

DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY OF THE REGIONAL CENTER OF COMPETENCE

Be ready and competent

*Vocational school Vice Vlatković, Zadar
June 7th 2021*

CONTENTS

1. STARTING POINT FOR THE PREPARATION OF THE DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY OF THE REGIONAL CENTER OF COMPETENCE	5
2. OVERVIEW OF THE SITUATION IN VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING IN THE REPUBLIC OF CROATIA	8
3. REGIONAL CENTER OF COMPETENCE AND PROJECT PARTNERS	11
4. STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES OF THE REGIONAL CENTER OF COMPETENCE	24
5. PRINCIPLES OF WORK OF THE REGIONAL CENTER OF COMPETENCE	26
6. CONCLUSION	26
<i>Bibliography</i>	27



* Nouns used in the masculine gender, such as student, teacher, professional associate, and others, refer to male and female persons and have no discriminatory meaning.

Project title: „Be ready and competent !“ U.P.03.3.1.04.0003

Brief description of the project: The project holder is the Vice Vlatković Vocational School. As a modern vocational school, this school was named the Regional Center of Competence in the mechanical engineering sector by the Decision on the appointment of regional centers of competence in vocational education brought by the Minister of Education on July 20, 2018. The project “Be ready and competent!” aims at strengthening the capacity of educators and the capacity of the Regional Center of Competence (RCC) for the development and implementation of regular vocational education programs, as well as formal and non-formal adult education programs in accordance with labor market needs. The field of mechanical engineering is an important component of many economic branches, and the improvement of the (sub) sector of mechanical engineering will have a positive effect on the progress of the entire economy. Through strengthening the organizational capacity of the RCC, establishing a system of quality and professional guidance of students and other participants, improving the competencies of teachers and mentors among employers, the project “Be ready and competent!” Shall establish cooperation to increase the relevance and effectiveness of vocational education and training. (sub) sector of mechanical engineering and the capacities of the RCC for the development and implementation of professional occupations in accordance with the needs of the labor market will be strengthened.

The activities that will be implemented within the project are:

- Establishment of work organization and development of the regional center of competence
- Development and / or improvement and implementation of regular vocational education programs, formal and non-formal adult education programs in regional centers of competence
- Strengthening the competencies of educational workers of the RCC and mentors employed by employers related to the implementation of VET programs in the (sub) sector of mechanical engineering
- Promotion of professional occupations and work of the Center
- Promotion and visibility
- Project management and administration

The project partners are:

- Zadar County

- Vocational school Vice Vlatković, Zadar
- High school Biograd na Moru
- Technical School, Rijeka
- Industrial Craft School Pula
- Electrical Engineering Vocational School, Zagreb
- School for Montage of Installation and Metal Structures, Zagreb
- Technical school Zadar
- University of Zadar
- Craft College, Zagreb
- Profine Croatia Ltd
- Auto Hrvatska automobili Ltd
- Vaillant Ltd

Objectives and expected results of the project: The aim of the project is to establish the working framework of the Vice Vlatković Vocational School as a Regional Center of Competence in the (sub) sector of mechanical engineering, and to strengthen the capacities of educators for development, modernization and implementation of effective regular vocational education programs. adult education through work-based learning with the aim of providing relevant practical skills to students and adult learners in accordance with the needs of the economy and the labor market.

Total value of the project and the amount co-financed by the EU:

The total value of the project is HRK 33,693,182.17

Aid intensity: 100%

Project implementation period:

May 29, 2020 - December 29, 2023

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Web stranica projekta: <https://www.budispreman.com/>

Više informacija o EU fondovima: www.strukturnifondovi.hr

1. STARTING POINT FOR THE PREPARATION OF THE DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY OF THE REGIONAL CENTER OF COMPETENCE

Regional Centres of Competence (RCC) in Croatia represent a new form of vocational education. Their basic characteristics are connection with the labour market, education for lifelong learning and harmonization of qualifications with the European Qualifications Framework. In the context of the Croatian education system, there is a new way of financing vocational education.

In addition to the fundamental features, RCCs have special ones that derive from the European Union (EU) development guidelines and guidelines of individual countries. These special features are clearly articulated in their own strategy and action plan. Among these characteristics, the participation of various stakeholders (economic entities, higher education institutions, agencies, employment offices, etc.) is very important, and contributes to the modernization of existing and the creation of new occupational profiles, vocational curricula and qualifications. Vocational schools are thus transformed into centres that enable students to acquire knowledge, develop skills and abilities that meet the needs of the labour market and employers, both public and private sector. Their connection is strengthened at the level of professional training and retraining of adults, and professional development of employees. The innovation, creativity and entrepreneurship of all stakeholders permeates all segments of the RCC, as the pursuit of professional excellence is a prerequisite for quality assurance.

Vocational education varies in EU countries, so the aim is to find a balance between European and national guidelines. Some countries have developed centres of competence, and some (including Croatia) have yet to realize partner roles, define goals, determine the principles of collaboration and cooperation, whilst raising the importance of the connection between education and the changing labour market. The Platform of Centres of Vocational Excellence [1] is an adequate basis for a strategic framework. It includes elements that not only ensure sustainability of centres of competence, but enable them competitiveness, space for innovation and efficiency in vocational education and training for work and life in order to meet the needs of a smart, inclusive and sustainable economy.

