



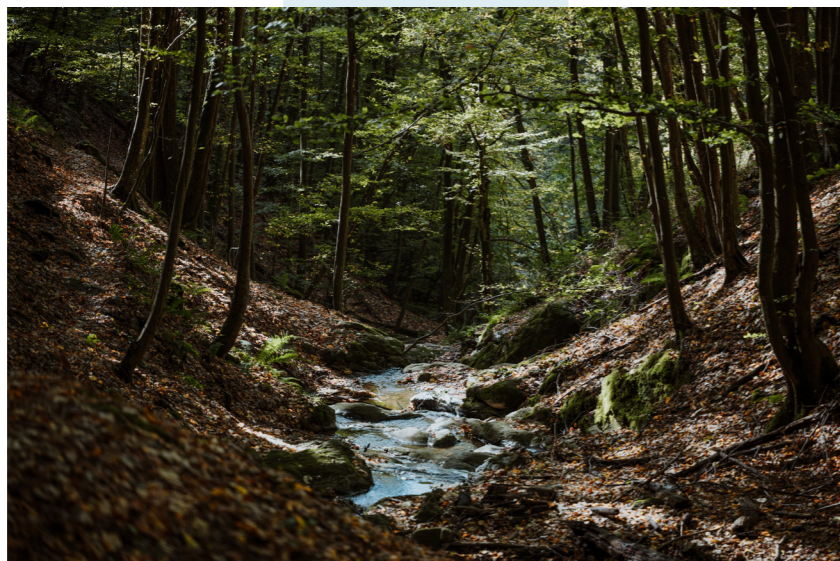
In collaboration with

Forbes

Continental Croatia:

Where Nature, Tradition & Innovation Converge

Continental Croatia, with its winding rivers, lush forests & rich heritage, blends tradition with opportunity. From the fertile Drava plains of Virovitica-Podravina to Karlovac County's historic fortresses & scenic waterways, the region offers a vibrant cultural landscape & outdoor adventures. Renowned for fine wines, artisanal cheeses & centuries-old craftsmanship, it thrives as a hub for gastronomic tourism & sustainable agribusiness. Improved transport & infrastructure enhance accessibility, while eco-tourism & rural hospitality investments attract travelers & investors seeking authenticity & growth opportunities.



Q&A



NIKOLINA BRNJAC

Member of European Parliament &
Former Minister of Tourism & Sports, Croatia

“

Europe's appeal lies in its heritage & way of life—preserving these must go hand in hand with tourism investment.”

HERITAGE & INVESTMENT

How do you view the region's year-round potential & what key policies supported its growth?

During my mandate, we focused on managing tourism development sustainably, both inland and along the coast. To support this, we adopted the Tourism Act to guide all destinations in sustainable tourism management and secured significant funding for related projects. We placed particular emphasis on infrastructure for health and active tourism to encourage year-round travel.

How can the European Parliament boost investment while protecting cultural & natural heritage?

I am a member of the Tourism Task Force of the TRAN Committee (European Parliament's Committee for Transport & Tourism), which is currently preparing an outline of Parliament's priorities for advancing sustainable tourism. We are well aware that Europe's appeal as a destination stems from its cultural and natural heritage, as well as our traditions and European way of life. For this reason, we will request that the Commission introduce a dedicated budget line for sustainable tourism. This would support the competitiveness of European tourism while reducing negative impacts on natural and cultural heritage, as well as on the quality of life for local communities. As a member of the Committee on Regional Development, I particularly look forward to working on the next Multiannual Financial Framework. My focus will be on simplifying procedures for beneficiaries—especially SMEs, which make up 90% of tourism businesses in Europe. Another key priority is promoting evidence-based Destination Management, which I believe should be a cornerstone of modern tourism policy.

How can continental destinations avoid overtourism & protect local quality of life?

We are witnessing growing dissatisfaction among local populations with how tourism development has been managed in the past—particularly due to the uncontrolled rise of the platform economy. Overtourism puts immense pressure on local infrastructure, from transport to water and energy supply, as well as access to affordable housing and public services for residents. However, when developed wisely, tourism can positively impact local and regional development. Public and private investment in tourism infrastructure can enhance the quality of life in tourist destinations and create a supportive environment for SMEs within the tourism ecosystem. That's why, in Croatia, we introduced mandatory destination management through our innovative Tourism Act. The Act requires all tourism destinations to manage development sustainably, using data and sustainability indicators. These indicators measure impacts on areas such as water resource management, waste management, biodiversity protection and sustainable spatial planning. Such factors must be considered when preparing Destination Management Plans, which aim to ensure balanced tourism development and, ultimately, improve quality of life for local communities.

Can the negative effects of short-term rentals on housing be reversed?

I believe it's our duty as policymakers to keep European tourism competitive—but not at the expense of pushing people out of their own neighborhoods. In many tourist destinations, short-term rentals now represent a significant share of the housing stock, leading to reduced availability and rising residential property prices. Ensuring access to affordable housing in these areas is one of my key priorities on the European Parliament's Special Committee on the Housing Crisis. I've already discussed potential solutions with European Commissioner for Housing, Mr. Jorgensen, and I look forward to developing a European-wide approach inspired by successful Croatian practices. ■



OSIJEK: A CITY OF PRESERVATION & PROGRESS

Osijek, a city resting on the banks of the Drava River, embodies resilience, history and modern ambition. This eastern metropolis is quietly redefining itself, seamlessly blending a storied past with a progressive vision. Once a strategic Roman outpost, later a Habsburg military stronghold, and now an economic and cultural heartbeat of Slavonia, Osijek tells a tale of reinvention.

The remnants of its past are etched into the city’s Baroque streets, particularly in Tvrd̑a, the grand fortress that once guarded against Ottoman invasions. Now a vibrant urban quarter, its historic walls shelter a growing cultural scene, where art, music and academia meet. It is here, among centuries-old facades, that Osijek asserts itself as a city of both preservation and progress.

While tradition is honored, change is inescapable. Economic revival is shaping Osijek’s next chapter, with global



enterprises recognizing its potential. Manufacturing giants, including American and German firms, have established operations here, drawn by the city’s infrastructure and skilled workforce. The University of Osijek, one of Croatia’s most respected institutions, fuels this momentum, supplying talent that supports an evolving economy.

Beyond business, the city thrives on a deep cultural richness, a result of its geographical and historical confluences. The local palate, a reflection of centuries of

cross-cultural influences, offers a mix of Croatian, Austrian and Hungarian traditions. The black Slavonian pig, celebrated since the 19th century, remains a culinary staple, while the region’s famed kulen, a richly spiced sausage, continues to define Slavonian gastronomy. Wine lovers find solace in the nearby Baranja vineyards, where the famed Graševina and Traminac flow as easily as the Drava itself.

Its reinvention is not without intention. The city has placed significant emphasis on green initiatives, solidifying its reputation as Croatia’s most walkable urban center. Dubbed the country’s best fifteen-minute city, Osijek offers an ease of movement that major metropolises envy. Public transport is modernizing, cycling infrastructure is expanding and electric buses are gradually transforming the rhythm of the streets. The city’s love for the outdoors is evident along its sprawling promenade, a waterfront stretch where residents and tourists alike converge to enjoy unhurried afternoons against a backdrop of river reflections and historic silhouettes.

