodation establishments recorded from 2.92 to 3.08 billion overnight stays, exceeding pre-pandemic levels and confirming the sector's strong recovery. The tourism ecosystem is dominated by SMEs and increasingly driven by demand for authentic, sustainable and experience-based destinations.

With 479.3 million overnight stays in 2025, Italy is one of Europe's leading tourism destinations, accounting for approximately **15,4% of all overnight stays in the EU**. The country combines internationally recognised cultural assets with a rich enogastronomic heritage, making gastronomy a strategic driver of territorial competitiveness and local value creation.

“Croatia has consolidated its position as growing Mediterranean destination. The moderate increase in tourist traffic in commercial accommodation establishments continued in 2025. A total of 20.7 million tourist arrivals and 94.8 million tourist nights were realised, which was a **2.2%** increase in tourist arrivals and a **1.2%** increase in tourist nights compared to 2024. Tourists realised an average of 4.6 nights per arrival” (<https://podaci.dzs.hr/2025/en/97094>). More than **90% of overnight stays are generated by international visitors**, highlighting its strong international orientation.

For the Italy-Croatia Programme area, these trends highlight a shared opportunity to strengthen sustainable gastronomic tourism by enhancing local food heritage, supporting SMEs and producers, improving professional skills and promoting more accessible, innovative and resilient visitor experiences in line with European policy priorities.

(Main statistical and policy sources: UN Tourism, [World Tourism Barometer](#), data. European Commission (2022-2025). *Transition Pathway for Tourism*. Eurostat (2024). *Tourism Statistics – Tourist Accommodation Statistics*. *EU Tourism Statistics*. <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/tourism>. ISTAT. <https://www.istat.it/tag/turismo/>. Croatian Bureau of Statistics: <https://podaci.dzs.hr/en/statistics/tourism/>, <https://podaci.dzs.hr/en/statistics/tourism/tourist-arrivals-and-nights/>. European Commission. *European Green Deal*. European Commission. *Farm to Fork Strategy*).

Table 2. Key EU tourism and sustainability evidence supporting the TESTEAT context



INDICATOR	LATEST EU EVIDENCE	SOURCE
Tourism overnight stays in EU accommodation (2023)	2.92 billion overnight stays (record level, exceeding pre-pandemic levels)	Eurostat (European Commission)
Tourism ecosystem	One of the EU's largest economic ecosystems, with around 20 million jobs directly and indirectly linked to tourism	European Commission – Transition Pathway for Tourism
SMEs in tourism	More than 99% of tourism businesses are Small and Medium-sized Enterprises	European Commission – Transition Pathway for Tourism
Food waste generated annually in the EU	58.2 million tonnes (around 130 kg per person, 2023)	Eurostat / European Commission

Additional statistical sources: Eurostat EU, ISTAT, Croatian Bureau of Statistics.

3.2 Context and Skills Needs in the Italy-Croatia Programme Area

The Italy-Croatia Programme area combines a rich enogastronomic heritage with a strong tourism vocation, making gastronomy a strategic driver of territorial development, cultural identity and local competitiveness. However, the HORECA sector is undergoing rapid transformation, requiring new skills, stronger cooperation and more innovative approaches to tourism development. The analysis carried out within TESTEAT, together with recent European policy priorities, identifies five common challenges for the cross-border area.

1. Skills shortages and workforce development

Both Italy and Croatia face persistent shortages of qualified hospitality professionals, particularly chefs, waiters and service staff. Seasonal employment, labour mobility, demographic change and limited attractiveness of hospitality careers reduce the availability of skilled workers, especially in coastal and rural destinations. These trends highlight the need to strengthen vocational education, lifelong learning and cooperation between education providers and tourism stakeholders.

2. New competences for changing consumer demand

Consumer expectations are evolving towards authentic, personalised and inclusive food experiences. Hospitality professionals increasingly require competences related to local food heritage, food storytelling, sustainable gastronomy, food safety and the management of changing dietary needs, including food allergies, intolerances and plant-based diets. These skills are becoming essential to improve service quality and destination competitiveness.

3. Sustainability as a territorial opportunity



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The transition towards sustainable and regenerative tourism creates new opportunities for local communities. Strengthening short supply chains, promoting seasonal products, reducing food waste and enhancing local producers contribute simultaneously to environmental sustainability, rural development and the preservation of cultural heritage, in line with the European Green Deal and the Transition Pathway for Tourism.

4. Digital transition of HORECA

Digitalisation is becoming a key enabling factor for tourism SMEs. Online booking systems, digital menus, customer relationship management, data analytics and user-friendly digital tools improve operational efficiency and visitor experience. Their effective adoption requires targeted digital upskilling for both current and future professionals.

5. A common framework for cross-border cooperation

The challenges identified are largely shared by Italy and Croatia and cannot be addressed in isolation. European initiatives such as the **Pact for Skills**, the **Transition Pathway for Tourism**, the **European Skills Agenda** and the **Council Recommendation on Vocational Education and Training (CEDEFOP)** encourage cross-border cooperation, knowledge transfer and capacity building to support a more resilient, sustainable and inclusive tourism ecosystem.

3.3 SWOT Analysis

The SWOT analysis conducted for the four regions participating in the TESTEAT project highlights the significant potential of traditional enogastronomy as a cornerstone of a sustainable tourism offering. The regions of Friuli-Venezia Giulia and Veneto in Italy, along with Dubrovnik-Neretva County and Istria in Croatia, have each presented unique insights into their local strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats, revealing both shared challenges and distinct opportunities for growth.

Key findings include:

- **Strengths:** Each region benefits from a wealth of high-quality, locally sourced ingredients and established traditions in enogastronomy, which contribute to their cultural and culinary identity. The global recognition of these regions as attractive tourist destinations enhances their appeal, while existing initiatives—such as protected designations of origin certifications—ensure the quality and authenticity of local products. Strong support systems for enogastronomy, particularly in the Region of Istria and Veneto Region, provide a foundation for further development. Collaboration between producers, restaurants, and stakeholders is evident in some regions, bolstered by efforts to incorporate sustainability into production and tourism practices.
- **Weaknesses:** Despite these strengths, all regions face significant challenges, such as workforce shortages due to a lack of young, skilled professionals and dependence on foreign labour. Limited production volumes and insufficient branding of local products prevent full utilisation of their enogastronomic potential. Over-tourism, particularly in Venice and Dubrovnik, strains resources and impacts the quality of service, while rural areas often struggle with underdeveloped infrastructure and coordination among stakeholders. Additionally, many restaurants in the regions lack innovation and fail to integrate local products effectively into their offerings, reducing the visibility of enogastronomy as a defining characteristic of the region.



