

## SLOVENIA

# Improve the quality of life in rural areas

### Location

Opatje selo

### Programming period

2007 – 2013

### Axis / Priority

Axis 3 – Quality of life in rural areas and diversification of the rural economy

### Measure

M322 - Village renewal and development

### Funding (EUR)

Total budget 122 147  
EAFRD 43 493  
National/regional 14 498  
Private 64 156

### Project duration

2013 – 2015

### Project promoter

Municipality of Miren –  
Kostanjevica

### Contact

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### Website

[www.opatje-selo.si](http://www.opatje-selo.si)

An renovated traditional house became a multi-purpose public space, offering opportunities for interaction among the members of the local community.

## Summary

Opatje selo is a typical Karst village located in the western part of Slovenia next to the border with Italy. The village has a rich history but it was in decline for many years. Today the village has around 420 people and its population has been growing since 2002. The local community needed a space where its members would be able to interact while maintaining the local traditions.



Support from the Slovenian rural development programme enabled the local community to reconstruct and revitalise a dilapidated building and convert it into a multi-purpose public space. The renovation of the building created spaces where traditional artefacts are displayed and an outdoor area where events can be organised.

## Results

The restored house is now used by local associations and groups. The upper room serves for meetings, exhibitions, lectures and workshops.

The house is annually visited by around 300 people and the number is growing steadily.

The yard in front of the house has become an attractive space for organizing cultural events. Over the last 3 years, the local community, associations and volunteers with the support of municipality have been organising a summer festival, choirs, theatrical plays and other events.

## Lessons & Recommendations

- ❑ Good cooperation between several stakeholders has been vital for the efficient implementation of the project.
- ❑ The municipality opted for a step by step approach in renovating the building. It provided funding and relevant expertise in the management of investment and in accordance with legal requirements.
- ❑ The effective use of the new facilities relies on committed volunteers, whom without their support this revitalisation would not have been possible.

## Context

Opatje selo is a small village in the Municipality of Miren-Kostanjevica, located in the western part of Slovenia next to the border with Italy. During the 1st World War the Battles of Isonzo between Austria-Hungary and Italy took place here. The village has demolished and later restored according to the plans of the famous architect Max Fabiani. After the 2nd World War, Opatje selo became isolated as the borders with Italy were closed. People lost their jobs in Trieste and Gorizia on the Italian side, and many left the village to find work elsewhere. Only after the 1970s when the road infrastructure was improved and new job opportunities arose in the nearby Nova Gorica and Ajdovščina, the out-migration stopped and young families settled in. Today the village has around 420 people and its population has been growing since 2002.

Although many still need to commute daily for work to other towns, many villagers are active in various associations (tourist, sports, cultural and youth, etc.). Some of these associations were recently established while others were set up over 100 years ago. For the leaders of the local community it was very important to keep the community spirit alive and provide inclusion opportunities for all generations. Also, it was needed to safeguard local traditions and the exceptional historical and cultural heritage of the village.

Opatje selo is an example of a typical Karst village. The village centre, surrounded with the church, school, guest house is registered as immovable cultural heritage. The locals proposed to revitalise old ruins into a house of local traditions and the Municipality Miren-Kostanjevica supported the initiative by preparing the project and obtaining support from RDP 2007-2013.

## Objectives

The overall objective of the project was to increase the quality of life of the villagers by contributing to the development of the social capital and protection of the area's cultural heritage. Specific objectives were:

- to reconstruct and revitalise a dilapidated building which is part of the immovable cultural heritage, into a multi-purpose public space available for the activities of local associations and civil groups;
- to set up and display a local collection of artefacts presenting traditional crafts;
- to establish an outdoor space suitable for organising local events.

## Activities

The Municipality of Miren – Kostanjevica started preparing the project documentation in 2011 and obtained the building permit in 2012. The documentation for the investment and application for support from the RDP were submitted in 2013 and approval in August 2013.

Initially the roof and the ceiling above ground floor were removed manually. The initial layout and dimensions of this Mediterranean style building were maintained during the reconstruction. The main building and an extension were built. All doors and windows are wooden and made in accordance with local typology. External stairs leading to the upper floor were put in place and complemented with a typical balcony. In total 87.6 m<sup>2</sup> of new surfaces were constructed, including:

- a multi-purpose room in the ground floor (34 m<sup>2</sup>), where the ethnological collection is placed;
- a multi-purpose room in the upper floor (34 m<sup>2</sup>);
- in the extension part, 9 m<sup>2</sup> are used for storage and two toilettes (10.6 m<sup>2</sup>).

The investment included purchasing chairs and tables and ICT equipment. The narrow belt in front of the house was paved with local stone. The typical crafts in the village were making barrels, stonemasonry and making whips from a tree *Celtis australis*. The artefacts, which are now displayed in the house, have been collected by the locals. An agreement was signed between the local community and the owners of these artefacts in use at the exhibition. The exhibition has been set up by the members of the tourist association in cooperation with the locals. Descriptions of the crafts were prepared by the president of the tourist association, some photos and other materials were provided by the regional museum in Nova Gorica. The municipality acquired an operational permit in March 2015. The House of Opatje selo tradition is now managed by the Local Community.



## Main Results

The restored house is now used by local associations and groups. The upper room serves for meetings, exhibitions, lectures, workshops. An important part of the activities focusses on transferring traditional skills from older to younger generations. The room is regularly used by the tourist association, which contributes to the promotion of the village and provides guidance through the new exhibition in the ground floor.

The house is annually visited by around 300 people (only groups counted). The number is growing steadily as the House is being included in itineraries of different groups of visitors from Slovenia and Italy, that usually come to visit the nearby Pečinka cave, or the Cerje monument. The tourist association is now arranging a new exhibition dedicated to the 1st World War which will be displayed in the nearby rectory.

According to the local community, one of the most important benefits of the project is the possibility to use the yard in front of the house. It has become an attractive space for organizing cultural events. Over the last 3 years, the local community, associations and volunteers with the support of municipality have been organising a summer festival called 'Opajski večeri pod zvezdami' (Opatje evenings under the stars). A range of different outdoor events, ranging from music, choirs, theatre, and other events are organised from May to September. The festival attracts visitors from the village and tourists. The place can accommodate about 200 people and most events are full. What is also important is that the festival is organised completely on a voluntary basis and is very much appreciated by the local population. Most events are of local character, while some have also contributed to create cultural cooperation with other towns across Slovenia.

The project contributed to increased social cohesion of the villagers and triggered the potentials for tourist development and subsequently for the economic development.

## Key lessons

The project arose from concrete, real needs of the villagers and has been implemented successfully due to the good cooperation between several stakeholders.

Initially, the plot in the village centre where the House of tradition operates today was not a public property. The municipality approached the owners who had moved to Italy years ago and they were ready to donate the property for the public purpose.

The municipality opted for a step by step approach in renovating the building. It provided funding and relevant expertise in the management of investment and in accordance with legal requirements.

Good leadership within the local community and established cooperation between the villagers and associations seem to be a critical success factor that contributed to the effective use of the new facilities. As pointed out by the president of the local community, without committed volunteers such revitalisation would not be possible.



*"The project improved the image of the village centre, added a new quality to the place and united the local people. However, things can only be moved for the better with the will of the people. We should not wait for somebody external, but have to be pro-active ourselves."*

Mirjan Pahor, president of the municipality Opatje selo

## Additional sources of information

[www.tdcerje.si](http://www.tdcerje.si)