

## SLOVENIA

# Implementing local development strategies

### Location

Slovenska Bistrica

### Programming period

2007 – 2013

### Axis / Priority

Axis 4 – LEADER

### Funding (EUR)

Total budget 33 163

EAFRD 21 171

National/regional 5 293

Private 6 699

### Project duration

2012 – 2014

### Project promoter

RIC Slovenska Bistrica

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### Website

<http://vino-ritoznojcan.si>

The project addressed the needs of local winegrowers and winemakers in the municipality of Slovenska Bistrica to add value to their work and improve their market position.

## Summary

Winegrowers and winemakers in Slovenska Bistrica have for years worked individually. The quality of their wine was not standardised and each of them was too small to make any significant progress as a business. They decided to join efforts and explore the potentials for reviving the 200-year tradition of Ritoznojčan wine.



12 wine growers and wine producers organized themselves in a consortium, shared practice and learned from examples in other wine producing regions. They developed the documentation and applied for legal protection as recognized traditional denomination (PTP) for the wine Ritoznojčan. They defined the production specifications and developed promotional tools.

## Results

Cooperation between 13 local wine growers and wine makers was established.

The wine Ritoznojčan has been awarded legal protection status.

Annually around 10 000 to 15 000 litres of Ritoznojčan PTP are produced.

## Lessons & Recommendations

- ❑ Applying a participatory approach allowed the consortium members to take part in decision making.
- ❑ Winegrowers and wine producers benefited from learning from other regions' experiences and were better prepared to define their own strategy.
- ❑ Another key success factor was that the roles of the project partners were well defined and the project team worked well together.



## Context

The area around Slovenska Bistrica has a long tradition of winegrowing and wine production. The area used to be famous for a quality wine called Ritoznojčan which was marketed not only locally, but also in Vienna, Prague, Graz, etc. Nowadays there are still around 199 ha of vineyards stretching over the surrounding hills of Slovenska Bistrica and give form to the area's typical landscape.

However, Ritoznojčan lost its reputation and disappeared from the markets years ago. As a result many large wine cellars that produced it in the wider region closed down. The market gap was filled in by smaller wine producers and the competition increased. Winegrowers and winemakers in the area have for years worked individually and the quality of their wine varied as each of them was too small to make any significant progress in terms of standardisation.

Producers were looking for opportunities to add value to their work by working together and exploring the potentials of reviving the 200-year tradition of Ritoznojčan as a higher quality wine, to be re-introduced primarily to the local market. The main idea was to be able to tell the story of the wine and have it tasted by visitors in the environment where it had been produced.

The project was initiated by the local wine producer in cooperation with the local development centre and the regional institute for agriculture and forestry, which operates within the national Chamber of agriculture and forestry.

## Objectives

Specific objectives of this project included:

- bringing together winegrowers and winemakers in the area to jointly produce and market the wine Ritoznojčan;
- preparing the necessary documentation to nominate the wine with a national brand 'recognised traditional denomination' – PTP;
- re-positioning local wine producers on the market and contributing to the development of local tourism.

## Activities

The project started with animation and motivation activities. A study visit to the area of Posavje was organised to learn about the experience of local winegrowers and their cooperative that had already

succeeded in legally protecting the wine Cviček. Animation comprised of joint meetings and personal contacts between the project partners and the local winegrowers and winemakers. This interaction encouraged them to join the project and to discuss different aspects and models of cooperation based on their strengths and weaknesses. The local association of winegrowers also supported this process. The response was very positive and many participants recognised opportunities for cooperation. In April 2013, the cooperative Consortium Ritoznojčan was established by 15 winegrowers who produced the majority of the wine in the area.

The project partners continued with the analysis of the traditional procedures in making of Ritoznojčan and the analysis of winegrowing in the area. Both analyses were necessary to define the necessary elements for the protection of the wine. Data from the past were analysed including the vine varieties typically grown in the area, the distinct taste of the wine, as well as customer preferences.