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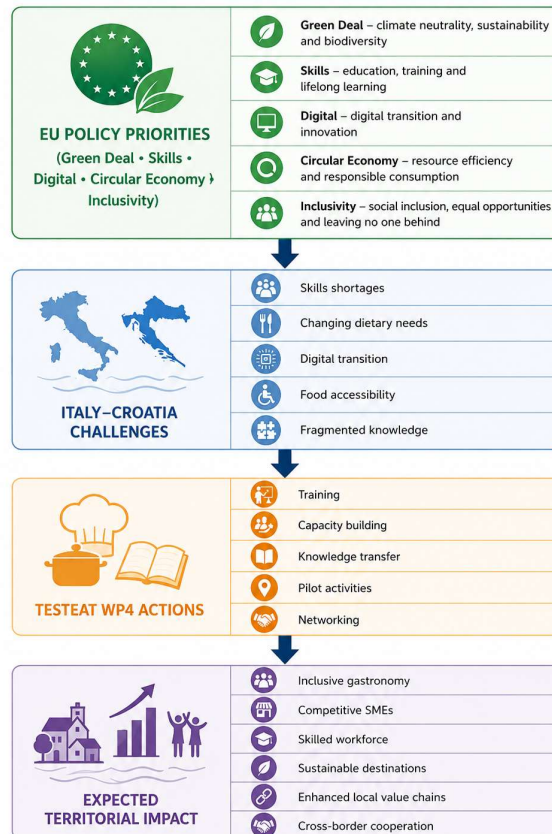
- **Opportunities:** Expanding the appeal of tourism beyond peak seasons presents an opportunity for sustainable growth, particularly by promoting enogastronomy as a year-round attraction. Digital tools offer untapped potential for enhancing marketing efforts and customer engagement, while collaborations between educational institutions and industry stakeholders could address skill shortages and improve service quality. Leveraging the growing global interest in sustainability and authentic travel experiences could help position these regions as leaders in sustainable enogastronomic tourism. Furthermore, creating synergies between rural and urban areas, such as integrating inland producers with coastal tourism, could enhance the diversity and appeal of the regions' offerings.

- **Threats:** Climate change poses a significant risk to traditional agriculture and the availability of certain ingredients, potentially threatening the authenticity of regional gastronomy. Geopolitical instability, global competition, and fluctuating economic conditions could also impact tourism demand. Over-reliance on seasonal tourism exacerbates the risks of market instability, while the growing trend of globalisation in food and drink markets challenges the regions to differentiate their offerings without losing authenticity. Rising living costs and urban depopulation further threaten the sustainability of these destinations as vibrant, culturally rich communities.

Within this policy framework, TESTEAT WP4 contributes to strengthening the resilience and competitiveness of the Italy-Croatia tourism ecosystem by supporting capacity building, knowledge transfer and cross-border cooperation. Through updated training pathways, practical learning resources and stakeholder engagement activities, WP4 addresses current labour market needs while promoting food accessibility, inclusive gastronomy, sustainable destination management and the valorisation of local food heritage. In doing so, it supports the broader European priorities for the green and digital transition, territorial cohesion and sustainable tourism development.

Table 3. From EU Priorities to Territorial Impact: The TESTEAT WP4 Logic Framework





3.4 Key European Trends Supporting the TESTEAT Approach

The European hospitality (HORECA) sector and gastronomic tourism are undergoing profound transformations driven by sustainability policies, digital innovation, changing consumer expectations and increasing demand for authentic, accessible and responsible tourism experiences. According to Eurostat, tourism has fully recovered after the COVID-19 crisis exceeding pre-pandemic levels and confirming tourism as one of Europe's most important economic sectors. At the same time, travellers increasingly seek experiences combining local identity, sustainability, quality food and cultural authenticity rather than traditional mass tourism.

Against this background, the European Union promotes the transition towards more resilient, inclusive and sustainable tourism ecosystems through initiatives such as the **European Green Deal**, the **Transition Pathway for Tourism**, the **Farm to Fork Strategy** and the **European Skills Agenda**. The TESTEAT project directly contributes to these priorities by strengthening the capacity of tourism destinations to enhance local gastronomic heritage while responding to contemporary market expectations.

1. Strengthening skills for tourism stakeholders and future professionals



The shortage of qualified personnel has become one of the main challenges facing the European hospitality sector. According to the European Commission, tourism and hospitality businesses increasingly require workers capable of combining technical competences with digital, sustainability and customer-oriented skills. Continuous professional development has therefore become essential not only for chefs and restaurant staff, but also for destination managers, tourist guides, hospitality managers, producers and vocational education providers. At the same time, the **Pact for Skills** and the **European Skills Agenda** encourage cooperation between education providers and industry to reduce skills gaps and prepare the future workforce for the green and digital transition. Developing practical competences among both students and professionals is therefore a strategic investment for the competitiveness of European tourism destinations.

2. Updating knowledge of gastronomic heritage to contemporary dietary needs

European gastronomy is increasingly expected to preserve its cultural authenticity while becoming more inclusive and responsive to evolving consumer preferences. Alongside growing awareness of food allergies, coeliac disease and food intolerances, the number of consumers adopting vegetarian, vegan and flexitarian diets continues to increase across Europe. These trends require hospitality professionals to reinterpret traditional recipes without compromising their cultural identity. Knowledge of local products, seasonal ingredients, traditional food heritage and contemporary dietary requirements is becoming an essential competence for tourism professionals seeking to deliver high-quality gastronomic experiences. This evolution is fully consistent with the objectives of the Farm to Fork Strategy, which promotes healthy, sustainable and transparent food systems.

3. Sustainable and regenerative tourism as an opportunity for local territories

Recent European tourism policies increasingly promote sustainable and regenerative tourism models capable of generating positive environmental, social and economic impacts for host communities. Rather than focusing exclusively on visitor growth, regenerative tourism seeks to strengthen local ecosystems, preserve cultural heritage and increase the resilience of rural economies. Gastronomic tourism represents one of the most effective instruments for achieving these objectives, as it directly connects visitors with local producers, traditional knowledge and territorial identity. For small-scale food producers, wineries, olive oil mills, fisheries and family businesses, tourism offers important opportunities to diversify income, increase product visibility and strengthen local value chains while preserving biodiversity and traditional production methods.

4. Integrating circular economy principles into gastronomy and hospitality

The transition towards circular economy models represents another major priority of European policy. Food waste reduction, sustainable sourcing, seasonal products, resource efficiency and short supply chains are becoming increasingly important competitiveness factors within the HORECA sector. According to Eurostat, in 2023 the EU generated around 58.2 million tonnes of food waste, corresponding to approximately 130 kg per person. “Household waste accounted for more than half of all food waste (53%), the equivalent of 69 kg per inhabitant. The remaining 47% was waste created upwards in the food supply chain: 19% by the manufacture of food products and beverages, 11% by restaurants and food services, 10% in the primary production, and 8% in retail and other distribution of food”. (https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/products-eurostat-news/w/ddn-20251016-2?utm_source=chatgpt.com).

Hospitality businesses therefore play a crucial role in adopting circular practices, including menu planning, ingredient valorisation, reduction of food losses, sustainable procurement and collaboration



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with local suppliers. These approaches not only reduce environmental impacts but also reinforce the authenticity and attractiveness of gastronomic destinations.

5. Digitalisation and user-friendly technologies supporting accessible tourism

Digital transformation is rapidly reshaping tourism and hospitality throughout Europe. The **Digital Decade Policy Programme 2030** identifies digital skills and technology adoption among the main priorities for European businesses, particularly SMEs. Within the HORECA sector, digital solutions such as online booking systems, QR-code menus, multilingual information platforms, digital storytelling, customer feedback applications and food traceability tools improve both operational efficiency and visitor experience. User-friendly digital technologies also facilitate communication regarding ingredients, allergens, dietary preferences and local food products, contributing to more accessible and inclusive gastronomic tourism. For cross-border destinations such as the Italy-Croatia area, digital innovation further supports multilingual communication, knowledge sharing and coordinated promotion of local gastronomic heritage.

