

DIH INNOVAMARE PROJECT

D.4.2.1 - Report on organized innovation competition



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**Project identification****Project id:** ITHR0200416**Name of the lead partner organization:** Hrvatska gospodarska komora**Name of the lead partner organization in English:** Croatian Chamber of Economy**Project title:** Cross-border digital innovation Hub for innovative marine technology**Project acronym:** DIH InnovaMare**Program priority:** Sustainable growth in the blue economy**Specific objective:** Developed new innovative solution concepts for challenges in blue economy that are ready for funding opportunities**Project duration in months:** 30**Work package:** WP4 Co-creation of innovative solution concepts, project concept and new funding opportunities/schemes**Activity title:** A4.2 – Innovation competition in cooperation with financial institutions, Venture capital funds, private equity funds, corporations for development of innovative solution concepts**Expected date:** 31st July 2026

Activity description: Organized innovation competition of solution providers teams - companies, scientific research institutions, graduate students teams who will have to respond to previous selected challenges and needs in act 4.1. Innovation competition will enable for teams to involve stakeholders from different sectors (private-science) and from cross-border level to boost collaboration and knowledge transfer between sectors and countries. Innovation competition will be organized with different financial institutions as one of them is our associated partner Hamag-Bicro, venture capital, private equity funds and multinational companies who would potentially see the interest in financing of developed solutions or implementation in their companies. This kind of process will be part of services in DIH Innovamare after the project ends. Responsible for this act is UCV. Innovation competition will be organized in hybrid mode in Venice. We will have at least 15 teams applied and 15 solution concepts developed.

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Executive summary

The initiative conducted under Activity 4.2 of the DIH InnovaMare project was conceived not merely as a standalone event, but as a true catalyst for the transnational innovation ecosystem between Italy and Croatia. The primary objective was to transform the strategic challenges identified in the project's earlier phases into concrete technological solutions, capable of pairing environmental sustainability with the economic competitiveness of the Adriatic Blue Economy.

The process unfolded through a dual-track methodology that maximized the impact of the results. On one hand, the **Live Competition held in Marghera** on February 26th highlighted the vitality of 8 finalist teams. These participants engaged in a high-intensity acceleration process, demonstrating remarkable technological and business maturity. On the other hand, to ensure a comprehensive response to the sector's complexities, the organizing committee undertook a **targeted technical scouting phase**. This extension allowed for the integration of 7 additional innovative concepts into the project portfolio, sourced from leading "Knowledge Carriers" within the regional academic and scientific networks.

As a result of this combined approach, the initiative successfully reached its target of 15 innovative solutions, covering critical sectors for the future of the Adriatic basin. These range from the circular management of marine biomass and the safety of lagoon infrastructures to advanced desalination systems and drone-assisted emergency protocols.

In summary, the results achieved confirm that **DIH InnovaMare** project has successfully built a solid bridge between the world of research and the industrial market. The portfolio of solutions now available, led by the winning concept, **STAR BIOBASED**, represents more than just the attainment of an administrative KPI. It constitutes a strategic resource for the development of a more resilient, digital, and sustainable Blue Economy, fully prepared to meet the demands of the European ecological transition.

1. Introduction

1.1 Project context and framework

The present report documents the successful implementation and outcomes of the Innovation Competition, a strategic initiative developed as part of the project DIH INNOVAMARE, which represents an expansion of the cross-border Digital Innovation Hub (DIH) dedicated to innovative marine technologies.



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1.2 Objectives of activity 4.2

This deliverable falls under Work Package 4, which focuses on the "Co-creation of innovative solution concepts, project concept and new funding opportunities/schemes". Specifically, this report fulfills the requirements of Activity 4.2: Innovation competition in cooperation with financial institutions, venture capital funds, private equity funds, corporations for development of innovative solution concepts.

The primary goal of this activity is to bridge the gap between research and the market. By fostering the development of innovative solution concepts, the project aims to:

- Stimulate cross-border and cross-sectoral cooperation between Italian and Croatian stakeholders;
- Engage financial players (private equity, venture capital) to ensure that the technological solutions developed have a viable path to commercialization;
- Accelerate the digital and green transformation of the Blue Economy in the Adriatic Sea.

1.3 Purpose of the Innovation Competition

The Innovation Competition was designed as a high-intensity acceleration process rather than a traditional hackathon. It served as a strategic platform for SMEs, start-ups, and research teams to showcase their ability to solve real-world "Blue Economy" challenges previously identified in Activity 4.1.

The initiative emphasized project maturity, testing participants not only on technical prowess but also on market readiness, business planning, and cross-border collaborative potential. Beyond the live event, the process was extended to include targeted scouting of high-level research concepts, ensuring a comprehensive portfolio of 15 solutions. Through this combined approach, DIH InnoVaMare provides a tangible example of how a transnational innovation ecosystem can bridge the gap between scientific research and industrial application, supporting marine technologies that are both environmentally responsible and economically competitive.

1.4 Scope of the Document

This report details the methodology, the profile of the participating teams, the innovative concepts presented and the final results of the evaluation process. It serves as a record of achievement for the project partnership and a roadmap for the future integration of these winning solutions into the wider DIH INNOVAMARE ecosystem.



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2. Event overview

2.1 Venue and Format

The DIH InnovaMare Innovation Competition was conducted on Thursday, February 26th, 2026, between 09:00 and 17:00 CET. The event employed a hybrid format to maximize accessibility and cross-border participation, combining physical presence at the Business Center of Marghera – Venezia (Via Banchina dell'Azoto 15, Venice, Italy) with Zoom platform accessibility for remote attendees. This structure allowed the project to engage a diverse range of stakeholders, including SMEs, start-ups, researchers and young graduates from both Italy and Croatia.