Tourism, once a secondary thought in this inland city, is now gaining traction. Osijek is proving that Croatia’s cultural and natural wealth extends far beyond its coastline. Its meticulously restored landmarks, thriving festival scene and culinary renaissance position it as a compelling destination for those who seek authenticity away from the crowds. Direct flights from Munich have made it more accessible, and infrastructure improvements signal a growing commitment to welcoming the world. Today, Osijek stands at the crossroads of history and modernity, drawing strength from its past while confidently striding toward the future.■

IVAN RADIĆ, Mayor, Osijek

“Osijek is not just a city; it is an idea of progress, a place where history & innovation walk side by side.”



“Osijek proves that a 15-minute city can be efficient, sustainable & deeply connected to its people.”

THE 15-MINUTE CITY

What makes Osijek Croatia’s best 15-minute city?

The 15-minute city concept means that everything a resident needs — work, education, healthcare, shopping, recreation — is accessible within a 15-minute walk, bike ride or public transit trip. Osijek naturally fits this model because of its compact and well-planned urban structure. Our investments in infrastructure, like the modernization of tram lines and expansion of cycling lanes, further strengthen this. People in Osijek enjoy a high quality of life with minimal commuting stress, and the city remains well-connected, making it an attractive place to live and work.

Why are companies like Jabil and IMS Gear investing in Osijek?

Osijek has a combination of strategic location, excellent infrastructure and a highly skilled workforce. The American company Jabil, which chose Osijek over multiple European cities, was drawn to our strong collaboration with Osijek University and technical schools. Similarly, IMS Gear from Germany is expanding here because of our well-developed industrial zones. Our city administration has made sure to streamline the investment process, offering in-

centives like the elimination of municipal contributions for businesses. This proactive approach has contributed to record-high employment and economic growth.

How is Osijek positioning itself as a green city?

We are leading Croatia in sustainable initiatives. Osijek has the highest rate of waste separation among major cities, reaching 58%, exceeding EU standards. Our public transport is undergoing a green transformation with new low-floor trams and electric buses, reducing carbon emissions. Additionally, we are implementing solar energy solutions across municipal buildings and promoting urban greenery. Osijek has more parks than squares, reinforcing its identity as a green city where sustainability is a way of life.

What can visitors expect when they come here?

Tourists are increasingly drawn to Osijek for its rich blend of history, culture and natural beauty. We recently completed the extensive renovation of Tvrd̑a, our stunning 18th-century fortress, transforming it into a lively cultural hub that hosts concerts, festivals and exhibitions throughout the year. For nature lovers, the Drava River is a highlight, providing breathtaking landscapes, well-maintained walking trails and an extensive network of cycling paths that connect the city with surrounding areas. The riverfront promenade is one of the longest in this part of Europe, making it ideal for leisurely strolls, picnics and outdoor activities. In the warmer months, Copacabana, our city beach complex, becomes a vibrant gathering place, offering swimming pools, sports facilities and stunning views of the historic city skyline. Beyond the city, Osijek serves as the perfect base for exploring the wine-rich Baranja region, known for its rolling vineyards, traditional wine cellars and exceptional local cuisine.■

The heart of Slavonia just a step away from adventure.

Osijek welcomes you with open arms. Exquisite food, excellent wines, numerous events & at a pace that restores your soul. Your perfect weekend destination – just a few hours’ drive from home!

@visitosijek





Hrvoje Jurić

VIROVITICA-PODRAVINA: CROATIA'S HUB OF HERITAGE

Situated in Croatia's northern frontier, Virovitica-Podravina County is a region where deep-rooted heritage meets forward-looking innovation. Spanning roughly 2,000 square kilometers, it encompasses a dynamic mix of urban centers and picturesque rural landscapes, offering exciting opportunities for those looking to invest or explore.

At the core of the county's transformation is a strong commitment to economic diversification. While agriculture remains a cornerstone, new opportunities are emerging in advanced manufacturing, renewable energy and agribusiness. One standout initiative is the development of a solar-powered vegetable drying facility, designed to localize food production and reduce reliance on imports. With a secured industrial site and permits in place, the project is attracting interest from in-

vestors looking to tap into Croatia's expanding food processing sector.

The county is also redefining its connectivity. Significant investments in transport infrastructure are set to reduce travel time and enhance accessibility for both businesses and tourists. These improvements, alongside the expansion of high-speed digital networks, are positioning Virovitica-Podravina as an increasingly attractive destination for entrepreneurs and remote workers.

The county's tourism sector is evolving as well. Beyond its famed cultural landmarks and nature parks, Virovitica-Podravina is embracing experiential travel. Visitors can stay in heritage estates such as the Pejačević Castle in Virovitica, explore the Noble Route, an 80-kilometer cultural trail that winds through restored castles and aristocratic manors, or enjoy

local farm-to-table experiences featuring award-winning honey, wines and dairy products. For outdoor enthusiasts, cycling tourism is flourishing with new routes linking the county to the EuroVelo 13 network. The region is also tapping into eco-tourism, with hiking trails in Papuk Nature Park and sustainable agri-tourism initiatives that give visitors a hands-on experience of local farming traditions.

A forward-thinking approach to sustainability underpins much of the county's progress. From smart agriculture initiatives that use precision farming and AI-driven irrigation to eco-friendly industrial developments, Virovitica-Podravina is proving that economic growth and environmental stewardship can go hand in hand. One such example is the upcoming Smart Agriculture Center which will integrate digital technologies to enhance farming efficiency, reduce water consumption, and boost crop yields—ensuring that the region remains both economically competitive and environmentally responsible.

With its rich cultural heritage, growing network of sustainable tourism initiatives and commitment to innovation, Virovitica-Podravina County is rapidly emerging as one of Croatia's most compelling destinations. Whether exploring castles, cycling through picturesque landscapes, or indulging in local gastronomy, visitors will find an experience that blends history, nature and modernity in perfect harmony. ■

IGOR ANDROVIĆ, Prefect

“Unexpectedly beautiful, green & rich in cultural heritage.”



“The vegetable drying facility is one of the most exciting investment projects, with the potential to transform Croatia's food processing industry.”

INNOVATION & INVESTMENT

What steps are you taking to attract nature & heritage tourists?

The pandemic accelerated the demand for less crowded, sustainable destinations, and our county has positioned itself as a leader in eco and heritage tourism. We have invested €70 million in cultural and natural heritage projects, with branding under “Slavonia & Podravina.” Our key attractions include two UNESCO-listed nature parks—Papuk Nature Park and the Mura-Drava-Danube Biosphere Reserve. The Noble Route, an 80-kilometer cultural trail, features restored castles, heritage hotels and historic estates, offering visitors a glimpse into the region's rich history. Cycling tourism is another growing sector as we are part of the EuroVelo 13 route, a major cycling network in Europe.

How is the county advancing smart & sustainable development?