Overall, these European trends clearly demonstrate that the future competitiveness of gastronomic tourism depends on the ability to integrate professional skills, cultural heritage, sustainability, circular economy principles and digital innovation into a coherent destination strategy. By addressing each of these dimensions, TESTEAT contributes to the broader European objectives of enhancing resilient tourism ecosystems, supporting local communities and promoting high-quality, accessible and sustainable gastronomic experiences.



3.5 Strategic Objectives of TESTEAT

Building on the territorial analysis and the needs assessment carried out during the preparatory phase, TESTEAT was designed around four complementary strategic objectives that guided the implementation of all Work Packages and now provide the foundation for the present Strategy and Action Plan.

The **first objective** was to **map and analyse the shared enogastronomic heritage of the Italy-Croatia Programme area**, creating a common knowledge base capable of supporting an integrated and sustainable tourism offer. Through research activities, territorial mapping and stakeholder engagement, the project identified the cultural, gastronomic and tourism assets that represent the distinctive identity of the Programme area and their potential for cross-border valorisation.

The **second objective** focused on **strengthening the skills of both the current and future tourism workforce**. TESTEAT promoted innovative learning approaches targeting students, teachers, chefs, HORECA professionals, destination managers and tourism stakeholders, recognising that capacity building is a prerequisite for improving service quality, responding to changing market expectations and supporting the long-term competitiveness of the tourism sector.

The **third objective** aimed to **enhance the enogastronomic heritage by adapting it to contemporary tourism demand**. Particular attention was devoted to sustainability, circular economy principles, food accessibility, digital innovation and changing dietary needs, demonstrating that traditional gastronomy can evolve while preserving its authenticity and territorial identity.

Finally, the **fourth objective** was to **support long-term policy development and sustainable territorial governance** through the preparation of common strategies, operational guidelines and Action Plans. These tools are intended to facilitate the transferability, scalability and institutional uptake of TESTEAT results, enabling public authorities, educational institutions, tourism organisations and local stakeholders to continue implementing the project's vision beyond its formal conclusion.

These four strategic pillars are directly reflected in the Action Plans developed by the project partners and validated through stakeholder consultation. Together, they provide a coherent implementation framework that combines knowledge generation, capacity building, sustainable innovation and long-term governance, ensuring that the TESTEAT legacy can continue to support resilient, inclusive and competitive tourism development throughout the Italy-Croatia Programme area.



3.6 Target Groups

The TESTEAT project addresses a broad range of stakeholders who contribute, in different ways, to the preservation, innovation and promotion of the Adriatic cross-border enogastronomy heritage. Rather than focusing on a single beneficiary group, TESTEAT adopts an ecosystem approach, recognising that sustainable tourism development depends on the active cooperation of public institutions, tourism operators, education providers, local producers and communities. The project's activities—including stakeholder consultations, vocational training, local HUBs, pilot events—have therefore been designed to engage different target groups according to their specific roles and responsibilities.

Public authorities and policy makers

Municipalities, regional authorities, destination management organisations and public agencies are key actors for integrating TESTEAT principles into local development policies. Through the HUB meetings, they contribute to strengthening governance, supporting sustainable tourism policies and facilitating long-term cooperation across the Italy-Croatia programme area.

Tourism and HORECA professionals

Restaurant owners, chefs, waiters, catering companies, hospitality managers, tourist guides represent one of the project's primary target groups. They participate in specialised training activities focused on sustainability, digitalisation, circular economy, food innovation, customer experience and the adaptation of traditional gastronomy to evolving consumer preferences. These stakeholders are also directly involved in testing innovative tourism products during the pilot actions.

People with Specific Dietary Needs

People with food allergies, intolerances and emerging dietary preferences constitute an important indirect target group of the TESTEAT project. Through the development of inclusive tourism products, the adaptation of traditional recipes and the training of tourism and HORECA professionals, TESTEAT promotes a more accessible and customer-oriented enogastronomic offer capable of responding to diverse dietary requirements, including gluten-free, vegetarian, vegan and other health-, ethical- or culture-related food choices. By addressing these evolving consumer needs, the project contributes to making the cross-border tourism offer more inclusive, attractive and aligned with contemporary market demand.

Local producers and agri-food businesses

Farmers, food producers, wineries, artisanal processors and local supply chain actors play a central role in reinforcing the authenticity and sustainability of the tourism offer. TESTEAT promotes stronger collaboration between producers and tourism operators, encouraging the use of local products, short supply chains and territorial branding as essential components of integrated tourism experiences.

Education and vocational training providers



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Vocational education and training (VET) centres, hospitality schools, universities, teachers and trainers are directly involved in the development and delivery of innovative educational programmes. Through dedicated guidelines, training materials and workshops, they contribute to equipping future tourism professionals with the green, digital and entrepreneurial competences required by the evolving tourism market.

Students and future tourism professionals

Students enrolled in hospitality, tourism and vocational education programmes represent an important long-term target group. Practical workshops, experiential learning activities and pilot initiatives allow them to acquire professional competences while becoming familiar with sustainable tourism, local heritage preservation and innovative approaches to enogastronomy.

Civil society, local communities and cultural organisations

Local communities, cultural associations, NGOs and citizens contribute to safeguarding intangible heritage and reinforcing local identity. Their involvement through stakeholder consultations, HUB activities and public pilot events ensures that tourism development remains socially inclusive, culturally authentic and rooted in local traditions.

Tourists and visitors

Tourists are the ultimate beneficiaries of the innovative tourism model developed by TESTEAT. The project aims to offer more authentic, accessible and sustainable enogastronomic experiences that respond to emerging consumer expectations, including healthier food choices, local sourcing, inclusiveness and year-round tourism opportunities.

Table 4. TESTEAT Target Groups and Expected Territorial Benefits



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PRIMARY TARGET GROUPS		ROLE IN THE TESTEAT	
	Public authorities and policy makers		Governance and policy implementation
	Tourism and HORECA professionals		Delivery of sustainable and inclusive tourism services
	Local producers and agri-food businesses		Valorisation of local products and short supply chains
	Education and VET providers		Development of skills and training programmes
	Students and future professionals		Future workforce and innovation capacity
FINAL BENEFICIARIES		ROLE / BENEFITS	
	Visitors with Specific Dietary Needs		Primary beneficiaries of the project's inclusive gastronomy approach, benefiting from adapted recipes, accessible food services and improved hospitality responding to diverse dietary requirements.
	Tourists and visitors		End users of the integrated sustainable tourism offer
	Local communities		Preservation of local identity and community engagement
	SMEs and destination ecosystems		Regional valorization



4. From Vision to Action: The TESTEAT Journey

Strategic Background and Project Evolution

4.1 Project Vision and Objectives

TESTEAT (*Enhance enogaSTronomy hEritage to eSTablish and Expand sustainAble Tourism*) was developed in response to the profound changes affecting the tourism ecosystem across Europe. The project recognises that traditional tourism models are increasingly challenged by seasonality, labour shortages, sustainability pressures and changing visitor expectations. At the same time, the Italy-Croatia cooperation area possesses an exceptional enogastronomic heritage that remains only partially integrated into contemporary tourism development. Against this background, TESTEAT was conceived to transform local food heritage into a strategic resource for sustainable tourism, regional competitiveness and territorial cohesion.

