

# LOCAL SKILLS MATTER

## SERBIA



# Entrepreneurial Communities:

## Sparking change in communities in the ETF partner countries



**The Serbian Entrepreneurial Community is an example of the power of a grass-roots initiative to build trust and, by building a complex network of horizontal and vertical relations, encourage collaboration and break administrative boundaries in a push to implement adult education.**

**The partnership in Serbia that resulted has four main actors:**

- Radojicic farm (lead)
- Mionica Municipality
- Kreativa (non-governmental organisation)
- Mionica High School

Serbia struggles with high youth unemployment, significant disparities between regional labour markets, low workforce mobility and an exodus of qualified workforce. The participation of women in the labour market is significantly below that of men. The Serbian Entrepreneurial Community is located in the town and municipality of Mionica, which have populations of 1,500 and 14,000 respectively. The economy of Mionica is tourism-led, targeting mainly weekend and holiday season visitors from the capital Belgrade. Mionica has high unemployment and women carry the bulk of the burden as many marry young, never complete their secondary education and thus struggle to enter the labour market.

The story of the Serbian Entrepreneurial Community began with an opportunity to obtain funding for a local development project aimed at children and youth. In order to qualify for the funding, a partnership consisting of local public and private actors was formed. The funding made possible the realisation of a micro-project for children's recreation, the Magical Village which consists of training and employing a small number of young women for seasonal jobs. In addition, the Magical Village was made available for the local secondary VET provider as a place for practical training.

The modest start by the Serbian Entrepreneurial Community soon grew into something much more meaningful as the key person who sparked the partnership set out to help the women working in the Magical Village to reach their goal - completing their education in a secondary vocational school. Realising that this was already provided for in the National Education Strategy, project founder Željana Radojicic Lukic set out to connect the local demand for adult secondary VET to those who could supply it: local, regional, and national government; the local VET school; and academic researchers.

In Mionica the municipality has seen the capability and the value-added of local partnerships in boosting limited public resources by linking actors and binding them into collective action. The experience is now sparking cross-regional learning and partnerships as the municipality is eager to connect to other municipalities and share the lessons learnt. In parallel, the as yet imperfect trickling of information and knowledge from the municipality to the regional and national level is beginning to inform public investment in adult learning.

# With a little magic: Learning and employment in Serbia's rural communities



**Project:**

*Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet  
consectetuer adipiscing elit sed  
diam nonummy nibh euismod.*



**The Serbian Entrepreneurial Community was established in 2012 under the lead of a local farmer and teacher in order to qualify for donor funding. The partnership brings together the local authority, VET provider, and a non-governmental organisation. The initial focus on creative learning for children in the Magical Village, where women receive training and could obtain seasonal employment, soon grew into a collective effort to activate provision of adult secondary VET in Mionica.**

In 2010 primary school teacher and small farm owner Željana Radojicic Lukic founded Kreativa as a network for local teachers and policy makers concerned with the development of education in the Mionica region. Kreativa soon entered into partnership with Mionica High School, a vocationally-oriented high school with strong links to the hospitality and tourist trades. The initial motivation was to participate in a bid for UNICEF project funding, but the long-term plan was to trial a new type of educational tourism which involves adapting the existing infrastructure within the school system to create 'educational tourism' destinations for visiting children and families.

Radojicic Lukic set up a proof-of-concept project on her own farmland called the Magical Village, an outdoor play-and-learning centre with an experiential curriculum of agricultural and environmental themes. From the beginning Kreativa had the backing of the Education Forum, an influential policy networking group, and sought to attract the active participation of national and municipal government.