The initiator of the project used to work as oenologist in the cellar where Ritoznojčan was produced and could provide relevant expertise in defining a standard mixture of wine varieties. It was also important to define the geographical area where Ritoznojčan was produced. The process was coordinated between the experts and local wine makers who shared their own experience. The final decisions were taken jointly (e.g. the definition of the wine mixture, the size of bottles, etc.). The study and the wine specifications needed for the protection procedure were finalised. In the next phase, the members of the consortium received training on how to produce the wine according to the jointly developed common standards and requirements.

In parallel, the application for the legal protection was submitted to the Ministry of agriculture, forestry and food. Initial marketing activities also commenced: the brand was developed and a webpage was set up. The first series of 50 000 wine labels and 2 000 promotional brochures were printed. The cooperative members were trained in marketing aspects and the use of the common brand. Materials for the booklet about the wine Ritoznoj was prepared and translated.

The first confirmation on the approval of the protection procedure came in April 2014. A final project event was organised and social media activities were carried out.

## Main Results

The most important achievement of the project was an increase in the level of cooperation between local wine growers and wine makers. 13 consortium members regularly meet and plan joint promotion actions, attend trainings and lectures, mutually share knowledge and skills related to the technology of production. It is worth noting that winegrowers and wine makers who cooperate in the consortium are relatively young and the older members started transferring knowledge to the younger generations.

Another success was the development and protection of the traditional wine Ritoznojčan PTP, which is now produced on the basis of specific conditions and features. It is the first wine protected in the local area, as well as in the wider wine producing region of Štajerska - Slovenia. Annually around 10 000 to 15 000 litres of Ritoznojčan PTP are produced, bottled and offered to customers using different market channels.

The consortium members invested their own means in a range of promotion activities organized in cooperation with the municipality, local cultural organisations, other associations and caterers. They traditionally participate at local festivals and events, such as 'The autumn images of Bistrica homesteads' and 'Martinovanje', which are very popular. Each year in autumn 'Days of cider, chestnut and wine' are organised by the members; for 3 weekends in a row the wine cellars open to visitors to learn about and taste Ritoznojčan. The wine is slowly finding its way to local guest houses and restaurants, although this has been quite challenging. Caterers have been for many years used to offer other popular and also cheaper wines. The consortium members also participate in festivals and trade fairs in Slovenia and Croatia.

The wine has gained visibility and recognisability while financial benefits are also being recognised. The plan of the consortium is to stabilise the production quality and quantities and establish a local presence. They also aim to expand the cooperation with tourist providers in order to establish a touristic destination around Ritoznojčan.

## Key lessons

The project partners were aware that building trust and cooperation takes time. They have been effective in bringing together local producers who could identify themselves with the cooperation objectives and were ready to invest own resources. An important factor was the participatory approach that allowed the consortium members to take part in decision making, e.g., although initially it was planned to produce the wine in one cellar for all consortium members, they preferred that each one would produce it in their own cellar and this decision was respected.

The approach to the selection of the organisational model and type of wine protection was thoughtful and well planned. The winegrowers and wine producers learned from other regions' experiences and were better prepared to define their own strategy. In deciding on the specifics of the protection they took into account several factors that allow the producers some flexibility and get closer to preferences of the consumers while using their own production potential (e.g. both dry and semi-dry wine can be produced under PTP protection).

The roles of the project partners were well defined and the project team worked well together. The municipality supported the initiative financially and the local development centre was responsible for the project management. The institute provided access to past analyses and expertise. The wine producer who was also the project initiator provided relevant expertise, access to good practices and worked very closely with other producers. This partner is still a driving force of the newly established consortium and has a longer term vision of cooperation with other stakeholders in promotion of the area as a unique tourist destination.

*"What we have learned is that it is not enough to have one good producer. If we want to succeed, we all need to improve and cooperate. I feel we have reach a high level of trust and sharing and we are becoming more and more recognised."*

Darja Bovha, the president of the consortium Quote

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## Additional sources of information

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