Since joining the EU, we have heavily relied on EU funding to implement smart, sustainable and forward-thinking projects that support economic and social development. One of our most impactful projects is the Technology & Innovation Center, which focuses on honey, wine and dairy production. This facility has significantly improved product quality, leading to prestigious awards such as Decanter honors for local wines. Additionally, the Dairy Research & Development Center helps farmers produce high-value dairy products rather than just selling raw milk, strengthening the entire agricultural sector. Another key initiative is the Pannonian Wood Competence Center, which supports the local wood-processing industry by providing a hub for small

IGOR ANDROVIĆ

Prefect, Virovitica-Podravina County, Croatia

and medium-sized enterprises. Looking ahead, we have secured permits for the Smart Agriculture Center, which will use digital technologies to enhance farming techniques, irrigation systems and agricultural competitiveness.

Can you highlight any new investment opportunities?

A major investment opportunity is the vegetable drying facility, poised to transform Croatia's food processing industry. The project arose from discussions with Podravka, producer of the renowned Vegeta seasoning, which currently relies on imported dried vegetables. To localize the supply chain, the county secured a 10,000-square-meter site in an industrial zone and obtained construction permits. The energy-efficient facility will use solar power and rainwater collection. With strong interest from Podravka and a guaranteed market, we seek an agribusiness or food processing investor to develop and operate it.

How is the county improving transport infrastructure?

The most critical development is the construction of a new regional expressway from Virovitica to Zagreb, which is expected to be completed within the next three years. This road will significantly improve regional connectivity, enhance business logistics and attract more investors by reducing transportation costs and travel time. In addition, the government is investing in rail modernization, improving train connections from Virovitica to key cities such as Zagreb, Varaždin and Osijek. These upgrades will make the county more accessible to commuters and businesses, facilitating economic growth and strengthening our position in the broader regional market. ■



Matija Turkalj

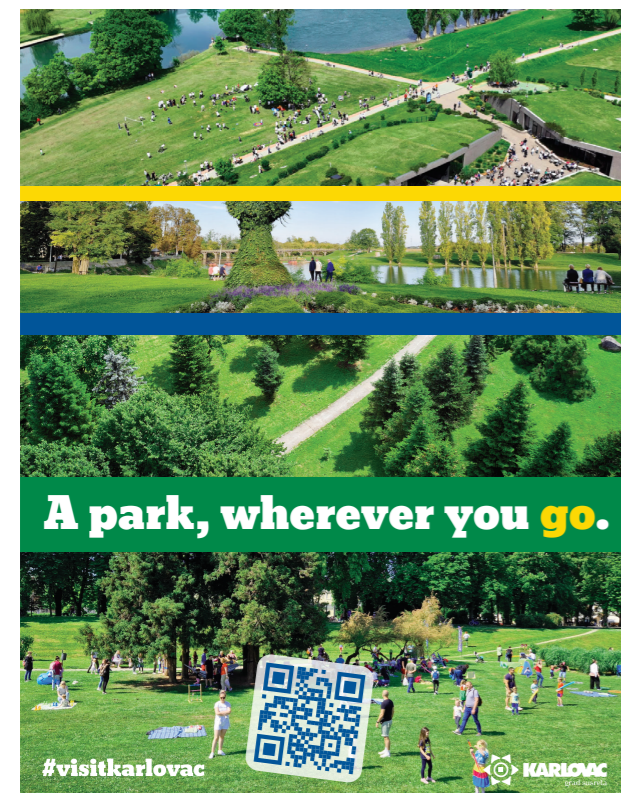
Saša Planić



KARLOVAC: A CITY OF HERITAGE & OPPORTUNITY

Karlovac, located at the confluence of four rivers—Korana, Kupa, Mrežnica and Dobra—stands as a testament to Croatia’s rich history and burgeoning potential. Founded in 1579 as a strategic fortress against Ottoman incursions, the city has evolved into a harmonious blend of historical charm and modern ambition. The city’s unique star-shaped center, known as “Zvijezda,” reflects its Renaissance origins. This meticulously preserved area offers visitors a journey through time, with its symmetrical streets and historic architecture. Beyond its urban allure, Karlovac is surrounded by lush greenery and pristine waterways, earning it the moniker “city of parks.” The rivers not only provide picturesque landscapes but also opportunities for activities like kayaking, fishing and riverside promenades.

The city’s commitment to preserving its heritage is evident in landmarks such as the Dubovac Castle, which offers panoramic views and insights into medieval life.



A park, wherever you go.



The city’s strategic location, approximately 55 kilometers southwest of Zagreb, positions it as a pivotal transport hub. This accessibility has attracted significant investments, bolstering the local economy. Recently, Austrian building materials giant Wienerberger announced an €8 million investment to modernize its Karlovac facility, introducing a new production line for innovative “Porotherm IZO Profi” bricks. This development not only enhances local manufacturing capabilities but also underscores Karlovac’s appeal to international investors.

Moreover, the Croatian unit of Bosnian aluminum processing company FEAL has committed €32 million to establish a new plant in the region. This substantial investment is poised to generate employment opportunities and stimulate economic growth, further solidifying Karlovac’s reputation as an attractive destination for industrial ventures.

The municipal administration actively supports investors, offering consultation and assistance throughout project development. Emphasizing sustainable urban planning, Karlovac has partnered with the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development to develop a Green City Action Plan. This initiative aims to balance economic development with environmental stewardship, ensuring that growth aligns with ecological preservation.

This commitment to thoughtful growth reflects Karlovac’s broader identity—a city where history, nature and innovation come together. Its rich cultural heritage and vibrant landscapes create an atmosphere where the past and present exist in harmony. Visitors find an authentic Croatian experience shaped by tradition and nature, while those looking to invest discover a city defined by strategic opportunity, forward-thinking initiatives and a vision for long-term sustainability.■

DAMIR MANDIĆ
Mayor, Karlovac, Croatia

“With strategic investments, Karlovac is shaping its future while preserving its past.”



“Karlovac isn’t competing with major destinations—we’re creating an authentic experience that keeps visitors longer.”

A CITY IN A PARK

What key infrastructure projects are improving Karlovac’s connectivity & quality of life?

Karlovac’s location has always been both an advantage and a challenge due to its proximity to Zagreb. We are now focusing on two major national infrastructure projects. The first is the construction of a second railway track from Hrvatski Leskovac to Karlovac, which is already in progress. This will improve rail efficiency and attract new residents. The second is the expansion of the Karlovac-Zagreb highway with a third lane. The Croatian government has initiated this crucial project, ensuring smoother travel and economic benefits for Karlovac. Additionally, we are actively working on flood defense projects, as Karlovac is prone to flooding. The Korana and Mrežnica rivers are already protected and we are securing funding for the Kupa River. These projects, supported by EU funds, will define Karlovac’s future.

How is Karlovac preserving green spaces & advancing sustainable energy?

Karlovac is often called a “city in a park,” and we take great pride in preserving our green spaces. Our approach to sustainability includes several strategic initiatives. We have implemented a solarization project for 14 public institutions, allowing them to generate 80% of their electricity needs. We recently upgraded our public lighting system, replacing over

DAMIR MANDIĆ
Mayor, Karlovac, Croatia

9,000 lamps with remotely controlled LED lights thereby reducing energy consumption by nearly 70%. One of our most ambitious projects is harnessing Karlovac’s geothermal potential. We have secured European funding and are exploring public-private partnerships to develop this resource, which could provide 100% renewable heating for Karlovac in the future.

What is Karlovac doing to keep young people & families in the city?