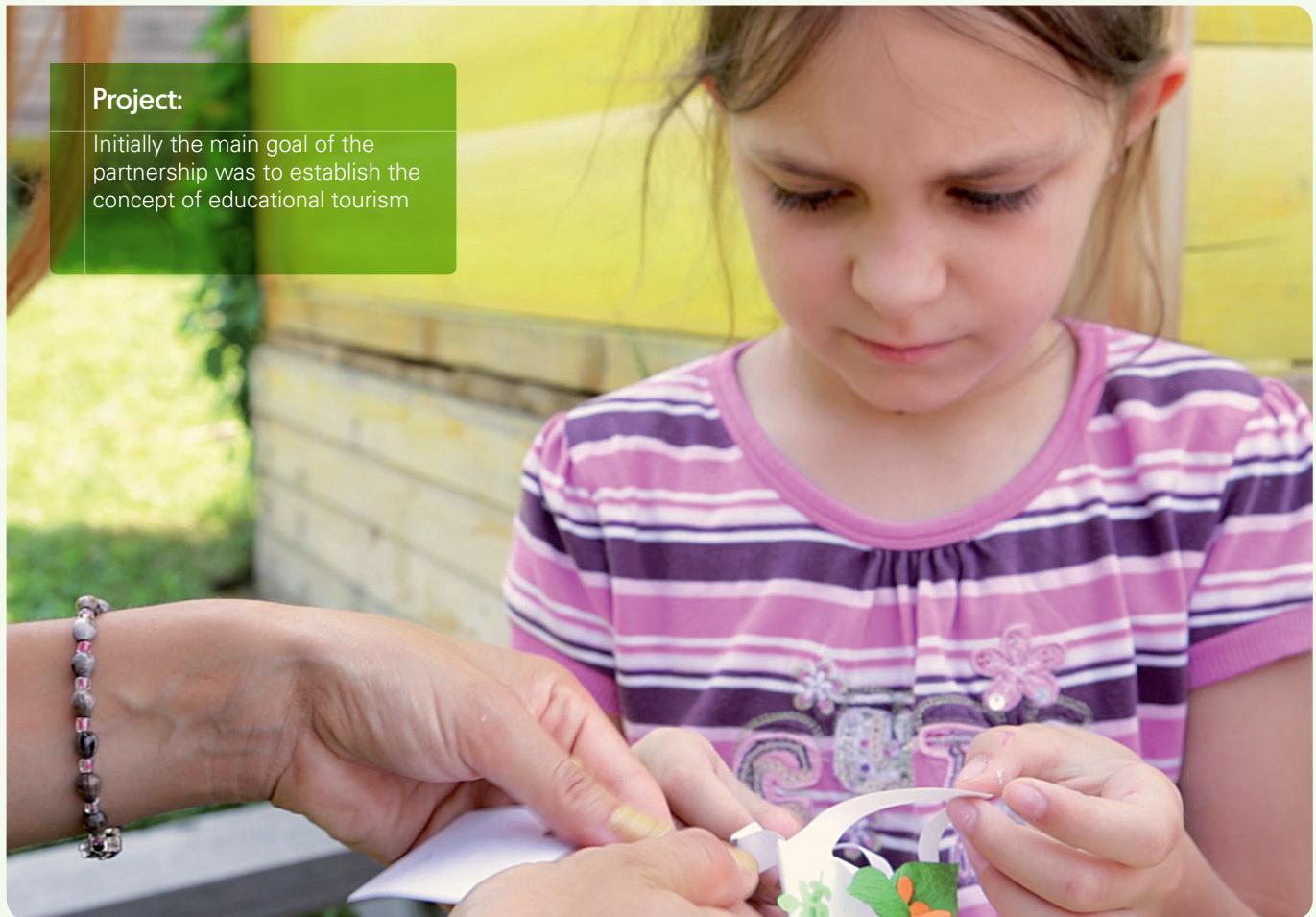
"Our goal is that, by cooperating with local authorities and the Ministry of Education, we can change the law so that local partnerships are permitted to implement formal education for young rural women who haven't finished high school," says Željana Radojicic Lukic. "When we started this project we weren't recognised by the local authorities as an important factor for tourism or education, but from our activities they realized that we are really innovative and that we are increasing tourism in the area."