2.2 Mission and Objectives

The mission of the competition was to foster cross-border collaboration and stimulate the development of sustainable technological solutions tailored to the Adriatic Sea's specific environmental and economic needs. Participants were challenged to develop concepts that respond to real-world "Blue Economy" needs previously identified by the project consortium. Beyond the €1,000 monetary award for the top-ranked solution, which was granted by Fondazione Fenice using its own resources, the initiative aimed to provide teams with high-level networking, visibility, and professional mentoring within the DIH InnovaMare ecosystem.

2.3 Structure of the Day

The competition was organized into two distinct competitive phases designed to test both the technical innovation and the practical maturity of the projects:

09:00 – 10:30 | Registration and Opening Session: the day commenced with a welcome coffee and registration, followed by a formal opening. This session included a keynote speech on Blue Economy innovation, an introduction to the multidisciplinary jury and mentors and a thorough explanation of the day's competitive format.

10:30 – 12:30 | Phase 1 – The Preparation Sprint (Pitch Presentations): each of the 8 finalist teams delivered a 10-minute pitch followed by a Jury Q&A session. This phase focused on the core innovation, the specific challenge being addressed and the initial feasibility of the proposed solution.

12:30 – 14:00 | Networking Lunch: a dedicated session for informal discussion and interaction between participants, jury members and project partners.



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14:00 – 15:30 | Phase 2 – The Blue Economy Contest (Rapid-fire Contest): this high-intensity session tested project maturity across seven fundamental topics: Market Description, Innovation, Communication & Reputation, TRL & Legal Framework, Business Plan, Reference Partners and Team Competencies. Teams used the Padlet platform to provide structured digital responses to targeted questions after a 5-minute expert briefing on each topic.

15:30 – 16:30 | Deliberation and Award Ceremony: while the jury evaluated the combined performance from both phases, a final plenary session was held. The day concluded with the announcement of the winning team, STAR BIOBASED, and a discussion of the next steps for integrating these solutions into the DIH InnovaMare network.

2.4 Incentives for Collaboration

To further the project's goal of Adriatic integration, the competition rules included Strategic bonus points:

Cross-Border Bonus (+2 points): awarded to teams with at least one member of a different nationality compared to the rest of the team (e.g., a Croatian member in an Italian team).

In-Person Bonus (+2 points): awarded to teams with at least one member physically present at the venue in Marghera to encourage face-to-face networking.

3. Organizing team and governance

3.1 Lead Organizer and Coordination

The Innovation Competition was led and coordinated by Unioncamere del Veneto, acting as Project Partner 8 (PP8) within the DIH InnovaMare consortium. The coordination team was responsible for the overall strategic design of the competition, the drafting of the "Rules and Regulations," the selection of the digital tools (Padlet) and the management of the transnational jury.

3.2 Transnational governance and partnership support

To ensure the cross-border nature of the Interreg programme, the governance of the event involved a collaborative effort between Italian and Croatian partners.

- Lead Partner (CCE - Croatian Chamber of Economy): provided strategic guidance and ensured the competition's alignment with the overall DIH InnovaMare mission and the sustainability of the cross-border ecosystem.



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- **Technical Support:** staff from the DIH InnoVaMare network provided mentorship during the "Blue Economy Contest" (Phase 2), guiding teams through the maturity topics (Market, Business Plan, TRL, etc.).

3.3 The Evaluation Board (The Jury)

The Governance structure included an independent, multidisciplinary Jury of Experts. The Jury was specifically composed to represent three critical pillars: Academia/Research, Business/Finance and Institutional/Policy.

- Jasna Pletikosić (Croatian Chamber of Economy): LP representative; representing the institutional and innovation system perspective.
- Francesco Stocco (Alma LED & My Restartup): providing expertise in equity crowdfunding, legal frameworks and financial scalability;
- Prof. Eleonora Di Maria (University of Padua): expert in Economics and Business Management, focusing on circular economy and internationalization;
- Prof. Luca Martinelli (University of Padua): expert in maritime construction and coastal engineering, evaluating the technical feasibility of the solutions;
- Filippo Mazzariol (Unioncamere del Veneto): focused on the alignment with regional and European sustainability standards.

3.4 Management tools and quality control

The competition utilized a digital governance approach to ensure transparency and real-time evaluation:

- Padlet Platform: used to collect and archive all team responses during the rapid-fire contest, creating a permanent and auditable record of the participants' work.
- Standardized Evaluation Forms: every jury member used an official "Jury Evaluation Form" with weighted criteria (Relevance, Innovation, Collaboration, Market Potential, Sustainability, Presentation).
- Eligibility Check: an internal committee performed a preliminary screening of all registered teams to ensure compliance with the "Rules and Regulations" (e.g., cross-border requirements) before the event.

4. Participants and teams

4.1 Recruitment and selection process



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The identification of the 15 innovation concepts followed a dual-track approach to ensure both competitive excellence and a comprehensive representation of the Adriatic Blue Economy sectors, building directly upon the foundations laid in the previous project phases.

Track 1: Competitive Call for the Live Pitch (8 Solutions)

The initial recruitment focused on selecting finalist teams for the hybrid event in Marghera - Venezia.

Targeting: the Innovation Competition attracted a diverse pool of applicants from across the Italy-Croatia cross-border area. Following a targeted communication campaign, teams were invited to register by submitting a preliminary concept aligned with the 20 challenges identified in Activity 4.1, July 2025 (D4.1.2. Report on organised Open call).