Our city has a long tradition of entrepreneurship and industry. However, we recognize that salaries and quality of life are key factors in keeping young people in Karlovac. Over the past eight years, we have invested over €10 million in expanding kindergarten facilities and another new kindergarten is under construction. Additionally, Karlovac has excellent secondary schools and we are closely collaborating with Karlovac County on new investments, such as a technical skills center and a new medical school. We also see Karlovac Polytechnic as a key institution in attracting and retaining students, ensuring they have educational and career opportunities within the city.

What are Karlovac’s top attractions & how is tourism growing?

Karlovac is unique in its natural and historical heritage. We are home to four beautiful rivers, stunning green spaces and a well-preserved historical center. In recent years, we have significantly expanded our tourism offerings. Key attractions include Aquatika, a freshwater aquarium, Dubovac Castle, the Homeland War Museum in Turanj and the Tesla Experience Center, which honors Nikola Tesla’s connection to Karlovac. One of our most significant projects is the revitalization of the Star, Karlovac’s historic center, where we are restoring public buildings and infrastructure with the help of EU funding. In terms of events, Karlovac is famous for Beer Days, but our “Starry Summer” festival, running from June 23 to July 13, is becoming an increasingly popular celebration.■



Karlovac County is undergoing a transformation, balancing economic development with sustainability while preserving its rich natural and cultural heritage. Known for its strategic location and diverse industries, the region is now drawing attention for its efforts in urban planning, environmental conservation and economic revitalization.

The county's administrative center, Karlovac, has committed to integrating energy efficiency and climate action into its long-term development. As part of the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development's Green Cities program, Karlovac is implementing a Green City Action Plan, reducing carbon emissions and improving district heating systems. The recent urban plan for Lušić requires the use of renewable energy sources while prohibiting fossil fuels for heating.

Economic revitalization remains a key focus. Karlovac County has long been a hub for processing industries, contributing 30.9% to its GDP. Sectors such as food production, metal processing, machinery, and wood manufacturing have built a strong economic foundation. The region's strategic position along major European highways makes it a prime



Ozalj Castle over the Kupa River

KARLOVAC COUNTY: SMART DEVELOPMENT

destination for domestic and international investors.

Tourism plays an increasingly important role, with Karlovac County ranking as the second most visited inland destination in Croatia after Zagreb. The region benefits from Plitvice Lakes National Park, as nearly half of its visitors stay in Karlovac County. Beyond Plitvice, travelers are

drawn to Rastoke's waterfalls, historic towns and river-based activities, reinforcing its reputation as a nature-lover's retreat.

To strengthen tourism infrastructure, the county has expanded its hotel capacity, surpassing 1,000 hotel beds. Several hotels in Rakovica and Slunj are adding conference halls, positioning the region as a hub for congress tourism. With Zagreb's venues fully booked, Karlovac's proximity to Franjo Tuđman Airport (40 minutes) makes it a compelling alternative for business events.

The county also protects its natural resources,

granting legal safeguards to the Mrežnica and Tounjčica rivers. Tourism strategies aim to prevent overcrowding in Rakovica, while promoting lesser-known sites. Nearly 200 cultural events are hosted annually, including the famous Beer Days Festival and Štrudla Fest in Jaškovo. International sporting events further boost Karlovac's visibility. The county has hosted both the WRC Croatia Rally and CroR-ace, attracting thousands of visitors and global media coverage in 190 countries.

Balancing economic growth with sustainability remains a challenge, but Karlovac County continues to integrate climate action into urban planning. Expanding green infrastructure, enforcing strict environmental standards and promoting renewable energy solutions are part of its forward-thinking strategy. As Karlovac County evolves, it demonstrates how economic stability, environmental consciousness and cultural heritage can thrive together, shaping a future that benefits both residents and businesses.■

ŽELJKO FANJAK, Director, Karlovac County Tourist Board, Croatia

“We are preparing to break the Guinness World Record for the longest strudel in the world this September.”



“Karlovac is Croatia's second most visited inland region, known for its rivers & eco-tourism.”

PROGRESS & PRESERVATION

What key factors have driven Karlovac County's economic success?

Our role is to support businesses and create a stable investment climate. One of the biggest advantages is preserving our traditional industries, particularly metal processing, defense and food production. While other regions lost their industrial base, we maintained and modernized ours. Companies that once operated under large state-run enterprises have successfully transitioned into independent, competitive businesses. We also have a strong wood-processing sector in Ogulin, as well as companies producing construction materials for export. This economic stability has led to historically low unemployment and an increase in young families moving to the county. Karlovac County now ranks fourth in Croatia in income levels, showing that our industries provide high-quality, well-paying jobs.

How is Karlovac County balancing economic growth with sustainability?

We take a structured approach to planning, ensuring businesses develop in designated industrial zones with strict environmental standards. Renewable energy is a major focus—nearly all public buildings have been upgraded with solar panels, heat pumps

MARTINA FURDEK HAJDIN

Prefect, Karlovac County, Croatia

and energy-efficient systems. Tourism is also managed sustainably. Karlovac is the second most visited continental region in Croatia, after Zagreb, thanks to our four rivers, eco-tourism and outdoor recreation. Instead of large hotels, we promote small eco-friendly campsites and boutique accommodations, which attract visitors seeking sustainable tourism experiences. We also successfully secured long-term protection for the Mrežnica River, ensuring its pristine environment is preserved for future generations.

How is Karlovac County working to retain residents?

The labor market drives mobility, so our focus is on making Karlovac County an attractive place to live and work. One key issue is childcare access. In 2017, only five out of 17 municipalities had kindergartens. Today, every municipality provides some form of preschool education, either through dedicated facilities or repurposed school classrooms. We have also introduced housing incentives for young families, helping over 50 households buy or build homes in just four years. These efforts, combined with job stability and quality infrastructure, have encouraged more families to settle in the county.

What are the biggest German investments in Karlovac County?

One of the most valuable German investors is Wienerberger, which acquired the former Ilovac brick factory and continues to expand. They are now investing in eco-friendly building materials, such as sawdust-infused bricks that require less insulation and lower energy costs. Karlovac County is also seeing increased investment in tourism infrastructure, including a new autodrome in Slunj, which will host racing events, driver training and high-end tourism experiences. With growing investor confidence, strong infrastructure and a skilled workforce, we are building a prosperous and sustainable future for Karlovac County.■



Slunj



www.visitkarlovacounty.hr



Slavonski Brod is a city that seamlessly blends its deep historical roots with a dynamic cultural scene, making it an attractive destination for visitors. Positioned on the banks of the Sava River, the city offers a wealth of experiences that cater to history enthusiasts, music lovers and those looking for modern attractions.

One of the most iconic landmarks in the city is the Brod Fortress, an 18th-century Baroque stronghold constructed during the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Designed as a defensive structure against Ottoman invasions, the fortress remains well-preserved, offering visitors a glimpse into the city's strategic importance in past centuries. Today, the site not only stands as a historical monument but also serves as a cultural venue, hosting exhibitions, events and educational programs that connect the past with the present.