Mionica is known as one of the most beautiful regions in Serbia, and with its rich natural resources has a promising economic base. Yet it faces significant socio-economic challenges. The municipality is under-developed and has limited resources, asserts Dragan Gavrilović, president of the municipal government. "Our budget of 300m Dinars (€2.5m) is insufficient for the development of life here. We need help from the Republic and also from European Union funds to make the natural treasures that we have here available

to tourists, not only from Serbia, but foreign tourists as well. Our partnership with Kreativa and the Magical Village, and their contribution to the quality of life in Mionica, is very important to us in terms of the economic development of the municipality."

### Creative thinking

In return the municipality supports Kreativa with modest donations and provides logistical capability and other help wherever possible. Kreativa's impact is very much in line with the economic goals of the municipality, particularly in attracting tourists to the Magical Village, as Gavrilović notes. "When tourists come to the Magical Village they visit the whole municipality, they stay in local hotels, eat in local restaurants, and in that way contribute to the local economy."





Initially the main goal of the partnership was to establish the concept of educational tourism, in which children from bigger towns and cities gain first-hand knowledge of nature through the meadows, orchards, and rivers for which Mionica is famous. Having kept the partnership together after the initial UNICEF process, the Kreativa team also wanted to find a way of helping young women from rural communities who struggled to access the labour market. In the Magical Village the educational content is based on the seasonal nature of agricultural activity, and each season is represented by a character known as a 'Magic Fairy', who leads the children through related games and study activities. They realised that this presented an opportunity to offer training to local women to run the workshops. It was not hard to find young women locally who knew how village agricultural processes are typically performed, but they needed to be professionally trained to transmit that knowledge to children. Kreativa founded an informal training programme which enabled the women to work in the Magical Village.

One of these women, Violetta Trisić, has worked at the Magical Village since it started. After a few months of general administrative duties, she took on the role of a Magic Fairy, as she was keen to work directly with children. "The Magic Fairy does creative work with the children, we run workshops where children learn about the seasons in a fun and interactive way. Before I started working at the Magical Village I didn't have a job, I was a housewife, I was at home with my children. I have benefited a lot from working in the Magical Village, I'm more independent and I get a regular salary."

In 2012 Kreativa co-founder Katarina Čarapić was appointed as Principal of Mionica High School. The High School has around 200 students and the curriculum encompasses business studies, hospitality management, traditional cuisine, and has recently added qualifications in environmental tourism. Čarapić is excited by the opportunities afforded by Kreativa in supporting the empowerment of local rural women. "Through the partnership of Mionica High School and Kreativa we want to help young women from villages in the municipality to complete their basic education and get into employment. We organize informal training for

### In the picture

Serbia is firmly in the FRAME – an ETF project looking at strategic skills policy development – as it plans for the skills needs of the future. Clear vision is essential, along with the means to build capacity, monitor progress, and cooperate on a regional basis.

**Source:** FRAME Review Of Institutional Arrangements Workshop, [www.etf.europa.eu](http://www.etf.europa.eu)



young rural women that come to Mionica High School where they obtain professional training in organic food production, preparing traditional dishes, and making craft souvenirs."

### It's a kind of magic

The partnership also offers students from Čarapić's school the chance to gain work experience at the Magical Village, during the summer holidays and at special events that Kreativa puts on. They have been able to add professional training for pastry chefs to the High School's curriculum having identified a need through the students' participation in the Magical Village. Čarapić highlights the positive relationship with the local authorities, and would like them to support the opening of a lifelong learning centre, providing vocational education and training for young people and adults, by donating government-owned property that is not currently being used. Čarapić and Željana Radojicic Lukic are working through the Kreativa partnership on legislative change to enable the municipality to do this, and are lobbying national government to change the law to recognize partnership as a mode of governance within the regulations for education and training institutions.

"At the national level our initiative is linked with the Ministry of Education, and now we have their support for this project and it will be covered legally," says Radojicic Lukic, adding that the plan is for the Magical Village concept to be extended to the whole of Serbia. Education Minister Srdjan Verbić is well-placed to understand how the benefits enjoyed by someone like Violetta Trisić could translate to national success, having witnessed it first-hand on a recent visit to the Magical Village.