Selection: the organizing committee performed an eligibility check based on the official "Rules and Regulations." The evaluation focused on team composition (3–5 members), relevance to the Blue Economy, and the potential for cross-border collaboration.

Outcome: 8 finalist teams were admitted to the live competition and evaluated by the official Jury during the event on February 26th.

Track 2: Technical Scouting and Knowledge Capitalization (7 Solutions)

To reach the project target of 15 solutions and ensure a broader coverage of the strategic challenges that emerged during the July 2025 open call, a secondary scouting phase was implemented.

This phase was characterized by a shared action agreed upon by the Hackathon community and their scientific supervisors. Following the live competition, this network collectively decided to mobilize their institutional connections to intercept further scientific proposals and ideas necessary to fulfill the project's KPIs and enrich the DIH InnoVaMare portfolio.

Targeting: direct engagement with the broader "Knowledge Carrier" network, involving prestigious academic departments and specialized cooperatives (e.g., University of Padova, Politecnico di Bari, University of Zadar) that had expressed interest in the project's thematic areas and were encouraged by the existing community to contribute.

Selection: these solutions underwent a Technical Validation by Unioncamere del Veneto to ensure high scientific quality and perfect alignment with the challenges defined in deliverable D4.1.2.



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Outcome: 7 additional high-level concepts were integrated into the final portfolio, ensuring a 100% achievement of the project's KPIs and a robust diversification of the technological solutions proposed.

4.2 Profile of the participating Teams – live event

A total of **8 finalist teams** were selected to compete in the hybrid event in Marghera. The cohort represented a balanced ecosystem of 50% Italian-led and 50% Croatian-led initiatives, with teams achieving "Cross-Border" status through mixed nationality memberships.

Detailed Team Profiles:

- **STAR BIOBASED (Winner)**
 - **Type:** academic-Industrial Partnership;
 - **Composition:** a transnational team including researchers from the **University of Foggia** (Italy) and the **University of Dubrovnik** (Croatia), alongside the CEO of **Varano La Fenice** (an IMTA plant operator);
 - **Expertise:** organic chemistry, biological sciences, biotechnology and commercial aquaculture management;
- **Blueat (Mariscadoras Srl)**
 - **Type:** Startup / Benefit Corporation (SME);
 - **Composition:** an all-female multidisciplinary team led by CEO Carlotta (Marine Biologist, PhD);
 - **Expertise:** marine biology, circular economy entrepreneurship, processing industry and communication;
- **BlueDataB**
 - **Type:** technological Innovation Team;
 - **Composition:** 5 members with a high degree of technical specialization;
 - **Expertise:** physics, AI/Computer Vision development, Full Stack development and Hardware engineering;
- **Tidal Team**
 - **Type:** Research & Innovation Group;
 - **Composition:** experts in telecommunications and data science;
 - **Expertise:** IoT systems, ML/AI algorithms, and maritime data protocols (SATCOM, LTE);
- **BlueLife EcoCloud Adriatic Lab**
 - **Type:** educational & scientific consortium;
 - **Composition:** a broad collaboration involving the **University of Split**, high school educators, and biodiversity experts;
 - **Expertise:** maritime technology, maritime economics, marine biology and sustainable tourism marketing;



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- **SITA Compositi (SITA Marine)**
 - **Type:** industrial SME;
 - **Composition:** engineers and digital transformation experts.
 - **Expertise:** advanced materials engineering, sustainable manufacturing, robotics and high-performance computing;
- **UNIZD (University of Zadar)**
 - **Type:** academic / maritime experts;
 - **Composition:** professors and maritime professionals from the University of Zadar's Maritime Department;
 - **Expertise:** marine traffic engineering, maritime law, nautical tourism and port infrastructure management;
- **SAV (Squadra d'Azione Veneziana)**
 - **Type:** non-profit Organization (O.d.V.) specialized in lagoon monitoring;
 - **Composition:** multidisciplinary team of maritime operators, technical designers and environmental experts;
 - **Expertise:** IoT sensor integration (LoRaWAN), maritime safety and circular economy (wood recovery);

4.3 - Profile of the participating Teams – scouting phase

- **CREA - Viticulture Dept.**
 - **Type:** Research Centre (CREA - Research Centre for Viticulture & Enology);
 - **Composition:** led by Dr. Luca Masiero, including precision viticulture experts and agro-hydrological modelers;
 - **Expertise:** precision viticulture, IoT sensor networks and climate-smart irrigation management;
- **University of Padova - Dept. of Biology**
 - **Type:** University Research Team;
 - **Composition:** led by Prof. Lucia Manni, including marine biologists and UAV engineers;
 - **Expertise:** marine biology, autonomous flight systems (waterproof drones), and predictive oceanographic modelling;
- **Cooperativa 'OP Fasolari'**
 - **Type:** SME/Fishing Cooperative;
 - **Composition:** led by Dott. Paolo Tiozzo, involving master fishers, food processing technicians, and packaging engineers;



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- **Expertise:** sustainable mollusc harvesting, cold-chain management, and vacuum/MAP packaging technology;
- **University of Padova - Dept. of Biology**
 - **Type:** University Research Team;
 - **Composition:** led by Prof. Lorian Ballarin, a leading international expert in tunicate immunobiology;
 - **Expertise:** Marine biotechnology, nanocellulose extraction, and circular bioeconomy models;
- **University of Zagreb**
 - **Type:** University Research Team / Quadruple Helix Coordinator;
 - **Composition:** led by Dr. Prof. Hrvoje Mikulčić;
 - **Expertise:** energy modelling, offshore wind systems, and transnational R&I strategy;
- **Politecnico di Bari – DICATECh**
 - **Type:** University Research Team;
 - **Composition:** led by Dott.ssa Gabriella Balacco, including hydraulic engineers, renewable energy specialists and agronomists;
 - **Expertise:** desalination systems, solar/hybrid energy integration, and irrigation science;
- **University of Zadar – Dept. of Maritime Studies**
 - **Type:** University Research Team;
 - **Composition:** led by Prof. Marko Valcic, involving experts in maritime automation and emergency response protocols;
 - **Expertise:** drone operations (EASA regulations), maritime safety and professional training framework design;

