



Raising Employability of Women
through entrepreneurial Activities
fostering Rural Development

CASE STUDY

ANDREJA BIZJAK
Razpotje turizem d. o. o (enterprise)


INTRODUCTION

Andreja is an energetic young entrepreneur who, together with her life-partner, runs the company Razpotje turizem d. o. o in Logar Valley. Their activity is related to various tourist activities at the Ecotourism House (Eko hiša Na razpotju), which offers accommodation, local cuisine, congress tourism, and wellness. They also organise open days, various education, forest pedagogy, activities in the Fairytales Park, a new holistic approach for tourists.... Their offer is constantly being updated with Andreja's ideas and desire to develop them. She is fully committed to the idea of sustainable tourism, so she strives to develop the energy-efficient guesthouse, using local food, to cooperate with the local community and to produce as little waste as possible. She also dedicates her time to local and family heritage. Among different tourist packages they also offer Easter at the "Eko hiča Na razpotju« where they serve food with Easter traditions typical for Logar valley (they bless the Easter food in the church which is then served at breakfast). In accordance with the recommendations of the Institute for Cultural Heritage, the old hay barn was turned into a space for congresses, lectures and other gatherings. In the forest of fairy tales, among other, the traditional legends can be presented, for example the story about Heathen Maiden, a daughter of a giant.


1. PERSONAL DATA

 **Name:** Andreja Bizjak




 **Age range:** 31-45

 **Education:** Andreja has a Trade academy secondary school diploma. She later decided to retrain for beautician. She also completed an NVQ - a national herbalist vocational qualification. She has passed the exam for specific spa mentor by Sebastina Kneipp methodology (120 years ago Sebastian Kneipp cured with his unique Kneipp spa treatments), which she received in Bad Wörishofen in Germany.



 **Occupation:** Andreja lives and works in the countryside, but she is not occupied with agriculture, she is just involved in rural tourism. She liaises with local farmers who supply local food and with local artisans. Her main business is caring for guests and acting in accordance with permaculture principles. She also offers massage to her guests and organises various animations in the fairy forest, aromatherapy, holistic treatment approach (home made food, recreation and meditation in nature...).

2. FARM PROFILE

-  **Address:** Eko hiša "Na razpotju", Logarska dolaina 14, 3335 Solčava.
-  **Farm Area in ha:** 2ha fairytales park.
-  **Date since when the female entrepreneur owns/rents the farm:** In 2014, she and her husband opened the company Razpotje turizem, d.o.o.

N° of workers on the farms:

	FULL TIME	PART-TIME/SEASONAL	WOMEN
Family members	2	2 (a daughter-student and mother-in-law)	3
Other than family members	1	2-students	2

 **Farm description:** Razpotje turizem Ltd (Crossroads Tourism) company is located in Logar Valley, which is a protected area with a landscape park status. The establishment of the company continues the partner's family tradition of tourism – there used to be hotel, owned by the partner's grandfather, which was burned down during the 2nd WW. Later, partner's aunt rebuild that hotel, where all the partner's family members could worked. His mother later decided to build a home and a guesthouse by herself (in 1998), and after retirement in 2010, she left it to Andreja's partner and their family – this is now a guesthouse Eco-house Na razpotju. The couple did an energy renovation of the guesthouse with EU funds, including the renovation of a roof destroyed by a severe storm. The rehabilitation is directed towards a passive facility which will also help to get Marjetica environmental certification.

Tourism activity is linked to permaculture principles and a holistic approach. They offer a variety of multi-day packages: Natural Energy, Mountain Air and Sun, Wellness and Alps. They also offer accommodation, wellness, various training courses, congress tourism. They educate their guests in sustainable principles, which reflects the interests and tastes of their guests.

A special feature is the fairy-tale forest, which is adapted for people with disabilities and is marked with educational boards. It boasts local stories and world-famous fairy tales, also hosts school groups where they carry out forest pedagogy and groups of people with disabilities ... They cooperate with local artisans, farms and disability associations from which they buy products. Animations in the Forest are carried out in collaboration with the Institute for Genuine Adventures (Zavod za pristna doživetja). A holistic garden is being built around the guesthouse, where, according to permaculture principles, herbs and spices will be grown, and guests will be soothed by "plant music".

 **Website and social networks accounts:** <https://www.logarska-narazpotju.si/slo/paketi>

3. MULTIFUNCTIONALITY / RURAL CULTURAL HERITAGE

Andreja is very involved in the local environment and family tradition. She and her partner continue the family (husband's) tradition of tourism; the first hotel was built in 1930. Cultural heritage is integrated in various ways: food is made according to traditional recipes, the guesthouse is equipped with handicrafts work of villagers (felt wool, wooden statues in a fairytale forest, clay pots...). Tradition can be observed also in using forms like relaxation on hay, herbs used in aromatherapy and using the wild herbs in food preparation. Intangible cultural heritage is also present through traditional stories in the fairytale forest, which has 21 stations. A presenter provides local stories from the Institute for Genuine Adventures, Solčava. The source for the stories is the book Simple stories (Preproste zgodbe)from the Solčava mountains (by Vršnik Joža).