Beyond its historical charm, Slavonski Brod is home to contemporary attractions that enhance its cultural appeal. The House of Tambura pays tribute to the tambura, a traditional stringed instrument. Meanwhile, the city's observatory invites astronomy enthusiasts to explore the wonders of the cosmos, offering a blend of science and education. For those drawn to the arts, Galerija Ružić provides a cultural counterpoint, showcasing an collection of modern and contemporary

MIRKO DUSPARA, Mayor

“*Slavonija Fest CMC 200 is set to ignite the city with music & energy.*”



Slavonija Fest

Marina Pesić

SLAVONSKI BROD: WHERE HISTORY CULTURE & MUSIC COLLIDE

Croatian works while honoring the legacy of sculptor Branko Ružić and other notable artists.

The city's cultural vibrancy is best exemplified by its annual events, which bring both locals and tourists together. Among the most anticipated is Slavonija Fest CMC 200, a major rock festival held the last weekend of August. As one of the largest regional music festivals, it attracts a diverse audience, featuring performances from renowned artists alongside a variety of programs. This high-energy event transforms the city into a lively hub of entertainment, reinforcing Slavonski Brod's reputation as a cultural hotspot.

Hospitality and accommodation standards have also seen significant improvement in recent years. In recognition of outstanding service and quality, eight

local establishments have been awarded the "Dobar gazda" quality label, ensuring that visitors receive top-tier accommodations during their stay. This initiative reflects the city's dedication to creating a welcoming and comfortable environment for tourists, further enhancing its appeal as a travel destination.

The steady growth in tourism is backed by strategic initiatives to enrich visitor experiences through diverse offerings and high-quality services. Investments in infrastructure, cultural programming and business-friendly policies have played a key role in positioning Slavonski Brod as a rising star in Croatian tourism. With its blend of history, culture and modern attractions, the city continues to captivate those who seek an authentic and engaging destination.■



“*We are building a future where economic growth, sustainability & quality of life go hand in hand.*”

GROWTH & SUSTAINABILITY

What makes Slavonski Brod an attractive city for investors?

Slavonski Brod is the second-largest city in Slavonia, strategically positioned on the Sava River, just 200 km from Zagreb, Sarajevo, and Belgrade. It is well-connected by highways and railways, with a navigable river and a developed port. The city has a long-standing tradition in the metal industry, with the Đuro Đaković industrial zone employing around 6,000 workers. We also offer three business zones, including the Western Zone, with 92 hectares ready for investors. Foreign interest, particularly from Germany, has been increasing. The city provides a skilled workforce through strong technical schools and the Faculty of Mechanical Engineering, which has a 60-year history. Recent investments include Krempel, a German company operating in multiple countries.

How does the city support business development & prevent brain-drain?

For over 20 years, Slavonski Brod has provided incentives to investors, waiving municipal fees and offering long-term lease options instead of requiring immediate land purchases. For example, businesses can lease land for as little as 170 euros per month instead of paying hundreds of thousands upfront.

MIRKO DUSPARA

Mayor, Slavonski Brod, Croatia

We focus on keeping young professionals by providing affordable housing—families can rent apartments for ten years and later purchase them at a reduced cost. The city also gives financial support for newborns, free kindergarten for all children and assistance in obtaining housing. These measures have helped attract young families, including returnees from Germany. Employment has grown significantly, with over 3,000 new jobs in the past few years and the city now has around 28,000 employed residents.

What sustainability initiatives have you implemented?

We have invested in environmental projects, such as extensive tree planting and the expansion of cycling paths, which now cover over 70 kilometers. The city provides free public transport to reduce emissions. A major initiative is the development of a botanical garden in the Brod Fortress, one of our largest investments in 30-40 years. We are also exploring geothermal energy sources to heat public buildings sustainably, with three locations identified for potential development. Additionally, we subsidize solar panel installations and incentivize switching from solid fuels to cleaner energy sources. A new project will harness heat from wastewater for city heating, aligning with EU carbon reduction targets.

What can visitors experience in Slavonski Brod?

Slavonski Brod has won multiple awards for its urban beauty. The city features Croatia's largest town square, a scenic river promenade and the unique splavari—floating houses on the Sava River. The Poloj beach, ranked the fourth-best in Croatia, is a top attraction. Cultural highlights include the Brod Fortress, the House of Ivana Brlić-Mažuranić and the Dragutin Tadijanović Memorial House. The city hosts several festivals, including the CMC music festival, wine and beer festivals and a food festival. For dining, traditional Slavonian cuisine can be enjoyed at local restaurants, while Kuća Piva offers a wide selection of beers, including over 1,000 varieties. Whether for business, tourism or quality of life, Slavonski Brod has a lot to offer.■



Wine Days

Dani Vina 2024



IVICA KIRIN
Mayor, Virovitica, Croatia

“Our vision is to make the city a key hub for business, innovation & quality of life.”

Located near key transport routes, including the D2 and D5 highways, with future rail and river shipping integration, Virovitica is strengthening its appeal for export-oriented industries. Investments in geothermal energy infrastructure are further expanding opportunities for sustainable industrial production and year-round greenhouse farming. By fostering a business-friendly environment and positioning itself as a center for innovation, this evolving destination is paving the way for a sustainable economic future.

The city's cultural heritage remains a cornerstone of its identity. Home to Pejačević Castle, an 18th-century Baroque masterpiece, this historic town preserves and promotes its landmarks through cultural events and festivals that draw visitors from across the region. These initiatives not only celebrate local history but also boost tourism, contributing to economic vitality. By intertwining heritage preservation with tourism development, Virovitica offers an authentic experience that honors its past while embracing the future.

Virovitica's transformation goes beyond tourism, striving for a balanced, sustainable city where tradition meets progress. Through innovative waste management, education investment and strategic planning, it serves as a model for integrating heritage with modern innovation. ■



IVICA KIRIN
Mayor, Virovitica, Croatia

“Our geothermal & solar potential is shaping the city into a leader in sustainable energy.”

travel times between Virovitica and Zagreb to under two hours. The Mega Zone will soon have direct access to national roads, rail, and a future Drava River waterway, strengthening its appeal to logistics and industrial investors.

How is Virovitica integrating sustainability & innovation into its development?

The city has enormous geothermal and solar potential, and we are committed to renewable energy. During hydrocarbon exploration, we discovered hot water at 200°C, which presents a major opportunity for geothermal power generation. Additionally, water sources at 65-72°C can be used for greenhouse heating, supporting agriculture year-round. Our technology hubs—including the Pannonian Wood Competence Center and the IT Center for Smart Agriculture—focus on research, sustainability and high-tech solutions. The city is also expanding its cycling and eco-tourism infrastructure, ensuring that development balances economic progress with environmental responsibility.

What makes the city an attractive destination for visitors & new residents?

Virovitica is a city where history, culture and modern opportunities come together. The Pejačević Castle and City Museum showcase our rich heritage, while the Drava River and Papuk Nature Park provide endless outdoor adventures. We host over 200 annual events, including Viroexpo, one of Croatia's top business fairs, and the Virovitica Theatre Festival. With new hotels, agritourism initiatives and major connectivity improvements, we are attracting more tourists and offering a high quality of life for those looking to call it home. As we continue to grow, our vision is clear—Virovitica is becoming a thriving center of investment, innovation and sustainable living. ■

A CITY ON THE RISE

What key initiatives are shaping the city's future?