4.4 Synergy and collaboration

The participants showcased the core values of the DIH InnovaMare project by bridging the "valley of death" between laboratory research and market application. The inclusion of PhD students and Professors alongside CEOs and engineers ensured that the solution concepts presented were both scientifically grounded and commercially oriented. Furthermore, the **Strategic Bonus Points** system successfully incentivized teams to include members from both sides of the Adriatic, strengthening the project's goal of a unified maritime innovation ecosystem.

5. Innovation concepts and solutions





5.1 Alignment with project challenges

Each team was required to align their proposal with one or more of the **20 Strategic Challenges** identified during the previous phase of the DIH InnovaMare project (Activity 4.1 - D4.1.2. Report on organised Open call). These challenges focus on environmental sustainability, digital transformation of maritime sectors and the development of advanced marine technologies for the Adriatic Sea.

5.2 Detailed overview of solution concepts

The following solutions were presented, representing a broad spectrum of innovation (from TRL 4 to TRL 7):

- **STAR BIOBASED (The Winning Concept)**
 - **Challenge addressed:** sustainable aquaculture and seaweed biomass monitoring;
 - **Solution:** a "Regenerative IMTA (Integrated Multi-Trophic Aquaculture) System". The team developed a specialized sensor suite designed to monitor the growth and health of *Gracilaria* seaweed beds in real-time;
 - **Innovation:** by combining organic chemistry expertise with IoT sensing, the solution optimizes the carbon sequestration potential of aquaculture plants (Blue Carbon Credits) and provides SMEs with a data-driven approach to high-quality biomass production;
- **Blueat (Mariscadoras Srl)**
 - **Challenge addressed:** management of invasive alien species and waste valorization;
 - **Solution:** a circular economy model to manage the Atlantic Blue Crab (*Callinectes sapidus*) invasion. The project processes the crab for the food industry and, in collaboration with the Italian Institute of Technology (IIT), transforms the processing waste (shells) into compostable bioplastics;
 - **Innovation:** it turns an environmental threat into a dual economic opportunity: high-end food products and sustainable packaging materials;
- **BlueDataB**
 - **Challenge addressed:** digital tools for marine biodiversity monitoring;
 - **Solution:** an AI-driven "Real-Time Fish Population Analysis" platform. Using underwater cameras and computer vision, the system identifies, counts, and tracks fish species in Marine Protected Areas (MPAs);
 - **Innovation:** it replaces traditional, expensive and saltatory manual monitoring with a continuous "Virtual Aquarium" data stream, allowing for early warning signs of habitat loss or invasive species arrival;
- **Tidal Team**



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- **Challenge addressed:** integrated environmental monitoring and maritime safety;
 - **Solution:** an "Omni-Protocol Interconnected System". A cross-layer data architecture that connects sensors from the seabed, underwater vehicles (AUVs), surface buoys, and aerial drones;
 - **Innovation:** by breaking "data silos," the platform feeds Machine Learning algorithms with correlated data to improve disaster prevention, sea rescue and pollution control;
- **BlueLife EcoCloud Adriatic Lab**
 - **Challenge addressed:** resilience literacy and stakeholder engagement;
 - **Solution:** a hybrid physical-digital platform that uses algae as "marine bio-indicators". It visualizes the cumulative anthropogenic pressure on the Adriatic through an interactive "EcoCloud";
 - **Innovation:** it bridges the gap between scientific data and community understanding, fostering the "human dimension" of the maritime green transition;
- **SITA Compositi (SITA Marine)**
 - **Challenge addressed:** eco-sustainable materials for the nautical industry;
 - **Solution:** high-performance marine equipment (booms, poles, bowsprits) manufactured using flax fiber and bio-based epoxy resins (30% organic rapeseed content);
 - **Innovation:** it solves the lightweight-sustainability trade-off, reducing the carbon footprint of boat manufacturing and eliminating the toxicity associated with traditional fiberglass;
- **UNIZD (University of Zadar)**
 - **Challenge addressed:** marine pollution and port infrastructure digitalization;
 - **Solution:** an automated vacuum-pump system for the disposal of black and grey waters in communal ports. Usage is tracked via RFID cards;
 - **Innovation:** it integrates usage data into the legal framework for boat inspections, creating a mandatory "proof of proper disposal" to prevent illegal dumping at sea;
- **SAV (Project: BRICOLA 4.0)**
 - **Challenge addressed:** maritime safety and smart infrastructure management;
 - **Solution:** an "Event-Driven IoT System" for the real-time tracking and recovery of drifting "bricole" (wooden navigation poles) in the Venice Lagoon;
 - **Innovation:** transforms traditional wooden poles into smart infrastructure using low-power sensors. It prevents navigation hazards and enables the circular reuse of recovered timber, significantly reducing emergency maintenance costs.

5.3 Potential for cross-border implementation

The Jury noted that the majority of these concepts are highly replicable across the Adriatic. The solutions presented by **STAR BIOBASED** and **UNIZD**, in particular, offer a scalable framework that



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could be adopted by both Italian and Croatian port authorities and aquaculture clusters, directly contributing to the harmonized development of the cross-border innovation ecosystem.