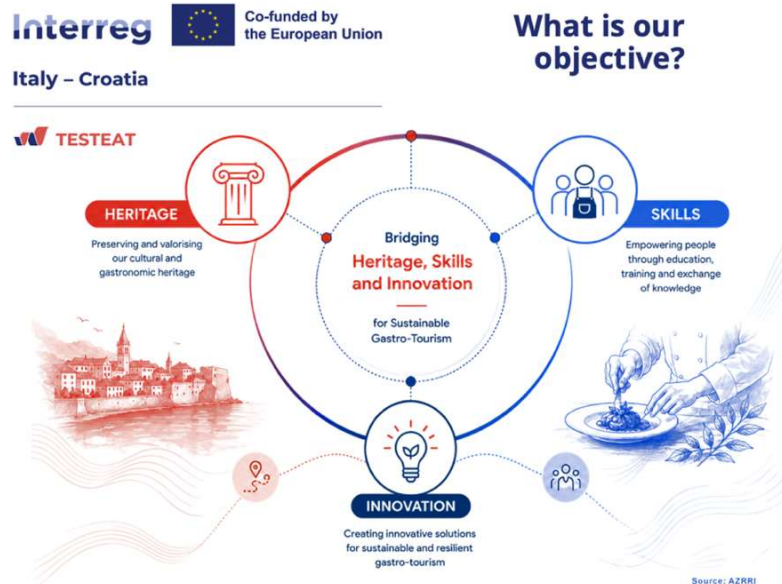
The project is built upon four complementary strategic objectives:

- **To map and analyse the shared enogastronomic heritage** of the Italy-Croatia programme area and establish a common knowledge base supporting integrated tourism development.
- **To strengthen the skills of the current and future tourism workforce**, promoting innovative educational pathways for students, teachers and tourism professionals.
- **To enhance traditional gastronomy by adapting it to contemporary tourism demand**, integrating sustainability, accessibility, circular economy principles and changing dietary needs.
- **To support long-term policy development** through shared strategies, operational guidelines and transferable Action Plans capable of extending project results beyond the programme lifetime.

Rather than preserving heritage as a static cultural asset, TESTEAT promotes a dynamic approach in which gastronomy becomes a catalyst for innovation, local development and cross-border cooperation.



Figure 3. The TESTEAT Objectives



4.2 Preparatory Phase: Building a Common Knowledge Base

Before developing pilot actions and training activities, the partnership carried out an extensive preparatory phase aimed at understanding the current situation of the Italy–Croatia cooperation area. This phase provided the evidence base upon which all subsequent project activities were designed.

The preliminary work included:

- mapping the intangible enogastronomic heritage of participating territories;
- analysing tourism trends and visitor expectations;
- investigating changing consumer behaviour and dietary preferences;
- assessing the needs of tourism SMEs and HORECA operators;
- identifying strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats through joint SWOT analyses;
- establishing common research methodologies shared by all project partners.

At the same time, TESTEAT created two cross-border **Innovation HUBs**, bringing together representatives from tourism, gastronomy, education, public authorities, local producers and cultural organisations. The HUBs ensured continuous stakeholder engagement throughout the project, allowing activities and outputs to respond to concrete territorial needs rather than theoretical assumptions. This participatory approach laid the foundations for long-term knowledge transfer and collaborative governance.



4.3 WP1 - “Enogastronomy heritage in function of specific behavior patterns in tourism”. Building Knowledge and Innovation

WP1 established the scientific and operational foundations of the project by transforming research findings into practical tools supporting sustainable tourism development.

The activities focused on three complementary areas.

First, partners jointly analysed the intangible enogastronomic heritage of the programme area, mapping traditional products, recipes, production systems and cultural practices while examining current tourism demand and visitor behaviour.

Second, the project developed an innovative digital framework connecting traditional gastronomy with emerging market expectations. Particular attention was given to food accessibility, changing dietary needs and the growing demand for authentic and sustainable gastronomic experiences.

A major achievement of WP1 was the development of the **TESTEAT Online Tool (testeat.eu)**, an innovative digital platform designed to bridge visitors' dietary preferences with local gastronomic heritage. The platform includes self-assessment functionalities for HORECA operators and personalised recommendations for visitors, facilitating the creation of inclusive gastronomic experiences while supporting SMEs in adapting their services to contemporary tourism demand.

A useful **Recipe Book** was developed as a practical tool to support the modernization of the cross-border enogastronomic offer while preserving the authenticity of local culinary heritage. Its main objective is to provide chefs, tourism operators, vocational schools, hospitality professionals and destination managers with a collection of traditional recipes reinterpreted to meet contemporary dietary requirements and sustainable tourism trends. The Recipe Book includes inventive versions of iconic dishes from the TESTEAT area, offering alternatives suitable for vegan, vegetarian, gluten-free, lactose-free and diabetic-friendly diets, thereby promoting accessibility, inclusiveness and healthier food choices. The development process followed the methodology defined in the **Blueprint of Innovative Enogastronomy Offer Adaptive to Modern Tourism Demand**, based on a participatory and evidence-based approach involving chefs, nutritionists, tourism experts and cultural specialists. The methodology combined the identification of representative regional recipes, the analysis of shared culinary elements, and the application of a **transition matrix model**, enabling the systematic adaptation of traditional recipes while preserving their cultural identity, sensory qualities and feasibility for tourism applications.

Overall, WP1 transformed research evidence into practical knowledge, providing the methodological basis for education activities and pilot implementation.





4.4 WP2 - “Upskilling and reskilling the tourism workforce”. Investing in Skills and Capacity Building

Building on the knowledge generated during WP1, WP2 focused on strengthening human capital through education, training and cross-border learning.

Training and education activities targets are:

- Restaurant owners or managers
- Chefs and waitstaff
- Food producers
- Teachers and facilitators



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- Students from VET schools, post-secondary and tertiary levels of education (MSc and Masters' students)
- Touristic guide
- Events and festival organizers
- Other actors involved in the tourism workforce

The HORECA and tourism sector's current skill needs can be broadly categorized into the following essential themes: **sustainability, circular economy, digitalization and gastronomy trends, evolving consumer demands** (personalization in providing customized experiences and menus and in adapting recipes to new dietary needs). Mastering these areas will be fundamental for professionals seeking to adapt to the evolving landscape of the catering and enogastronomic industry. Mastering these competencies will be fundamental for professionals seeking to thrive in the changing landscape of the enogastronomic and catering industries.

Teachers from vocational education institutions were first trained on topics including circular economy, food waste reduction, digitalisation, intangible cultural heritage and changing consumer behaviour. These competences were subsequently transferred to hospitality students through updated educational programmes.

In parallel, facilitators received specialised training before delivering workshops to tourism professionals, chefs, waiters, destination managers and other HORECA stakeholders.

Cross-border Student Challenges, workshops and international exchange camps organised in Pula, Venice and Trieste enabled participants to develop technical competences alongside teamwork, intercultural communication and problem-solving skills. Altogether, these activities demonstrated that cooperation between education providers and tourism stakeholders represents an effective model for strengthening professional competences and preparing future generations for a more sustainable tourism sector.

The **teaching method** developed within the TESTEAT project is **based on a participatory, experiential, and human-centered approach**, inspired by principles of design thinking and the creative handling of "wicked problems." Training is delivered through local workshops, aiming to mobilize stakeholders from the gastronomic and tourism sectors by fostering collaboration, creativity, and shared design processes. The methodology is composed of:

- Design Thinking: user-centered, iterative, and creative approach
- Peer-to-peer learning: experience sharing among participants
- Active learning: hands-on workshops, group discussions, case-based learning
- Participatory approach: every participant co-creates the learning process

In addition, TASTEAT training format, especially when addressed to students who have not yet completed their educational pathways and, therefore, have not yet developed all the core competencies of the relevant professional profiles broke down the topics and presented them through **short, targeted workshops with varying levels of difficulty and depth** (basic, intermediate, advanced), which can be integrated into and complement a regular lesson managed by the school.

