

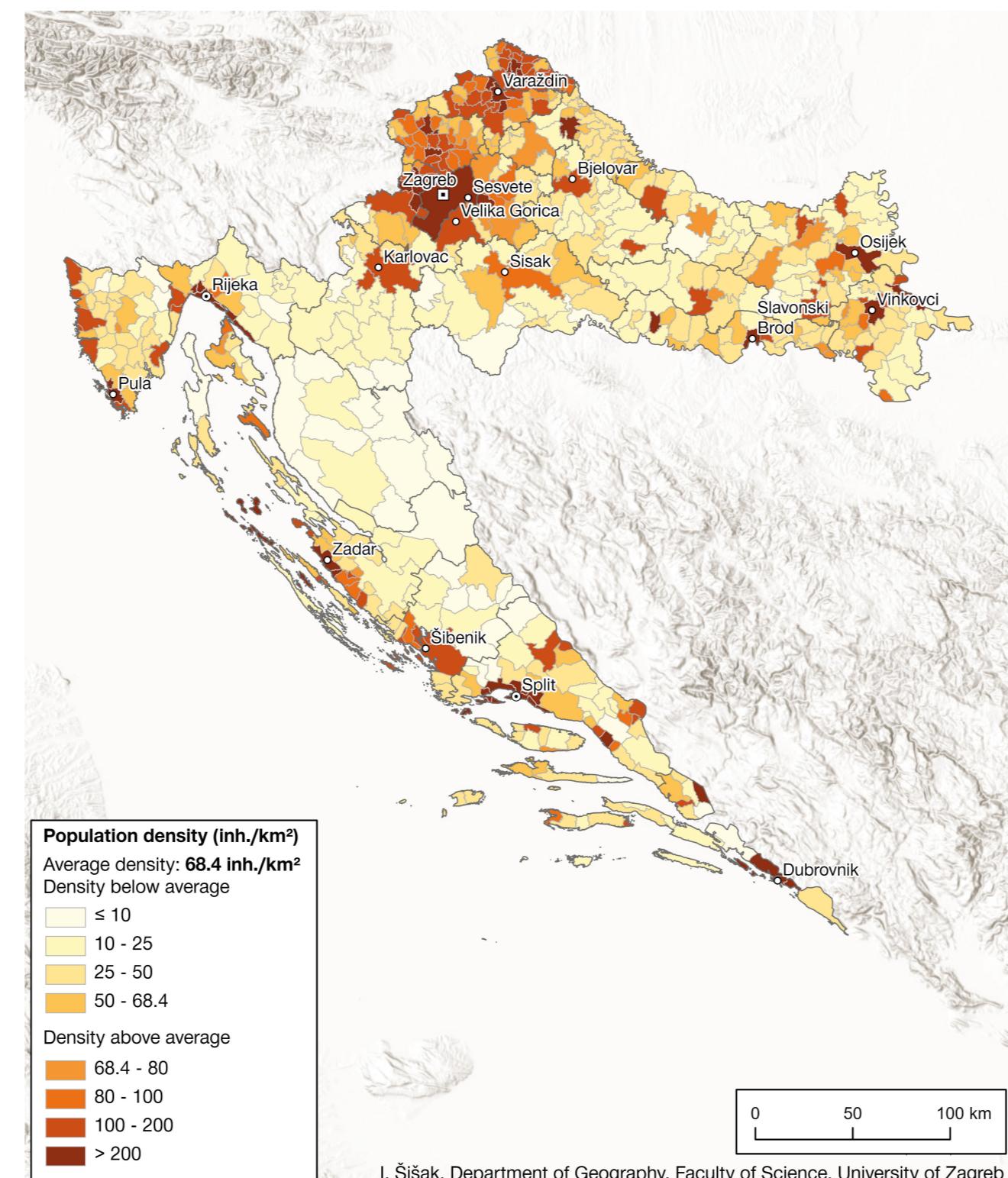
LIVING LAB CROATIA

More than 1.7 million people in Croatia live in rural areas, representing 42.5% of Croatia's population. 37.6% of the population live in intermediate regions and 19.9% live in urban regions. Rural areas have high unemployment rates, a lower percentage of highly educated population and a large share of people at risk of poverty or social exclusion in rural areas. Most rural areas in Croatia are exposed to continuous depopulation and economic recession with a high poverty rate (>30%).