5.4 Capitalization and extension of solution concept collection

Following the live event in Marghera - Venezia, the organizing committee initiated a targeted scouting phase to further consolidate the DIH InnovaMare innovation portfolio. Recognizing the high level of interest from the regional scientific community, an additional 15-day window was established to collect specialized concept notes and technical proposals from key research departments and institutional stakeholders within the project's network.

This proactive extension was designed to capture high-TRL solutions from experts who, while contributing to the project's "Knowledge Carrier" network, were unable to participate in the physical pitch session. By integrating these additional 7 solutions, the project successfully reached its target of 15 innovative concepts, ensuring a more comprehensive coverage of strategic challenges such as precision viticulture, maritime emergency robotics, and advanced blue biotechnologies.

- **CREA - Viticulture Dept. (Project: Smart Water Resilience)**
 - **Challenge addressed:** climate change and water scarcity in coastal viticulture;
 - **Solution:** an integrated Decision-Support System (DSS) that synchronizes IoT vineyard sensors with Copernicus satellite data to automate irrigation management;
 - **Innovation:** it bridges the "governance gap" by translating global climate forecasts into actionable, farm-level water management decisions, specifically for premium Adriatic wine-producing areas facing drought.
- **University of Padova - Dept. of Biology (Project: DronEco Adriatic)**
 - **Challenge addressed:** mass mortality events in clam farming (Northern Adriatic);
 - **Solution:** a monitoring ecosystem based on 5th-generation waterproof drones and predictive oceanographic modeling to detect early signs of anoxia;
 - **Innovation:** it replaces static buoy monitoring with high-resolution autonomous flight systems, utilizing the knowledge of fishers as "human sensors" to ground-truth biological data.
- **Cooperativa 'OP Fasolari' (Project: Expanding the Fasolaro Value Chain)**
 - **Challenge addressed:** declining revenues due to fishing regulations and processing bottlenecks;



- **Solution:** a value-added processing model introducing specialized vacuum and modified-atmosphere packaging (MAP) for ready-to-cook mollusc products;
 - **Innovation:** it shifts the business model from a "commodity" market to a "premium branded" market, allowing fishing cooperatives to increase revenue per unit while reducing overall fishing effort (ecological sustainability).
- **University of Padova - Dept. of Biology (Project: Ascidians for Blue Bioeconomy)**
 - **Challenge addressed:** overexploitation of marine stocks and lack of circularity in aquaculture;
 - **Solution:** a multi-actor research model to culture ascidians as a sustainable source for high-purity nanocellulose and bioactive molecules;
 - **Innovation:** it provides the first zero-waste industrial model for "animal-derived" nanocellulose, which outperforms plant-based alternatives in biomedical and tissue engineering applications.
- **University of Zagreb (Project: Offshore Wind Knowledge Network)**
 - **Challenge addressed:** market domination by large players and fragmented R&I in offshore wind;
 - **Solution:** a transnational "Knowledge Network" supported by a digital hub to empower Adriatic SMEs in the specialized offshore wind supply chain;
 - **Innovation:** it applies a "Quadruple Helix" governance model (Academia, Industry, Policy, Citizens) to harmonize a regional roadmap for wind energy, breaking national data silos.
- **Politecnico di Bari – DICATECh (Project: Blue Water Carriers)**
 - **Challenge addressed:** freshwater crisis and saltwater intrusion in coastal and island aquifers;
 - **Solution:** an integrated ecosystem for renewable-powered desalination featuring an open-access digital planning configurator;
 - **Innovation:** it offers a bankable "Investment Scenario" assessment aligned with EU Taxonomy, making smart desalination a feasible first-choice for decentralized Adriatic territories.
- **University of Zadar – Dept. of Maritime Studies (Project: Knowledge Carriers)**
 - **Challenge addressed:** delayed maritime emergency response and lack of specialized professional profiles;
 - **Solution:** a drone-assisted first aid system integrated with smart docking stations and harmonized cross-border rescue protocols (COAST and OFFSHORE);





- **Innovation:** it defines the first certified professional profile for "Expert Drone Technicians for Blue First Aid," integrating EASA aviation regulations with maritime disaster risk prevention.

6. Evaluation Process

6.1 Composition of the Jury

The evaluation of the live event was entrusted to a multidisciplinary and transnational Jury, carefully selected to provide a 360-degree assessment of the proposals. The Jury was composed of 5 experts representing the "Triple Helix" of innovation: Industry/Finance, Academia and Institutional bodies.

- **Jasna Pletikosić** (Croatian Chamber of Economy): senior Expert in Innovation Systems, providing the institutional perspective and checking alignment with the Adriatic cross-border strategy;
- **Francesco Stocco** (Alma LED & My Restartup): expert in Equity Crowdfunding and Venture Capital, evaluating the financial scalability and investment readiness of the projects;
- **Prof. Eleonora Di Maria** (University of Padua): full Professor of Economics and Business Management, focusing on internationalization and circular economy business models;
- **Prof. Luca Martinelli** (University of Padova): associate Professor in Maritime Construction, providing technical validation for marine engineering and coastal protection concepts;
- **Filippo Mazzariol** (Unioncamere del Veneto): team coordinator for Innovation & Sustainability, assessing the proposals' alignment with regional and EU Green Deal objectives.