Each thematic workshop was based on one or more **"training programmes"** that enabled learners to acquire and strengthen one or more specific competencies, which can later be applied to their professional practice. Each training programme, based on a specific macro-topic, included several training modules at different level.

Finally, **cross-border exchange programmes** represented a key component of the TESTEAT capacity-building strategy, promoting cooperation, intercultural learning and professional skills



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development among students from Italy and Croatia. Through intensive training weeks, study visits, practical workshops, culinary challenges and teamwork activities, participants strengthened their knowledge of sustainable gastronomy, circular economy, local food heritage and digital tools. The exchange programmes also fostered networking between educational institutions and future tourism professionals, reinforcing cross-border collaboration and contributing to the development of a more innovative, inclusive and sustainable tourism sector in the Italy-Croatia Programme area.

Figure 4. Learning for Tomorrow



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Figure 5. Innovate, Sustain, Grow



Figure 6. Inspire, Learn, Connect



4.5 WP3 - “Creation of cross-border integrated tourism offer”. Testing Innovative Solutions in Real Contexts

WP3 translated research and training outcomes into practical applications through pilot actions implemented across the programme area.

Five territorial pilot events tested the TESTEAT approach in different local contexts, demonstrating that enogastronomy can effectively contribute to tourism diversification, seasonality reduction and local economic development. Organised **outside the main tourist season**, these initiatives combined local products, education, sustainability, cultural heritage and visitor engagement into integrated tourism experiences.

The pilots also strengthened cooperation with local producers, restaurants, educational institutions and cultural organisations, validating the adaptability of the TESTEAT methodology across diverse destinations. Dedicated investments in educational infrastructure, including **didactic kitchens** equipped for inclusive gastronomy and practical training, further reinforced the long-term capacity of vocational education providers.

Rather than representing isolated events, the pilots served as **real-life laboratories** through which the partnership refined operational methodologies and developed transferable Integrated Tourism Actions suitable for replication across other European regions.

Figure 7. The TESTEAT Pilot Actions Framework



4.6 Principles and Organisational Framework of the TESTEAT Pilot Events

Within the TESTEAT project, pilot events constitute the operational instrument through which the integrated tourism model is implemented, tested and validated in real territorial contexts. They are conceived not as isolated promotional initiatives, but as demonstrative actions designed to assess the effectiveness of innovative approaches to sustainable enogastronomic tourism, while generating evidence and good practices that can be replicated across the Italy–Croatia Programme area. As such, each pilot represents both a local implementation activity and a contribution to the development of a common cross-border methodology for integrated tourism products.

The organisational framework of the pilot events is based on a **common methodological approach** that combines shared strategic objectives with the flexibility required to respond to the specific characteristics of each participating territory. While all partners operate within a common set of principles and quality standards, the design of each pilot is adapted to local cultural heritage, gastronomic identity, tourism dynamics, stakeholder networks and institutional capacities. This approach ensures methodological consistency at project level while preserving the authenticity and distinctiveness of individual destinations.

A fundamental principle of the TESTEAT methodology is the adoption of a **participatory and multi-stakeholder governance model**. Pilot events are developed through the active involvement of public authorities, tourism organisations, educational institutions, local producers, hospitality operators, cultural organisations and civil society. The TESTEAT HUBs provide the organisational platform for stakeholder engagement, facilitating dialogue, joint planning and collaborative decision-making throughout the preparation and implementation phases. This collaborative governance model strengthens local ownership, enhances institutional cooperation and contributes to the long-term sustainability of project results beyond the lifetime of the initiative.

The pilot events are further characterised by the systematic integration of the **horizontal principles** underpinning the Programme, particularly environmental sustainability, social inclusion and territorial cohesion. Sustainability considerations are embedded throughout the event lifecycle, including procurement procedures, logistics, mobility, catering services, waste prevention, reduction of single-use materials and the promotion of circular economy practices. At the same time, accessibility and inclusiveness are addressed through the provision of gastronomic experiences capable of responding to the diverse dietary preferences and nutritional requirements of participants, the removal of physical and communication barriers and the adoption of multilingual communication where appropriate.

From a programme perspective, the pilot events are designed as **integrated territorial experiences** in which gastronomy serves as the connecting element between cultural heritage, tourism, education and local economic development. Rather than focusing exclusively on food consumption, the events combine educational activities, culinary demonstrations, experiential workshops, cultural performances, storytelling initiatives and opportunities for interaction between visitors and local communities. This integrated programming contributes to enhancing visitor engagement while reinforcing awareness of local identity, traditional knowledge and sustainable food systems.

An additional organisational principle concerns the **strengthening of local value chains** through the systematic involvement of regional producers, farmers, artisans and hospitality operators. The use of locally sourced ingredients and the promotion of traditional products contribute simultaneously to the preservation of intangible cultural heritage, the diversification of tourism experiences and the



generation of socio-economic benefits for local communities. Whenever possible, partnerships with local operators are established through transparent and participatory procedures, ensuring broad territorial representation and reinforcing cooperation among public and private stakeholders.

Finally, the implementation of the pilot actions confirms the **replicability and transferability** of the TESTEAT model. Although individual events differ in scale, thematic focus and organisational solutions according to local contexts, they all apply a shared methodological framework centred on stakeholder participation, sustainability, innovation and territorial identity. The pilot events therefore generate practical evidence that supports the refinement of the integrated tourism model and provides a transferable reference framework for future tourism initiatives within the Programme area and beyond. In this perspective, the pilots should be regarded not simply as project events, but as demonstrators of a governance model capable of fostering resilient, inclusive and sustainable tourism development through the valorisation of local enogastronomic heritage.

4.7 TESTEAT Pilot Events: From Methodology to Practice

Pilot actions represented one of the experimental phases of the project, allowing partners to validate the TESTEAT methodology in different territorial contexts before translating the lessons learned into the common Strategy and Action Plan.

One of the most significant achievements of the TESTEAT project was the implementation of pilot events across the Italy-Croatia Programme area. Although each initiative was developed according to the characteristics of its local context, all pilots shared a common methodological approach aimed at testing the TESTEAT integrated tourism model based on sustainability, local identity, stakeholder participation, education and innovation. Together, the pilots demonstrated how enogastronomic heritage can become a strategic driver for sustainable tourism development while strengthening cooperation among institutions, local communities and tourism operators.



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Regional Eno-Gastronomy Day - Pazin (Croatia) - 19 September 2025

Hosted at the **Educational Gastronomy Centre of Istria** in Pazin, the *Regional Eno-Gastronomy Day* focused on the integration of local products, vocational education and sustainable gastronomy. The initiative showcased the rich culinary heritage of Istria while promoting innovative approaches to food preparation and hospitality. The programme included presentations of local products, cooking demonstrations, educational activities, networking sessions among tourism stakeholders and opportunities for exchange between students, teachers, producers and hospitality professionals. The event highlighted the strategic role of vocational education in preserving gastronomic heritage while preparing future professionals capable of responding to contemporary tourism trends.