Virovitica is undergoing a transformation driven by strategic investments in infrastructure, business and sustainability. Our entrepreneurial zones are expanding, with the Mega Entrepreneurial Zone—the largest in Croatia—covering 360 hectares. This zone has been declared a strategic national asset, attracting major investors with its direct access to key roadways and future rail and waterway connections. The city also actively supports investors through free assistance in securing EU and national funding, ensuring seamless project implementation.

How is the city improving transport & infrastructure to enhance connectivity?

We are investing in major road and rail projects that will transform Virovitica into a key regional hub. The D12 expressway, set for completion by 2027-2028, will cut travel time to Zagreb to under an hour, boosting economic opportunities. The Podravska Expressway will link Virovitica to Osijek and Slovenia, while the D5 corridor will connect us directly to Hungary and Bosnia. Rail modernization is also a priority, with high-speed battery-powered trains reducing



VIROVITICA: REDEFINING GROWTH & SUSTAINABILITY

Virovitica is undergoing a remarkable transformation, positioning itself as a beacon of sustainable development and innovation. Historically significant and strategically located, this regional hub is blending its rich past with forward-thinking initiatives to foster economic growth and environmental stewardship.

A pivotal stride in its sustainability journey is the introduction of Croatia's only mobile plant for processing construction and bulky municipal waste. Operated by Flora VTC, this €930,000 project, co-funded by the EU, addresses long-standing challenges in waste disposal. The mobile nature of the plant allows for on-site waste processing, significantly reducing environmental impact and promoting efficient resource utilization. This initiative not only exemplifies the municipality's commitment to environmental respon-

sibility but also sets a precedent for other regions grappling with similar waste management issues.

Virovitica is also emerging as a key investment hub, offering strategic advantages across multiple sectors, including manufacturing, logistics, agribusiness and green energy. The city's entrepreneurial zones provide investment-ready land at highly competitive prices, with plots available for as low as €0.13 per square meter for manufacturing activities. Investors benefit from tax relief, up to 45% return on investment costs and exemptions from utility contributions for large-scale projects creating 50 or more jobs. The local government also facilitates fast-tracked permits and expert support in securing national and EU grants, ensuring a smooth investment process.

DISCOVER THE HEART OF GREEN CROATIA

www.virovitica.hr

Virovitica: A City With A Vision



VUKOVAR: SHAPING THE FUTURE

A city with a storied past, this Danube-side hub is undergoing a remarkable transformation, intertwining its rich heritage with forward-looking initiatives. Once known primarily for its historical significance, it is now emerging as a symbol of cultural revival and sustainable development.

Central to this renaissance is a commitment to preserving and celebrating cultural identity. The Municipal Museum, housed in the restored Eltz Castle, stands as a testament to this dedication. Showcasing artifacts from prehistory to modern times, it also serves as a cultural center, earning the prestigious European Silletto Award in 2016 for its role in revitalizing the community.

Complementing these efforts is the Vučedol Culture Museum. Situated near the Danube River, the museum offers an immersive experience into the Vučedol civilization, utilizing state-of-the-art tech-

nology to engage visitors. Its innovative approach was recognized in 2022 when it received the European “Destination of Sustainable Cultural Tourism” award.

The city’s cultural vibrancy is further amplified by a series of annual events that draw both locals and tourists. The Vukovar Film Festival, unique for being held on the Danube, promotes filmmakers from the region and contributes to the area’s cultural restoration. Likewise, the Vukovar ‘Svi zajedno Hrvatsko Naj’ Festival celebrates the region’s rich cultural heritage, bringing together traditional music, dance and gastronomy—creating a vibrant and immersive experience for visitors.

In tandem with cultural initiatives, significant strides are being made in economic development. Entrepreneurial zones, such as the Vukovar Business Zone, provide investment-ready land with competitive incentives. These areas are strategi-

IVAN PENAVA
Mayor, Vukovar, Croatia

“Vukovar is Croatia’s top river cruise destination, with over 54,000 visitors in 2024.”

cally designed to attract businesses across sectors like advanced manufacturing, logistics, agribusiness and green energy. Investors benefit from tax reliefs, expedited permits and access to national and EU grants, fostering a dynamic business environment.

Tourism also plays a pivotal role in the city’s resurgence. Its picturesque location along the Danube offers untapped potential for river-based tourism, with plans for a new marina to further enhance its appeal. This initiative aims to boost local businesses and provide visitors with unique experiences blending natural beauty with cultural richness.

Beyond tourism and investment, key infrastructure projects are improving overall quality of life. Upgrades to water and sewer systems, alongside the expansion of green spaces like Adica Forest Park, reflect a strong commitment to sustainable urban development. These improvements not only enhance livability but also make the area an increasingly attractive destination for new residents and investors alike.

As it continues to evolve, this resilient city stands as a model for how a place can honor its past while embracing the future. Through a blend of cultural preservation, economic innovation and infrastructural development, it is crafting a narrative of renewal. ■

QA



“Schengen integration is driving foreign investment, with Austrian & German companies recognizing Vukovar’s skilled workforce.”

A VISION FOR PROGRESS

What is the history & significance of Vukovar?

We are a city with a deep historical and cultural legacy. It was the second city in Croatia to receive free royal status in 1231, reflecting its long-standing importance. Positioned on the Danube River, it has always been a crucial economic and trade center. Before the war, Vukovar was one of the wealthiest municipalities in the former Yugoslavia, with a per capita GDP exceeding the Croatian average. While the war disrupted its industrial base, today the city is building a more resilient economy, focusing on small and medium-sized enterprises that can better adapt to modern market demands.

What steps has the city taken to attract investment & create jobs?

Over the past 11 years, we have worked to revitalize Vukovar’s economy by making it an attractive destination for investors. One of our biggest achievements was lobbying for amendments to the Vukovar Law, allowing businesses here to receive a 50% reimbursement on health and pension contributions, significantly lowering labor costs. Through EU funding, we have built entrepreneurial incubators and subsidized production facilities, offering companies reduced rental rates. We have also expanded economic zones, with a 35-hectare developed site

IVAN PENAVA
Mayor, Vukovar, Croatia

and an additional 76-hectare zone, ensuring ample space for businesses to grow.

What infrastructure projects are shaping the city’s future?

One of the most transformative projects was the Vukovar Water and Sewer Project, a major EU-funded upgrade ensuring modernized water supply and waste management. Our waste system has been ahead of its time—while cities like Zagreb are just now implementing semi-underground containers, Vukovar has had them for six to seven years, improving sanitation and efficiency. The city has also undergone a massive road and public space revitalization, including expanded pedestrian promenades along the Danube and Vuka rivers and new green spaces in Adica Forest Park. Looking ahead, one of our most ambitious projects is a €10-hectare expansion along the Danube, including a 700-meter breakwater and a new marina, which will redefine the city’s waterfront and boost tourism.

How is Vukovar strengthening its position as a tourist destination?