“ I live the countryside and I draw on ideas and energy from it for my entrepreneurial and personal growth. ”



4. CONSIDERATIONS, TRAINING / COMPETENCES INVOLVED

General considerations:

Andreja is a mother of two children and successfully combines family life with work. She is involved in social events through collaborations with: the Rinka Institute, the tourist society, the municipality, schools and she participates in various projects.... She is driven by the desire to constantly educate and improve guest experiences.

She is also a keen entrepreneur, full of new ideas and desires for new knowledge and experience. She is connected with the cultural heritage of Logar Valley and the family tradition of the Plesnik family. In winter, when there is no tourist season, she devotes her time to activities such as: collecting documents for the environmental certificate Marjetica and education.

Her role as an entrepreneur is expressed through her various responsibilities: company procurator, idea leader, organiser of tourist activities, marketing of tourism products, monitoring of tenders and obtaining finances... The challenges she encountered in her entrepreneurial journey are, on the one hand, a professional nature: the introduction of permaculture principles in tourism, the preparation of local dishes, the integration of cultural and natural heritage in tourism, the use of knowledge and skills acquired through formal education as economic and beautician. She is mainly interested in using herbs and healthy lifestyles and therefore she is trying to gain additional knowledge and transfer them to tourists (spa tourism and aromatherapy). On the other hand, empathy is needed to identify the needs of individual guests coming from different international backgrounds.


The main obstacles faced are the bureaucratic nature - obtaining various permits and opinions in various investments and in obtaining certificates.

Business restrictions are often organisational, mainly related to seasonal tourism - in summer there are more individual tourists and in winter more group tourism. The workforce must adapt accordingly.

She is also involved in social life as a member of the Committee on Economy and Tourism in the Municipality of Solčava. She cooperates with the Rinka Center and the LAG of the Upper Savinja and Sale Valley. Andreja also participates in various projects such as an integral tourism product inside which various courses are organised. The Ministry of Economic Development and Technology launched a call in 2017 to 2019 for co-financing the development and promotion of integral products of the tourism economy, which aims to contribute to the competitiveness of tourism for small and medium-sized enterprises. According to this call, an tourism product is a composite or integral tourist product, which in practice means a combination of several products and services designed to meet the needs of tourists when visiting a tourist destination. She also participates in workshops organised by Young Community Mediators led by the Association for the Culture of Relations - SPES.

The reasons for the continuation and expansion of the tourist activity in Logar Valley are: the commitment to tradition, the joy of tourism, the way of life in the countryside and, of course, the source of income. Their guests are those who value ecological orientation and sustainable behavior.

Rural tourism is an industry that offers jobs to women where they can use their experiences from domestic works and additional jobs such as animations or artcarfts, there are also opportunities for new business ideas. According to her, the woman makes a "home" in the tourism industry and provides warmth, homeliness, care for the environment and ambience.

 **Training/Competences (Knowledge, Skills, Attitudes) especially relevant for the process:** Andreja acquired knowledge, skills and competencies for the Eco House procurator from formal education (she completed 2 high school programs: economics and cosmetics technician), her national vocational qualification (NVK) for herbalist and also non-formal education: hydrotherapy tutor by Sebastian Kneippe. She participated in various field trips organised by the Municipality of Solčava and in various workshops and courses related to cultural heritage. In connection with

herbalism, cultural heritage, permaculture and holistic approaches, a great deal of education is being done through literature and online content.

In the near future, she wants to perform aromatherapy and get NPK. A good gift of observation with additional self-education has helped her to put some good practice ideas into business. She speaks good English, German and Croatian, which is essential for working with tourists.

The competencies she boasts are: communicative, good self-image, professionalism, perseverance, creativity, positive attitude, curiosity, empathy for guests.

The knowledge and skills she wants to acquire are professional (aromatherapy, gin making, essential oils), and general, such as foreign peoples habits and culture.

SWOT analysis:



Preserving the countryside, employment opportunities for women and family members, hiring jobs e.g. presenters, educators..., networking with local food suppliers and craftspeople and very important - source of income



Guests expectations are high - meeting guests' desires, full day's work, burnout during the season.



Integrating nature into tourist packages, homemade food, healthy treats, peace, genuine contact with locals, contact with local cultural heritage, sport in nature



Poor recognition of the location, dependence on weather and seasons, natural disasters (storms, closed roads).

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