SAOR Festival - Venice (Italy) - 10-12 October 2025

The **SAOR Festival** represented the flagship pilot action of the TESTEAT project and the most comprehensive application of the integrated tourism model. Rather than concentrating activities in a single venue, the festival activated the entire Venetian territory, involving the Historic Centre, the Lagoon Islands and the Mainland through a distributed programme of cultural and gastronomic initiatives. This event promoted intergenerational exchange, regenerative cuisine, and urban regeneration and was based on a **bottom-up model** involving public calls for participation and close collaboration with local actors.

Over **three days**, the festival offered **109 events** organised by **85 different organisations**, generating more than **420 hours of activities** across **over 20 locations**. The programme combined a wide variety of formats, including **food tastings, wine experiences, guided tours, cooking workshops, hands-on laboratories, talks and public presentations, book presentations, round tables, cultural performances, temporary exhibitions, educational activities, meetings with producers, artisan demonstrations** and community events dedicated to Venetian food heritage.

The festival involved museums, universities, schools, public institutions, associations, cooperatives, local businesses and producers, creating a broad territorial alliance around the promotion of enogastronomic heritage. City of Venice **estimated 10,900 visitors** across the festival, based on organisers' evaluations; **overall satisfaction averaged 4.49/5 and audience participation/interest 4.69/5**. Communication activities generated significant visibility, reaching more than 100,000 online users, supported by institutional communication through the Municipality of Venice, Venezia Unica, MUVE and other regional media channels. Beyond its impressive numbers, SAOR demonstrated how gastronomy can become an effective catalyst for connecting culture, landscape, local identity and sustainable tourism development through a collaborative governance approach.

Flavours and Stories of Pelješac and Ston - Ston (Croatia) - 16-18 October 2025

The three-day festival *Flavours and Stories of Pelješac and Ston* celebrated the gastronomic identity of the Pelješac Peninsula by highlighting local products such as oysters, olive oil, wine and the traditional Ston makaruli. Designed as an open community event, the programme included **food tastings, wine tastings, children's workshops, educational panels, culinary competitions, traditional cooking demonstrations, public presentations, entertainment activities** and meetings with local producers and experts. Among the highlights were the **Ston Feast**, the competition for the preparation of the best traditional makaruli and the **Ston Sweet Feast** dedicated to local confectionery traditions. The festival successfully combined cultural storytelling with gastronomic experiences,



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strengthening the visibility of local producers and reinforcing the role of traditional food heritage in sustainable destination development.

Days of Taste: From Tradition to Contemporary Trends - Dubrovnik (Croatia) 17-19 October 2025

The Dubrovnik pilot focused on the relationship between traditional gastronomy, nutrition, education and innovation. The event opened with the round table "**Food as Experience and Therapy**", bringing together experts in gastronomy, nutrition and medicine to discuss the cultural and health dimensions of food. The programme also included an exclusive gastronomic dinner prepared by a renowned Croatian chef, **children's educational workshops** dedicated to the adaptation of traditional desserts to modern nutritional principles, practical cooking activities and experiential learning sessions involving students from the Dubrovnik School of Tourism and Hospitality. The closing activities took place in the rural hinterland of Dubrovnik, where students prepared dinners under the supervision of professional chefs at a local agritourism facility. By combining scientific dissemination, culinary education and practical training, the event demonstrated how traditional gastronomy can evolve to meet contemporary dietary trends while preserving its cultural authenticity.

Roots of Taste: Land, Flavours and Community - Cividale del Friuli (Italy) 17 January 2026

Organised by Civiform, *Roots of Taste: Land, Flavours and Community* highlighted the importance of collaboration among producers, artisans, hospitality businesses, cultural organisations and educational institutions. The initiative promoted local food heritage through **tasting experiences, meetings with producers, storytelling sessions, presentations of traditional products, cultural activities, networking opportunities** and initiatives aimed at strengthening the connection between gastronomy, craftsmanship and local identity. The event demonstrated how integrated cooperation among territorial stakeholders can generate authentic visitor experiences while reinforcing local value chains and supporting sustainable tourism development rooted in community participation.

Overall Contribution



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Although differing in scale and format, the five pilot events collectively demonstrated the effectiveness of the TESTEAT methodology in translating local enogastronomic heritage into innovative tourism experiences. By integrating education, cultural interpretation, stakeholder cooperation, local production and sustainability, the pilots provided practical evidence for the development of the TESTEAT Strategy and Action Plan, confirming the potential for replicating this integrated tourism model throughout the Italy-Croatia Programme area and in other European territories.

Figure 8. TESTEAT Pilot Events organized by Partners

TESTEAT
Enogastronomy for a Sustainable
Tourism in Italy-Croatia

TESTEAT PILOT EVENTS
Testing Innovative and Inclusive
Enogastronomy Experiences

TESTING INNOVATIONS | PROMOTING SUSTAINABILITY | BUILDING SKILLS | STRENGTHENING COOPERATION | CELEBRATING OUR HERITAGE

SAOR
Venice, Italy
10 – 12th October 2025
In Venice, SAOR Festival showed how eno-gastronomy can become a tool for activating the entire territory and connecting food, culture and landscape.
Workshops | Tastings | Guided Tours | Talks | Networking

Regional Eno-Gastronomy Day
Pazin, Croatia
19th September 2025
In Pazin, we demonstrated how local products, education, sustainability and adapted gastronomic offers can be successfully connected in a unique experience.

Flavors and stories of Pelješac and Ston
Ston, Croatia
16 – 18th October 2025
In Ston, the focus was on local producers, oysters, salt and olive oil as part of the destination identity.

Days of flavors: From tradition to contemporary trends
Dubrovnik, Croatia
17 – 19th October 2025
In Dubrovnik, activities highlighted the importance of education and knowledge transfer through the involvement of hospitality school students.

Roots of Taste: Land, Flavors and Community
Cividale del Friuli, Italy
17th January 2026
In Cividale del Friuli, Civiform showed how strong collaboration among producers, artisans, restaurateurs and cultural stakeholders can create an authentic experience that promotes the territory and heritage.

Five events. Five territories. One common goal:
enhancing skills, sustainability and inclusive enogastronomy
tourism across the Italy-Croatia area.



4.8 Project Results and Territorial Impact

The implementation of pilot activities generated measurable results while demonstrating the practical feasibility of the TESTEAT model.

Across the programme area, the project delivered:

- **5 cross-border pilot actions** implemented in different territorial contexts;
- **more than 11,000 visitors and participants** involved in events and public initiatives;
- **over 370 participants** engaged in workshops, training sessions and educational activities;
- **more than 60 producers, restaurateurs and local stakeholders** actively participating in pilot implementation.

Beyond these quantitative achievements, the project generated broader territorial impacts by:

- strengthening cooperation between tourism, education and agri-food sectors;
- increasing the visibility of local producers and regional value chains;
- promoting sustainable tourism outside peak seasons;
- improving professional competences related to sustainability, digitalisation and food accessibility;
- fostering stronger collaboration between Italian and Croatian stakeholders.

These results demonstrate that gastronomic heritage can effectively function as a driver of innovation, territorial resilience and sustainable destination management.