6.2 Evaluation methodology and scoring system

The evaluation of the Innovation Competition live event participants followed a **weighted scoring system** (Scale 1–10) covering both the "Pitch Presentation" (Phase 1) and the "Blue Economy Contest" (Phase 2). This ensured that teams were judged not only on their presentation skills but also on the technical and commercial maturity of their projects.

Weighted Criteria:

1. **Relevance (20%):** how effectively the solution addresses the specific Blue Economy challenges identified in Activity 4.1;
2. **Innovation & Technological Feasibility (20%):** the uniqueness of the technology and its practical viability in the marine environment;



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3. **Cross-sector & Cross-border Collaboration (15%):** the strength of the partnership and its ability to bridge different sectors (e.g., Research + SME) and countries (Italy + Croatia);
4. **Commercialization Potential (15%):** the clarity of the business model, target market identification and scalability;
5. **Sustainability & Environmental Impact (15%):** alignment with the "Green Transition" and the positive impact on the Adriatic ecosystem;
6. **Presentation & Clarity (15%):** the effectiveness of the pitch, the quality of the visual materials, and the precision of the answers during the Q&A and Padlet sessions.

6.3 Strategic Bonus Points

To incentivize the specific goals of the Interreg programme, a system of "Bonus Points" was applied to the final score:

- **Cross-Border Bonus (+2 points):** awarded to teams with a mixed Italian-Croatian composition, fostering true transnational cooperation;
- **Physical Presence Bonus (+2 points):** awarded to teams with at least one member attending the event in person at the Marghera Business Center, recognizing the importance of face-to-face networking.

6.4 Deliberation process

Following the "Rapid-fire Contest" on Padlet, the Jury held a closed-door session. Each member evaluated the teams independently using the official **Jury Evaluation Form**. The final ranking was determined by calculating the weighted average of the scores provided by all five jurors, plus the validation of any eligible bonus points. In the case of a tie, the Jury Chair was designated to cast the deciding vote.

7. Results and awards

7.1 Final ranking and outcomes

At the conclusion of the live event competitive phases (Pitch Presentation and Blue Economy Contest), the Jury consolidated the scores based on the six primary criteria and the strategic bonus points. While all eight participating teams demonstrated high levels of innovation and alignment with the DIH InnoVaMare goals, the final evaluation highlighted the exceptional maturity of the following proposals:



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- **1st Place (Winner): STAR BIOBASED**
- **Finalists:** BlueDataB (2nd place), Blueat (3rd place)

7.2 The Winning solution: STAR BIOBASED

The project "**Regenerative IMTA System**" presented by the STAR BIOBASED team was identified as the most impactful and ready-to-market solution.

Key Strengths of the Winning Concept:

- **Transnational Synergy:** the team perfectly embodied the Interreg spirit, bringing together the University of Foggia (Italy), the University of Dubrovnik (Croatia) and the industrial operator "Varano La Fenice";
- **Technological Maturity:** the solution addressed a high-priority challenge (seaweed monitoring) with a clear roadmap for TRL advancement;
- **Economic & Environmental Impact:** the project successfully linked biological research with the emerging "Blue Carbon" market, providing a clear value proposition for Adriatic aquaculture SMEs;

7.3 Awards and incentives

The following awards were granted to foster the continuation of the winning innovation:

1. **Monetary Prize:** a cash prize of **€1,000.00** was awarded to the STAR BIOBASED team to support the further development of their prototype or to cover initial patenting/business development costs. The prize was sponsored by Fondazione Fenice. This collaboration highlights the project's ability to engage key local stakeholders and underscores the Foundation's role in supporting the technical organization of the event;
2. **DIH Networking & Visibility:** the winning solution, along with the most promising finalists, will be promoted through the official DIH InnovaMare channels and the "InnovaMare Innovation Ecosystem" platform to attract potential investors and corporate partners;
3. **Mentoring Access:** the winning team gained direct access to future specialized workshops and international brokerage events organized within the framework of the Interreg Italy-Croatia programme.

7.4 Closing remarks by the Jury

The Jury Chair, in the final award speech, highlighted the "high technical quality and diversity of the applications," noting that the competition proved the Adriatic region's potential to become a leader



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in sustainable marine technologies. The successful integration of digital tools (AI, IoT) with traditional sectors (fishing, materials, shipping) was cited as the most significant outcome of the event.

8. Conclusions and next steps

8.1 Achievement of objectives

The DIH InnovaMare Innovation Competition, combined with the subsequent technical scouting phase, successfully met and consolidated the strategic objectives defined in **Activity 4.2**. By gathering a total of **15 high-level innovation concepts** from Italy and Croatia, the initiative demonstrated the power of cross-border cooperation in tackling the environmental and economic challenges of the Adriatic Sea.

The process proved highly effective through a dual-track approach:

The Live Competition: The hybrid event in Marghera, with its two-phase competitive structure, allowed for a rigorous assessment of 8 "market-ready" solutions, testing their technical innovation and business maturity.

The Scouting & Capitalization Phase: The targeted collection of 7 additional research-driven concepts ensured a 100% achievement of the project's KPIs, while broadening the technological scope to include critical sectors such as smart desalination, precision viticulture and maritime emergency robotics.

Ultimately, the initiative proved that the **DIH InnovaMare ecosystem** serves as a vital bridge between scientific research and industrial application. By successfully attracting both established SMEs and prestigious academic "Knowledge Carriers," the project has created a robust and diversified portfolio of sustainable marine technologies that are now ready for the next stages of investment and cross-border implementation.

8.2 Strategic impact on the Blue Economy

The 15 innovation concepts collected and analyzed during this activity represent a comprehensive response to the **Green and Digital transition** promoted by the EU Blue Economy Report. The strategic impact of these solutions extends across the entire maritime value chain of the Italy-Croatia cross-border area.