The city has undergone a major tourism transformation over the past decade. We are now the most visited river cruise destination in Croatia, welcoming over 54,000 tourists by ship in 2024, a number comparable to continental cities like Zagreb. Our top attractions include Eltz Castle, the Memorial Center of the Homeland War, the Vučedol Archaeological Museum and the Vukovar Water Tower, which alone draws 120,000 visitors annually. In addition to historical sites, we are developing adventure tourism, with an elevated boardwalk through Adica Forest Park, the city’s first 500-meter zipline, an adrenaline park and a 20-meter outdoor climbing wall—the first of its kind in Croatia and this part of Europe. Visitors can now spend two to three days in Vukovar, enjoying a mix of history, culture and outdoor adventure, making the city a must-visit destination. ■

M. Turkalj



Situated in the heart of Croatia, this city blends its historical heritage with forward-thinking initiatives, positioning itself as a beacon of progress and sustainability in the region. Founded in 1756 by decree of Empress Maria Theresa, it was originally established as a military stronghold to defend the Habsburg Empire's frontiers. Despite its relatively recent inception, the city has cultivated a vibrant cultural and artistic scene. The influence of the Austro-Hungarian architectural style remains evident in the city center, where symmetrical streets and historic buildings offer a glimpse into the past.

In recent years, local leaders have embarked on ambitious projects to bolster the economic landscape and promote sustainability. A landmark initiative is the Terme Bjelovar complex, a €41.5 million investment set to become one of Croatia's largest thermal spas. Slated for completion by spring 2026, the facility will feature six pools, including an Olympic-sized pool, and will harness geothermal energy for complete energy self-sufficiency. This project not only aims to boost tourism but also underscores the city's commitment to renewable energy solutions.

Complementing this is the planned construction of a new football stadium, expected to commence in autumn 2025. De-

DARIO HREBAK, Mayor

“The new spa complex will boost tourism, drawing visitors seeking relaxation, wellness & nature.”



BJELOVAR: A CENTER FOR PROGRESS

signed to accommodate 3,800 spectators, the €8 million facility will meet top league standards and include Croatia's first indoor shooting range beneath its stands. This innovative addition reflects the municipality's recognition of local sports talents, inspired by the achievements of Olympic medalist Miran Maričić. Often referred to as the “City of Cheese,” the area celebrates a centuries-old tradition of cheese production. Its multicultural fabric is evident, with 21 national minorities contributing to a diverse cultural tapestry. Throughout the year, numerous events, including music, theater and film festivals, enrich the cultural life of residents and visitors alike. Nature enthusiasts are drawn to the gentle landscapes of the Bilogora hills, which offer opportunities for cycling, hiking and horseback riding. The region's inclusion in the Natura 2000 network highlights its

ecological significance and commitment to preserving biodiversity.

Under the leadership of Mayor Dario Hrebak, local governance has prioritized transparency and efficiency. The city boasts one of the most modern waste management systems in Croatia and has implemented digital platforms to enhance public access to information. These efforts have not only improved public trust but have also created a conducive environment for business and innovation.

As development continues, strategic investments in infrastructure, culture and sustainability position this urban hub as a dynamic place with a promising future. Balancing respect for its historical roots with a clear vision for progress, it exemplifies the potential of regional cities to drive meaningful change and development. ■



DARIO HREBAK

Mayor, Bjelovar, Croatia

“We were pioneers in digital governance. Citizens can see exactly how every euro is spent.”

TRANSPARENCY DRIVES GROWTH

What makes Bjelovar unique?

While it may not have a centuries-old tradition like some other Croatian cities, we take pride in our rich history of achievements. Our geographical position between Zagreb and Osijek has always made us an important regional center. We are known for success in sports—Bjelovar is the only Croatian city besides Zagreb to have won a European handball championship. Additionally, we have a strong cultural heritage, producing renowned artists such as Vojin Bakić, Edo Murtić and Ivo Friščić. Our focus is on growth, innovation and improving the quality of life for our citizens.

What major infrastructure projects are underway?

One of the most important projects is the expressway, which is set to open in early 2026. This road will significantly improve connectivity, making the city more attractive for businesses and investors. Bjelovar is also home to a 150-hectare industrial zone, offering the lowest taxes in Croatia, making it an ideal destination for new businesses. We have also invested in geothermal energy, drilling a well at 1,300 meters with water at

80°C, which will be used to heat industrial plants, businesses and homes. Two more wells are planned, which will make Bjelovar the first Croatian city to implement district heating using renewable geothermal energy.

How is Bjelovar leading in transparency & digitalization?

We have been pioneers in transparency—every city transaction, from €1 to millions, is available online, ensuring complete accountability. Bjelovar is also one of the few fully digitalized cities in Croatia, with an efficient administration that processes building permits in under three weeks. Our city has been ranked in the top 10% for securing EU funds for seven consecutive years, with €250 million in active projects. In the IT sector, we have expanded from 150 jobs to over 700 in just seven years, and we offer a unique tax-free model, providing free office space and incentives for startups. Additionally, we are building a €14 million digital innovation hub, offering 5,000 square meters of office space for young entrepreneurs, especially those graduating from Bjelovar University, where 95% of students find a job within three months of graduation.

What is the city's vision for tourism & quality of life?

Unlike heavily commercialized tourist destinations, Bjelovar offers untouched nature, peace and a slower pace of life. In recent years, over 30 countryside villas with pools have been built in Bilogora, preserving the landscape while offering unique retreats. Our biggest upcoming project is a thermal spa and wellness center, which will include an Olympic-sized swimming pool for international water polo and swimming competitions. Additionally, Bjelovar is one of the most affordable places to live in Croatia. We are also constructing a new school for 700 students and a gymnastics center, making us a leader in education and youth development. ■



BJELOVAR Where Tradition Meets Innovation





KUTINA: STRIKING THE PERFECT BALANCE

Located between Zagreb's bustling metropolitan core and the fertile lowlands of the Lonjsko Polje Nature Park, the Croatian town of Kutina is an unexpected synthesis of industrial ambition and ecological preservation. At its heart, Kutina is a city that defies a singular definition. It is a stronghold of industry, home to Petrokemija, a petrochemical giant that has anchored the local economy for decades. But it is also a gateway to one of Europe's largest protected wetlands, the Lonjsko Polje Nature Park, where migratory birds rest and traditional wooden houses line the floodplains.

The indigenous Škrlet grape, in particular, has become a symbol of the region's unique character. Unlike the more internationally recognized Croatian wines of Istria or Dalmatia, Moslavina's offerings

remain largely undiscovered by the global market. But this may not be the case for much longer. With increasing investment in local wineries and the rise of agritourism, the area is positioning itself as a premier destination for wine lovers.

Despite its deep agricultural roots, Kutina has long been defined by industry. The town's transformation began in earnest in the mid-20th century when oil and gas refining became key drivers of economic expansion. The establishment of industrial zones and manufacturing facilities led to an influx of workers, reshaping the city's demographic and social landscape. The local government has taken a proactive stance, establishing Croatia's first smart business zone to attract new investment while prioritizing efficiency and eco-conscious development. The

IVANA GRDIĆ
Director, Tourist Board, Kutina

“The Moslavina Wine Road showcases scenic beauty, rich winemaking tradition & high-quality wines, highlighting the region's potential.”

incentives are attractive: low-cost land, streamlined permitting processes and tax breaks for entrepreneurs.