Figure 9. From Pilot Actions to the TESTEAT Strategic Framework

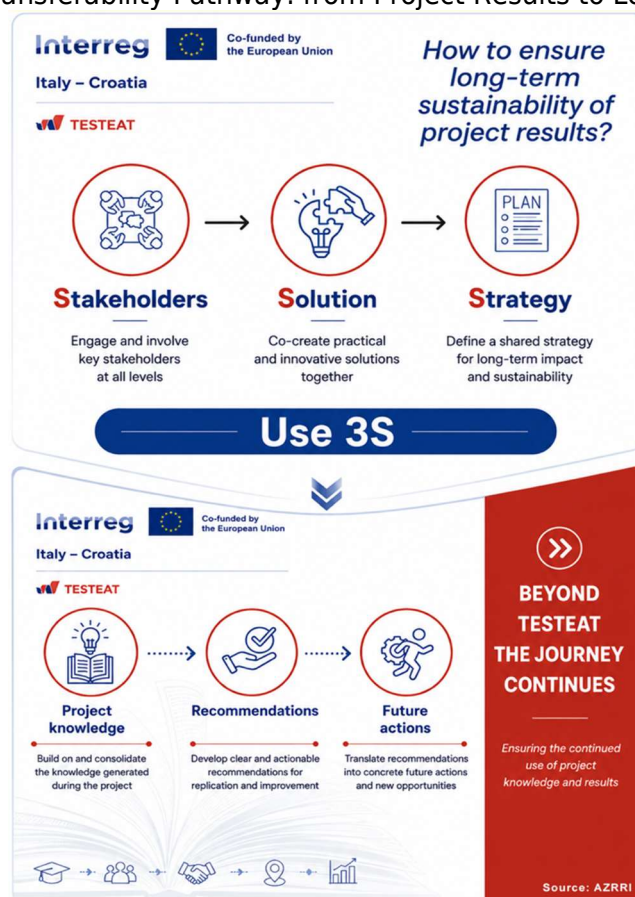


4.9 WP4 - “Developing guidelines and action plans to enhance Italian and Croatian enogastronomy heritage”. From Project Results to Long-Term Strategy

WP4 represents the strategic culmination of the TESTEAT project. While previous Work Packages generated knowledge, tested methodologies and validated innovative practices, WP4 capitalises on these achievements by translating them into a shared long-term vision for the Italy-Croatia cooperation area.

The activities carried out so far have focused on analysing European policy frameworks, reviewing best practices, assessing territorial needs and collecting evidence from all previous project phases. Stakeholder contributions gathered through the TESTEAT HUBs have played a central role in identifying priorities and ensuring that the Strategy reflects the needs of local communities, tourism operators, educational institutions and public authorities.

Figure 10. The TESTEAT Transferability Pathway: from Project Results to Long-term Sustainability



5. The TESTEAT Strategic Framework

5.1 Ten Guiding Principles for the Long-term Implementation of the Action Plans

The TESTEAT Strategy represents the main strategic legacy of the project and provides a common framework to guide the long-term development of sustainable enogastronomic tourism across the Italy-Croatia cooperation area. Rather than defining a new policy, the Strategy consolidates the knowledge, experience and evidence generated throughout the project into a coherent set of shared principles that can support future territorial initiatives, governance processes and cross-border cooperation.

The Strategy was developed through a collaborative process involving all project partners and was progressively refined by combining the results of territorial analyses, pilot activities, capacity-building actions and stakeholder engagement. This participatory approach made it possible to identify the fundamental values that emerged consistently across the different regional contexts and to translate them into a common strategic vision for the programme area.

The resulting framework is articulated into **ten strategic principles**, which reflect the key dimensions of sustainable tourism development promoted by TESTEAT: sustainability; authenticity and local identity; food inclusion and accessibility; digital innovation; stakeholder collaboration; cross-border cooperation; knowledge transfer and capacity building; cultural events; hospitality; and continuous improvement. Together, these principles define a holistic approach that combines environmental responsibility, cultural heritage, professional development, social inclusion and innovation while preserving the distinctive identity of local territories.

The Strategy is not intended to be a static document. Instead, it serves as a practical reference framework for the preparation and implementation of the partners' Action Plans, ensuring that future initiatives remain coherent with the project's vision and with the priorities of the Interreg Italy-Croatia Programme. In this perspective, the ten strategic principles provide a common basis for decision-making, stakeholder engagement and the design of sustainable actions capable of generating long-term benefits for local communities, tourism stakeholders and visitors.

By translating the shared values developed during the project into operational guidance, the TESTEAT Strategy contributes to ensuring the continuity, transferability and scalability of project results beyond the project lifetime, reinforcing the role of enogastronomic heritage as a driver of sustainable territorial development and cross-border cooperation.



5.2 TESTEAT Strategic Principles

1. Sustainability

Promoting responsible tourism, local supply chains and seasonal, high-quality ingredients. Adopting circular economy approaches and practices that preserve local resources, landscape, biodiversity, cultural heritage and identity for future generations, while ensuring environmental, social and economic balance. Raising awareness on sustainability.

2. Authenticity, Local Identity and Innovation Rooted in Tradition

Safeguarding and enhancing enogastronomic heritage as a living expression of local culture, rooted in traditions, knowledge and territories.

Encouraging innovative, creative and forward-looking approaches that reinterpret heritage without compromising its authenticity. Cultivating a strong sense of terroir and storytelling.

3. Food Inclusion, Accessibility and Respect for Diversity and Heterogeneity

Ensuring that tourism and gastronomy are accessible to diverse audiences, including those with different dietary needs (for health, culture, ethics, religious reasons...) and creating welcoming, stress-free experiences for all.

Encouraging the adoption of a “universal design” approach that makes inclusive options standard for everyone.

Valuing differences, fostering dialogue and embracing cultural “contamination” as a source of enrichment and innovation.

4. Digital Skills and Innovation

Strengthening digital skills and readiness through targeted training and capacity-building actions. Promoting the adoption of user-friendly tools and smart technologies among stakeholders. Developing and implementing interactive, user-oriented tools and diverse digital content.

5. Collaboration and Co-Creation, Stakeholder and Community Engagement

Fostering strong partnerships among public institutions, education providers, businesses, and communities to jointly design sustainable solutions.

Encouraging active participation, shared responsibility and a strong sense of belonging within hubs and local communities.

Giving value and visibility to the work, contributions and impact of each participant.



6. Cross-Border Cooperation

Promoting exchange, shared learning and collaboration across regions to generate cultural exchange, overcome policy-related barriers arising from diversity, foster mutual understanding and tolerance, support policy integration and create added value and transferable models.

7. Knowledge Transfer and Capacity Building

Investing in education, skills development (skilling/upskilling/reskilling), and lifelong learning—particularly for young people and professionals—to sustain and evolve food cultural heritage.

Developing flexible and market-oriented training programmes tailored to different target groups, skills and abilities.

Integrating practical, experiential, and problem-solving learning methodologies.

Institutionalising specific education and training courses within university, vocational and professional systems.

8. Pilot Events and Culture

Developing bottom-up events, festivals and experiences driven by stakeholder engagement, under the strategic direction and coordination of municipalities and public institutions.

Strengthening the involvement of cultural institutions (museums, theatres), recognized no profit organizations and the education system to further develop the cultural dimension of food and the link between “flavours” and “knowledge”.

Creating a playful and festive atmosphere positive for tourists, residents and stakeholders, contributing to inclusiveness, accessibility and quality of life.

9. Tourism, Generosity and Hospitality

Strengthening the connection between people, products and places. Providing unique thematic and integrated visitor experiences, routes and travel packages rooted in terroir.

Cultivating a culture of openness, conviviality and care, where hospitality reflects a genuine passion for people, food, places and lifestyle.

10. Continuous Improvement

Adopting a multidisciplinary approach. Testing ideas in practise. Carrying on with the research on cross-border food and culture potential. Constantly monitoring outputs and improving strategies and products by adapting them to market trends in an ethical and conscious way.