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Key areas of impact include:

- **Environmental Sustainability & Circular Economy:** solutions such as **Blueat** (invasive species management), **SITA Marine** (bio-based composites), and the **University of Padova's Ascidian project** (blue biotechnologies) demonstrate how marine resources can be valorized through zero-waste, circular models.
- **Digitalization & Advanced Monitoring:** the integration of AI and IoT—represented by **BlueDataB**, **Tidal Team**, and **CREA's Smart Water Resilience**—bridges the data gap in maritime operations, enabling predictive maintenance and high-resolution environmental tracking.
- **Maritime Safety & Smart Infrastructure:** the inclusion of projects like **SAV's Bricola 4.0** and **University of Zadar's Knowledge Carriers** (drone emergency response) addresses critical gaps in infrastructure management and rescue protocols, directly improving the safety and resilience of Adriatic coastal waters.
- **Climate Resilience:** specialized concepts like **Politecnico di Bari's Blue Water Carriers** (smart desalination) offer bankable solutions to the escalating freshwater crisis, providing a roadmap for decentralized coastal and island territories.

The winning project, **STAR BIOBASED**, serves as the flagship for this strategic vision. Its "Regenerative IMTA System" provides a scalable, data-driven model for sustainable aquaculture that can be replicated across the entire Adriatic basin, strengthening the competitiveness of regional SMEs while contributing to carbon sequestration goals.

Ultimately, the diversity and maturity of these 15 solutions confirm that the **DIH InnovaMare** has successfully identified the technological building blocks necessary for a more resilient, innovative, and sustainable Adriatic maritime economy.

8.3 Next steps and capitalization

To ensure that the momentum generated by the competition leads to tangible market entries, the following follow-up actions are planned:

1. **Integration into the DIH Platform:** the winning concept and the most promising finalists will be officially catalogued within the **DIH InnovaMare Innovation Ecosystem platform**. this will provide them with permanent visibility to a network of over 300 stakeholders, including investors and institutional partners;
2. **Facilitating Financial Connections:** as per the mandate of WP4, Unioncamere del Veneto and the project partners will facilitate introductions between the top-ranked teams and



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financial institutions/venture capital funds to discuss potential funding rounds for TRL advancement;

3. **Mentoring and Internationalization:** the teams will be invited to participate in upcoming cross-border brokerage events and technical workshops;

Final Reporting: this document (Deliverable D.4.2.1) can be shared with the Interreg Joint Secretariat as a **best-practice model for organizing high-impact innovation competitions within the Italy-Croatia programme.**



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9. Annexes

Annex I: Participants registration (attendance lists in presence and online)

In presence participants signature sheets

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PRESENCE LIST – INNOVATION COMPETITION 26.02.2026, Venice
Teams and Participants

N°	TEAM NAME	SURNAME	NAME	ORGANIZATION	SIGNATURE
1	Blue Life	Dobronić	Vesna	III. gimnazija, Split	on - line
		Jelič Mrčelić	Gorana	Faculty of Maritime Studies, University of Split	
		Jakulica	Petra	Faculty of Maritime Studies, University of Split	
		Marušić	Eli	Faculty of Maritime Studies, University of Split	
		Poduje	Josipa	High School Antun Matijašević Karamaneo Vis	on - line
		Žanić Mikuličić	Jelena	Faculty of Maritime Studies, University of Split	

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2	Blueat	Barani	Luca	Sea the Change	<i>Luca M.</i>
		Pari	Alice		ONLINE
		Santolini	Carlotta	MARISCADORAS	<i>Santolini</i>
3	BlueDataB	Bedalov	Ana	BlueDataB doo	<i>Ana Bedalov</i>
		Čopac	Roko	BlueDataB doo	
		Vidaković	Hrvoje	BlueDataB doo	
4	BOAT Sea-ride sharing <i>NO</i>	Bernardis	Davide		
		Petryshyn	Sofiia		
5	Milice	Pap	Karla		
		Vučić	Agata		

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6	SAV-Sorveglianza Aerea Veneta OdV	Colombo	Marcello	Sav - Sorveglianza Aerea Veneta OdV-Italy	
7	SITA Compositi	Bocci	Alessandro	SITA Compositi srl	
		Bocci	Elena	SITA Compositi srl	
		Pelliccioli	Paola	SITA Compositi srl	
8	STAR BIOBASED	Coccia	Leonardo	Cooperativa Varano La Fenice s.c.a r.l.	ONLINE
		Dobroslavić	Erika	Dubrovnik University	ONLINE
		Francavilla	Matteo	STAR*Facility Centre - University of Foggia	
		Hmane	Imen	STAR*Facility Centre - University of Foggia	

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		Soldo	Domenico	STAR*Facility Centre - University of Foggia	
9	Tidal Team	Francescon	Roberto	Wireless and More srl	
10	UNIZD	Baric	Mate	Maritime Department Zadar, UNIZD	ONLINE
		Grboc	Luka	Maritime Department Zadar, UNIZD	
		Milin	Vice	Maritime faculty Split	
		Pavic	Vinko	Maritime Department Zadar, UNIZD	
		Vucetic	Sime	Maritime Department Zadar, UNIZD	



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N°	TEAM NAME	SURNAME	NAME	ORGANIZATION	SIGNATURE
		ALESSANDRA VANDINI	Alessandra	OGS	