Kutina is also a city deeply connected to its cultural heritage. Annual festivals celebrate the region's winemaking tradition and historic sites—such as the 18th-century Church of St. Mary of the Snows—remind visitors of Kutina's long history as a crossroads of Central European and Balkan influences. The town's proximity to major transportation routes makes it an attractive location for new businesses, but it also means that Kutina must balance growth with livability. To that end, the city has invested in public infrastructure, including schools, childcare facilities and cultural programs aimed at retaining young professionals.

In an era where cities must continually reinvent themselves to remain viable, Kutina offers a compelling case study: a town striving to preserve its natural heritage while embracing the demands of a competitive global economy. It is a place of contradictions, of harmony, of reinvention. And if the right balance can be struck, it may soon emerge as one of Croatia's most compelling destinations—not just for tourists, but for those looking to invest in a future built on both resilience and respect for the past. ■



“Kutina is a city embraced by Lonjsko Polje & vineyard hills, where industry & nature coexist in harmony.”

DIVERSE IN NATURE

Can you introduce us to the city of Kutina?

Our city is located in central Croatia, just 70 kilometers from Zagreb, and is part of the Sisak-Moslavina County and the largest urban center of the Moslavina region. This area blends industrial and economic activity with stunning natural beauty. Kutina's slogan, “Embraced by Lonjsko Polje and Vineyards”, captures its essence perfectly. The city was first mentioned in historical records in 1256, and over the centuries, Kutina has evolved from an agricultural settlement into an important industrial hub.

What can visitors expect from the local culinary & wine scene?

Moslavina is a celebrated wine-making region, most famous for its indigenous white grape variety, Škrlet. This wine holds a unique distinction—it was the first Croatian variety to be officially recognized with certified clones by the Croatian Center for Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs. Beyond wine, Moslavina's culinary offerings feature traditional specialties such as “šaran na rašljama” (carp grilled over an open fire), a must-try for visitors. The combination of exceptional wines, authentic local dishes and Kutina's proximity to major transport routes makes it an emerging destination for gastronomy and wine tourism.

ZLATKO BABIĆ
Mayor, Kutina, Croatia

What makes Lonjsko Polje a special natural attraction?

Lonjsko Polje is one of the largest protected wetland areas in Croatia and the entire Danube basin, and it ranks among the world's most threatened wetland ecosystems. Its floodplain meadows and diverse habitats support an extraordinary array of plant and animal life, including many endangered species. Birdwatchers flock to the park to observe rare species in their natural habitat. Visitors can also see indigenous domestic breeds such as the Croatian Posavac horse, Turopolje pig and Posavina goose. Guided educational programs cater to both children and adults, offering an immersive experience in this biodiverse haven. The park's pristine landscapes make it an unmissable destination for nature enthusiasts.

How is Kutina developing as an industrial & economic hub?

Our city is deeply invested in fostering an environment conducive to business growth. We have prioritized the development of business infrastructure, particularly for small and medium-sized enterprises. The establishment of a business incubator has already supported nearly 30 young entrepreneurs, while fully equipped business zones offer investors competitively priced land at just €4 per square meter. Additionally, companies operating within these zones benefit from a complete exemption from municipal contributions and a five-year waiver on municipal fees. Kutina also actively supports new businesses with direct financial incentives, including grants of up to €2,500 for tourism infrastructure investments and subsidies for hiring employees, ranging from €1,000 to €2,000 per person. To further encourage economic expansion, the city has partnered with the county to offer subsidized credit lines to small and medium-sized enterprises, with interest rates as low as 1%. ■

Eco-trails of Lonjsko Polje Nature Park



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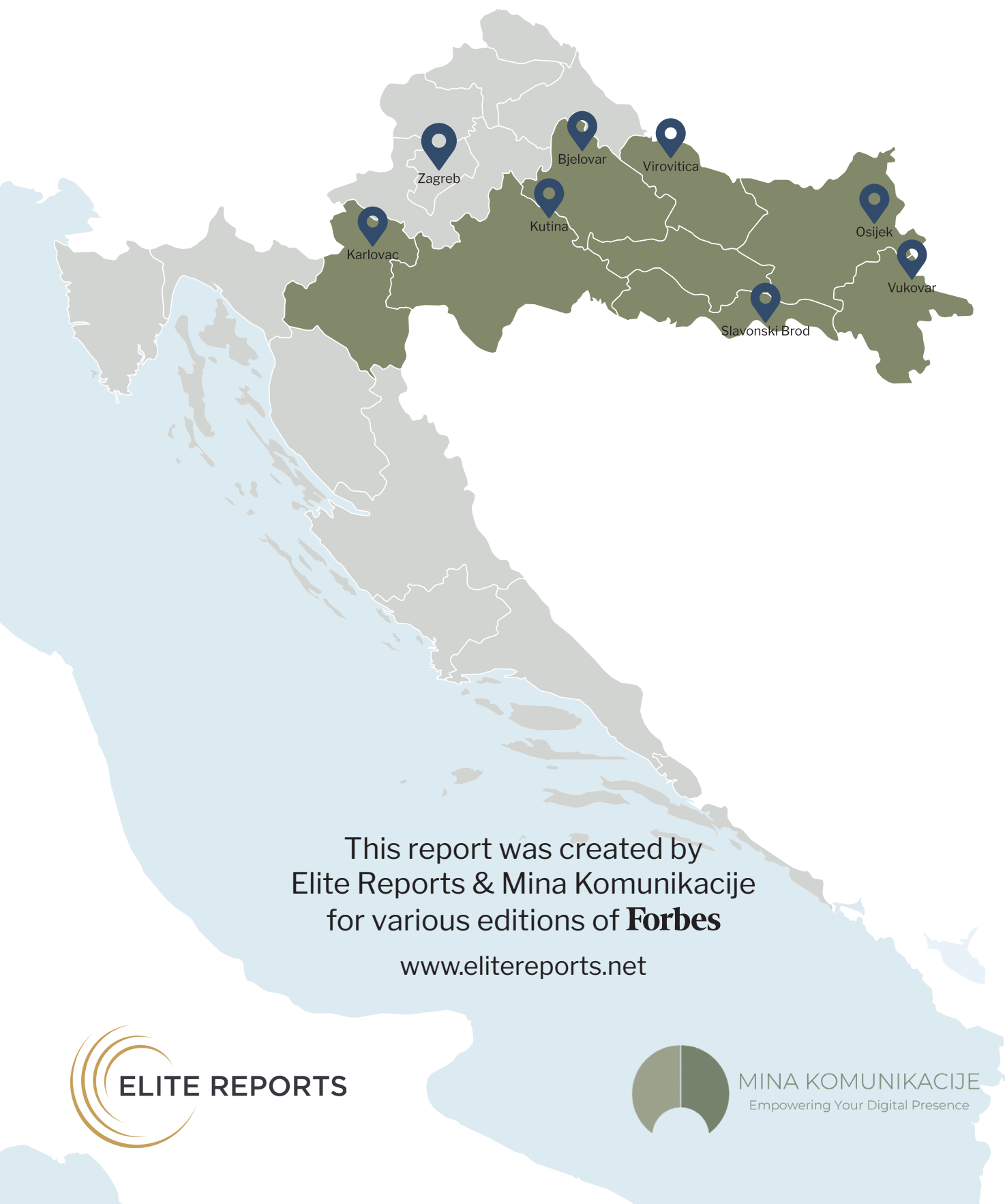
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