Regarding the role of rural women, in the Croatian Strategic Plan of the CAP, gender equality and women are mentioned a few times, however, there is no mention of gender inequality, related issues or measurable goals. The Strategic Plan proposes a tiny measure in the form of a minor additional score (up to 5%) for women – who share these points with young farmers – in the evaluation and granting of family farm subsidies, but nothing else. Nor does the strategic plan distinguish between women farmers and rural women, as it does not provide any specific objectives or measures in this regard.

In establishing the Living Lab, the focus was to gather innovative rural women and pioneers who can inspire and empower other women and men to promote gender equal opportunities and values as well as resilience through social and environmental innovation. In the Living Lab Eco-Women Entrepreneurs (EWE) we gathered rural women whose innovations have arisen from their awareness about the interconnectedness of ecological and social issues and solutions.

The focus of the EWE Living Lab is to empower rural women entrepreneurs in their bioeconomy business ventures and to support their further self-development as innovators. EWE participants are engaged in bioeconomy practices in their local contexts, which is important from the perspective of several rural development, demographic, economic and cultural aspects. Bioeconomy practices are fruitful platforms for diverse social, economic, and environmental goals. Making economy more local and authentic, through multifunctional agriculture and



Population density

Source: A. Lukić and I. Šišak, Department of Geography, Faculty of Science, University of Zagreb

other activities, is generating contemporary job opportunities, eventually reversing the rural out-migration trend. Women are proving to be innovative and aware of many social and environmental issues and they are prone to innovate in order to mitigate or solve the problems. Indications from the fieldwork show that the support and networking for new women innovators is one of the crucial needs. The EWE Living Lab is focused on empowering rural women to become the local leaders in ecological innovations which would give additional support to rural women for entrepreneurial engagement. Also, as rural women are politically underrepresented and economically invisible, the focus is also to acknowledge the importance of women-led innovations and entrepreneurship for local rural economies and to encourage political actors to implement policies for encouraging women in political engagement. Finally, the goal is also to facilitate networking among women innovators as well as with the stakeholders, especially those from the public institutions, including local government.

In order to provide support to rural women leading or engaged in innovative and entrepreneurial activities in rural areas, **several activities are proposed to be implemented** within the GRASS CEILING project:

- Meetings between rural and farm women and institutional actors (government, advisory services, LAGs and academics) to grow understanding of barriers that women face in their ventures.
- Facilitating knowledge transfer and exchanging best practices across different territories and subsectors (for and by Living Lab participants).
- Participation of Living Lab participants in thematic webinars and courses featuring women leaders and subject matter experts to address topics of Living Lab participants' particular interest.
- Awareness-raising workshops aimed at acquiring skills for advancing leadership within the sector and in various representative organizations.
- Multi-stakeholder gatherings and influential actors to present objectives achieved and make recommendations (including relevant government agencies in the rural and agricultural sectors, private entities, etc.).
- Activities for increasing visibility for rural women innovators utilising tools such as media, the internet, and social media platforms.



EWE Living Lab participants are rural and farm women mostly from the Mediterranean - Adriatic region (Croatia) where out-migration and (often mass) tourism has a large impact on local economies and the lack of diverse economic opportunities leads to out-migration. EWE participants are rural women who strive to and engage in sustainable practices. They are engaged in farm production (organic olive oil, organic cheese, organic fruits and vegetables, autochthonous cattle breed), as well as on the products based on natural and local resources, often unused or wasted (aromatic plants, organic cosmetics, wool, old oak beams), thus transforming the ways of thinking and practicing local rural development. They are 30-55 years old and most of them have a university degree, while all of them have completed numerous training courses in their innovation area.



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Stakeholders in the EWE Living Lab are coming from academic, civil society and policy backgrounds and are vital in the process of raising awareness about specific barriers for rural women and directing and shaping the ground for creating the policies to overcome those barriers.