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Project Partners

	SURNAME	NAME	ORGANIZATION	SIGNATURE
1	Bagattin	Giada	Unioncamere del Veneto	Giada Bagattin
2	Barić	Mate	UNIZD	ONLINE
3	Bologna	Giulia	CNR ISMAR	Giulia Bologna
4	Caccia	Massimo	CNR	
5	Cappelletto	Irene	Unioncamere del Veneto	Irene Cappelletto
6	Cukrov	Neven	IRB	
7	De Pascalis	Francesca	CNR ISMAR	Francesca De Pascalis
8	Francescon	Roberto	Wireless and More	Roberto Francescon

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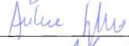
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9	Gadaleta Caldarola	Carlo	ARTI Puglia	
10	Galeković	Marija	Hamagbicro	
11	Ghezzo	Michol	CNR ISMAR	
12	Grbić	Luka	UNIZD	
13	Gundić	Ana	UNIZD	Gundić
14	Ivanov	Deni	UNIZD	
15	Lazzari	Roberta	Unioncamere del Veneto	Roberta Lazzari
16	Liberti	Anna	ARTI Puglia	Anna Liberti
17	Minciotti	Micol	Wireless and More	
18	Patruno	Valeria	ARTI Puglia	Valeria Patruno
19	Pletikosić	Jasna	HGK	Pletikosić
20	Tondi	Francesca	ARTI Puglia	

PRESENCE LIST – INNOVATION COMPETITION 26.02.2026, Venice
Speakers - Jury

	SURNAME	NAME	ORGANIZATION	SIGNATURE
1	Di Maria	Eleonora	Università di Padova	
2	Grigoletto	Andrea	Fondazione Fenice	
3	Martinelli	Luca	Università di Padova	
4	Mazzariol	Filippo	Unioncamere del Veneto	
5	Pivetta	Michela	Fondazione Fenice	
6	Stocco	Francesco	Alma LED	
7				
8				

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Zoom platform participants list

Topic		Start time	End time	Participants
DIH INNOVAMARE: Innovation Competition		26/02/2026 09:38:27 AM	26/02/2026 04:34:28 PM	31
Name (Original name)	Total duration (minutes)			
Andrea Novero	132			
Matteo Francavilla	137			
MB	26			
RC	139			
Domenico	298			
Leonardo coccia	339			
Mate Baric	290			
Star biobased	232			
BDB	188			
BDB	25			
Katija	20			
korisnik	186			
Erika Dobroslavic	366			
Katija	192			
Fenice Green Energy Park 14	417			
Andrea Novero	54			
SITA COMPOSITI	193			



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DIH INNOVAMARE Innovation Competition

Co-creating solutions for a sustainable Blue Economy

WHY THE COMPETITION

- Address real Blue Economy challenges
- Develop market-ready solutions
- Connect with experts and investors

ABOUT THE PROJECT

DIH INNOVAMARE is a cross-border Digital Innovation Hub funded by the **Interreg Italy-Croatia Programme**. The project supports **innovation, technology transfer** and **collaboration** in the **Blue Economy** across the Adriatic Sea region.

Focus areas: marine technologies, sustainability, digital solutions, innovation ecosystems.

FORMAT

One-day hybrid event
26 February 2026

Morning
Preparation & Pitch

Afternoon
Blue Economy Contest
(7 topics – fast-paced rounds)

THE CHALLENGES

Teams will develop solutions in response to selected challenges:

- sustainable marine technologies
- environmental monitoring
- digital tools for the Blue Economy
- market-oriented and implementable solutions

Only the most relevant, viable, and market-ready challenges have been selected.

WHAT YOU GET

- Expert feedback
- Visibility & networking
- Mentoring opportunities
- **€1,000 prize for the winning team**

Learn more

Project website: <https://www.italy-croatia.eu/web/dihinnovamare>

Contact: unione@ven.camcom.it

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Annex III: Jury Evaluation Form

DIH INNOVAMARE Innovation Competition

26th February 2026

Business Center – Marghera (VE)

Jury Evaluation Form

Team Name	
Jury Member	

	Pitch presentation	The Blue Economy contest	Comments (optional)
1. Relevance to the competition challenge (20%)			
2. Innovation and technological feasibility (20%)			
3. Cross-sector and cross-border collaboration approach (15%)			
4. Implementation or commercialization potential (15%)			
5. Sustainability and environmental impact (15%)			
6. Presentation and clarity of concept (15%)			

Scoring scale (1–10):

1–3 = Weak

4–6 = Adequate

7–8 = Strong

9–10 = Excellent

Bonus Points

- ☐ +2 – At least one team member in presence
- ☐ +2 – Cross-border tea

Signature _____





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Annex IV: Pitch Deck Template / Form

Co-funded by the European Union Italy – Croatia DIH InnovaMare Innovation Competition Pitch session Team Name Venice, 26 February 2026 www.italy-croatia.eu	Co-funded by the European Union Italy – Croatia DIH InnovaMare The Challenge • What problem are you addressing? • Why is it relevant for the Blue Economy and the Adriatic context?
Co-funded by the European Union Italy – Croatia DIH InnovaMare The Solution • What is your proposed solution? • What makes it innovative compared to existing approaches?	Co-funded by the European Union Italy – Croatia DIH InnovaMare Market & Users • Who are the target users or customers? • What concrete need does your solution address?



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Feasibility

- At what stage of development is the solution (TRL)?
- What are the main technical or regulatory constraints?

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Value & Impact

- What value does your solution create (economic, environmental, social)?
- What impact could it have if implemented?

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Team & Vision

- Who is in the team and what are the key competences?
- What is your vision for the next steps?

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Area for Economic Policies, Human Capital
and Programming of European Funds
Directorate for Joint Programming

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Annex V: Event Gallery



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