"The Magical Village and similar initiatives create the possibility of employment at the local level for those people who haven't finished formal education, such as housewives and young people with no degrees, who find it hard to obtain regular jobs. Rural tourism depends on the season, so all the jobs are for a short time, and starting more initiatives like this would make networking possible between these projects, which would allow individuals to move, to get to know different ways of working."



This in turn would help to generate the spirit of social enterprise that is a fundamental objective for the changes Kreativa is seeking to create within the Serbian education and training system. "The biggest challenge facing young people in Serbia is the lack of awareness that they need to do something for themselves," says Minister Verbić. "People still go around asking where they should work instead of what they should do, which is a crucial change in their way of thinking."

### Saving the village

Strengthening the resilience of the whole education system is vital if Serbia is to tackle the trickle of people leaving villages, a trickle that threatens to become a flood. Education Forum member Sofija Pekić Quarrie, Professor of Agriculture and former Dean of the Faculty of Agriculture at the University of Belgrade, has acted as a mentor for Željana Radojicic Lukic and a critical friend for the whole Kreativa project since it began. She makes a stark assessment of what is at stake.



#### Project:

Creating partnerships of primary schools with middle schools, especially agricultural middle schools, can help communities develop the skills and enterprise needed to ensure that agricultural traditions continue

"Serbian villages are dying. Young people are leaving the villages to go to the cities or to go abroad." Pekić Quarrie sees the Magical Village as a good example of the potential for a multi-functional approach in which, in addition to teaching, schools fulfil other functions designed to help communal development. She is an advocate of entrepreneurial skills for all, especially women in traditionally-oriented rural communities who are often encouraged to concentrate on caring responsibilities and do not complete basic education. This is part of the outcome that the Entrepreneurial Community in Mionica is striving for. Creating partnerships of primary schools with middle schools, especially agricultural middle schools, can help communities develop the skills and enterprise needed to ensure that agricultural traditions continue while processes are modernized. This has obvious significance for small villages facing the potential loss

#### Making better links

Connecting vocational schools' programmes and the needs of the local labour market is a link in the chain of social and economic value creation that must not be allowed to weaken. In Serbia, ETF research shows how the connection improves when VET schools are involved in the national strategy.

**Source:** Good Multilevel Governance for Vocational Education and Training, [www.etf.europa.eu](http://www.etf.europa.eu)

of large numbers of young people. "By maintaining the school in the village you basically maintain the village," as Pekić Quarrie puts it.

Minister Verbić believes that initiatives like the Magical Village fit with his government's National Education Strategy by helping to meet the demand for better human capacity development. However, he admits that there are regulatory gaps, and there is a need to make new laws and change others in order to extend the functions that schools can undertake. "The Strategy supports this," he points out, "but at the moment the law is not sufficiently flexible, so the changes need to be made to make it easier and faster for schools to develop offerings like educational tourism."

The ultimate goal is to activate the National Education Strategy as it relates to the offer of adult learning, and the best practice demonstrated by Kreativa and the Magical Village project is sparking cross-regional cooperation, led by the support and advocacy of the President of the Municipality. Meanwhile, national government will continue to watch closely, to see how the initiatives of grass-roots social entrepreneurs like Željana Radojicic Lukic and the Kreativa partnership can drive innovation in policy and practice.

### Two plus two equals one

Helping Serbia create a working group to unify its two current national qualifications frameworks is part of the ETF's ongoing support programme. Two events in 2014 looked at sustainable governance and a viable institutional support structure for the single national qualifications framework.

**Source:** Serbia, [www.etf.europa.eu](http://www.etf.europa.eu)



Education Minister Verbić believes that initiatives like the Magical Village fit with his government's National Education Strategy.



The ETF is an EU agency that helps transition and developing countries to harness the potential of their human capital through the reform of education, training and labour market systems in the context of the EU's external relations policy.