Ensuring that project outputs are scalable, transferable and reproducible. Embedding outputs into existing institutions, policies and training and education systems.



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Figure 11. Summary of the TESTEAT Strategic Principles and Purposes

STRATEGIC PRINCIPLE	PURPOSE
1. Sustainability	Promote responsible tourism and circular economy
2. Authenticity and Local Identity	Preserve and enhance local heritage
3. Food Inclusion and Accessibility	Ensure tourism is accessible to all visitors
4. Digital Skills and Innovation	Support digital transition in HORECA
5. Stakeholder Collaboration	Strengthen participatory governance
6. Cross-border Cooperation	Promote shared learning and transferability
7. Knowledge Transfer	Invest in education and lifelong learning
8. Pilot Events and Culture	Foster cultural participation and destination attractiveness
9. Tourism, Generosity and Hospitality	Strengthen visitor experience and local identity
10. Continuous Improvement	Ensure monitoring, scalability and policy uptake
These strategic principles guide all WP4 actions and support the creation of a sustainable, inclusive and innovative enogastronomy tourism model for the Italy–Croatia area.	

5.3 Stakeholder Validation of the TESTEAT Strategic Framework

To ensure that the TESTEAT Strategy reflects the priorities and expectations of the territories involved, all project partners organised a structured stakeholder consultation involving representatives from the tourism, HORECA, education, public administration, cultural and agri-food sectors. Participants were invited to assess the relevance of the ten strategic principles developed jointly by the partnership and to identify those considered important for guiding the long-term implementation of TESTEAT. The consultation combined quantitative rankings with qualitative feedback, providing valuable evidence on stakeholders' priorities and practical expectations. The results, summarised in the following table, confirm the overall consistency of the Strategy while highlighting the strategic principles that should receive particular attention during the implementation of the Action Plans and the future continuation of TESTEAT.

Overall, the consultation confirmed a strong alignment between the strategic vision developed by the project partnership and the priorities expressed by local stakeholders. The stakeholder consultation confirms that the TESTEAT Strategy is already perceived as **coherent, comprehensive and highly relevant**, requiring no substantial revision of its strategic principles. Rather than suggesting structural changes, respondents indicate a clear need to **prioritise implementation**. The highest-ranked priorities—**knowledge transfer, sustainability, authenticity, cultural events and inclusion**—may therefore constitute the initial drivers of the Action Plan, as they are expected to generate the greatest impact and stakeholder engagement. Conversely, governance-related principles such as cross-border cooperation, continuous improvement and stakeholder co-creation remain fundamental enabling conditions, although they are perceived as supporting mechanisms rather than immediate operational priorities. This evidence suggests that the Action Plan should combine **highly visible actions** with **long-term governance and capacity-building measures**, ensuring both immediate results and the long-term durability of the TESTEAT legacy.



Table 5. Strategic Priorities Emerging from Stakeholder Consultation

Strategic Principles	Evidence from Stakeholder Feedback	Implications for the Action Plan
1. Sustainability	Sustainability was interpreted in a holistic way, encompassing environmental responsibility, local supply chains, seasonality, circular economy, reduction of food waste and the protection of local resources and identities.	Promote sustainable tourism models based on responsible resource management, local products and environmentally conscious practices throughout future actions.
2. Authenticity, Local Identity and Innovation Rooted in Tradition	Stakeholders consistently highlighted the importance of safeguarding local identity, while encouraging innovation that respects traditional knowledge and cultural heritage.	Support initiatives that combine the preservation of local food heritage with innovative tourism experiential activities, storytelling and territorial branding.
3. Food Inclusion, Accessibility and Respect for Diversity	This principle received very strong qualitative validation. Stakeholders considered inclusion a defining element of the TESTEAT approach, emphasising the need to accommodate different dietary requirements, cultural backgrounds and accessibility needs while creating welcoming and stress-free experiences for everyone.	Strengthen inclusive tourism services through training, accessible communication, diversified food options and support for operators in implementing inclusive practices.
4. Digital Skills and Innovation	Digitalisation was generally perceived as an enabling tool rather than a strategic objective. Some stakeholders recognised the importance that technology should support rather than replace, authentic human interaction.	Promote the adoption of user-friendly digital tools, smart technologies while ensuring that innovation remains consistent with experiential tourism values.
5. Collaboration, Co-Creation, Stakeholder and Community Engagement	Stakeholders consistently recognised collaboration as a prerequisite for creating integrated tourism offers and sustainable local development.	Consolidate TESTEAT HUBs and stakeholder networks to support long-term cooperation among institutions, businesses, education providers and local communities.
6. Cross-border Cooperation	Stakeholders widely recognised European cooperation as a strategic value during interviews and discussions. Cross-border collaboration was considered fundamental for exchanging knowledge, sharing good practices, strengthening mutual understanding and generating transferable models.	Continue strengthening cross-border cooperation through joint initiatives and knowledge-sharing activities among Italian and Croatian stakeholders.
7. Knowledge Transfer and Capacity Building	The most frequently selected strategic priority. Stakeholders consistently recognised education, training and skills development as the key driver for preserving gastronomic heritage while supporting innovation and long-term project sustainability.	Prioritise training programmes, capacity-building activities, exchange of good practices and lifelong learning initiatives targeting students, professionals and local operators.
8. Pilot Events and Culture	Stakeholders identified pilot events as one of the most effective instruments for engaging local communities, increasing visibility and testing innovative approaches in real-life contexts.	Continue organising pilot events, festivals and experiential initiatives capable of connecting culture, gastronomy and local communities. Encourage municipalities, cultural institutions and stakeholders to cooperate in designing inclusive and participatory events that generate long-term territorial impacts.
9. Tourism, Generosity and Hospitality	This principle emerged repeatedly during interviews and stakeholder discussions as a core value of authentic gastronomic tourism, emphasizing relationships, hospitality and visitor experience.	Reinforce hospitality as a distinguishing feature of TESTEAT experiences by developing integrated tourism products centred on local communities and authentic encounters.
10. Continuous Improvement	Stakeholders acknowledged its importance as a cross-cutting principle supporting innovation and long-term quality and adaptability.	Introduce monitoring systems, performance indicators and periodic reviews to support continuous learning and long-term implementation of the Strategy.



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Reference Framework and Key Sources

The TESTEAT Strategy and Action Plan has been developed through the integration of European policy priorities, Programme documents, project outputs and stakeholder contributions. The following references represent the strategic, methodological and operational framework that informed the development of this document.

European Policy Framework

- European Commission (2019). The European Green Deal.
- European Commission (2020). A Farm to Fork Strategy for a Fair, Healthy and Environmentally-friendly Food System.
- European Commission (2020). European Skills Agenda for Sustainable Competitiveness, Social Fairness and Resilience.
- European Commission (2022). Transition Pathway for Tourism.

Programme Documents

- Interreg VI-A Italy-Croatia Programme 2021-2027.
- TESTEAT Project – Approved Application Form.
- Programme communication and implementation documents supporting WP4.

TESTEAT Project Outputs

- All documents and Deliverables produced by partners in WP1/2/3
- TESTEAT Manifesto.
- Stakeholder Consultation Reports.
- Partner Action Plans.
- WP4 Strategy and Action Plan supporting materials.

Statistical and Contextual Sources

- Eurostat.
- ISTAT.
- Croatian Bureau of Statistics.
- Other official statistics and institutional sources consulted throughout the development of the Strategy and Action Plan.



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