Job creation and employment, economic and social growth and development will be affected by various factors, such as new technologies and their implementation in different spheres of society and economy, global climate change and the need to adapt to the processes caused by them, the need to balance, and moreover the har-

monious relations between environmental protection and development, etc. Therefore, the reform requirements presuppose cross-sectoral networking, continuous scientific monitoring and research of the educational needs of learners and teachers, timely setting of priorities, (re) updating of vocational curricula and vocational qualifications. [2] Although the RCC has a prefix “regional” in its name, the application of the European Credit System for Vocational Education and Training (ECVET) is a legal obligation [3], and European Quality Assurance in Vocational Education and Training is a tendency of all modern education systems, which is why it is an indispensable European dimension of vocational education.

Since the Call for application for the establishment of the RCC, when the economic point of view dominated the definition of strategic goals of states, governments and educational policies, there have been changes that affect all sectors, especially the education.¹ The economy acquires special attributes, so the emphasis is placed on the green and digital economy, whilst resilience and recovery emerge as the most relevant aspirations in the social, economic, market and any other context. The green and digital economy are set as special requirements for vocational education. [4]

The definition of strategic goals in vocational education is significantly reflected in new circumstances, primarily the situation with the COVID 19 pandemic. Hence, the EU Member States’ and the accession countries’ Ministers of Education adopted in Osnabrück in November 2020 with the European Commission a Declaration on vocational education and training. It is seen as an enabler of recovery and just transitions to digital and green economies [5] with the aim of furthering vocational education more strongly in the service of recovery after the coronavirus pandemic and other unforeseen crises. This does not exclude all other challenges related to the common European area of education and training, namely the application of new technologies and digitalisation, demographic change, climate change, and continuous professional and vocational training due to evident educational sub qualifications and retraining of graduates. The strategic backbone of vocational education is enabling students to acquire and develop the competencies they truly need in the world of work and life, enabling them for lifelong learning. [6]

The development of a Regional Centre of Competence contributes to The 2030 National Development Strategy of Croatia (OG 13/2021) [7] in the public policy priority areas related to the acquisition and development of basic and vocational competencies, and a harmonized and promising labour market (Objective 2. Educated and employed people). The establishing smart specializations arising from the international context

¹ In this document, the term education will be used, and it also refers to upbringing.

in order to promote the efficient and effective use of public investment and the shift towards an innovative economy. Given the relevance of the said, the establishment and development of a regional centre of competence directly contributes to the national strategic smart specialization referring to “development of smart skills -improving qualifications in the existing and new workforce for smart specialization “[8].

Strategic goals of *RCC Be ready and competent* of Vocational School Vice Vlatković in Zadar with partners have origin in combining creativity and entrepreneurship of all employees over the past years, and looking at social and economic demands for change in local, regional, national and European context. The partnership of the Vocational School Vice Vlatković in Zadar with other vocational schools, companies and the University of Zadar has all the prerequisites for increasing the efficiency of vocational education in the Republic of Croatia.

The methodology of drafting the *RCC Be ready and competent Strategy* is based on defining basic goals arising from conventions, European and national strategies, the value framework, specific goals arising from local and regional labour market needs and the educational needs of learners and teachers. They are in line with principle of horizontal (shared) responsibility brought through dialogue with the school principal and all partners.

2. OVERVIEW OF THE SITUATION IN VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING IN THE REPUBLIC OF CROATIA

The program for development of vocational education and training system 2016-2020 [9] foresees gradual changes in the vocational education system (full-time secondary education and the acquisition of secondary vocational qualifications in the adult education system). The Republic of Croatia plans to develop high-quality vocational education and training that students and parents, as well as society as a whole, recognize as an attractive opportunity that provides them with the acquisition of key and specific vocational competencies. Such vocational education and training will be accompanied by investments in high quality, functional and rational infrastructure and facilities to support the creation of relevant vocational and adult qualifications in the labour market. Highly qualified teachers who will be provided with ongoing support in professional development have a key role to play in achieving the planned changes. In addition, the program provides for flexible and inclusive vocational education and training based on learning outcomes, innovative learning and teaching methods and partnerships with all stakeholders, in particular employers. Finally, it is planned to develop a transparent qualifications system that enables the acquisition and transfer of learning outcomes, recognition of qualifications and acquired competencies in international mobility, which will increase the possibility of international mobility of students and teachers in vocational education and training [9].

According to the data of the Ministry of Science and Education (2021) [10], in the Republic of Croatia in 2020/2021 there were 298 vocational schools that offered two-year, three-year and four-year education programs. The largest number of schools is located in the City of Zagreb (44 or 14.77%), followed by the Split-Dalmatia County (36 or 12.08%) and the Primorje-Gorski Kotar County (26 or 8.72%), while the smallest number is in Koprivnica-Križevci County (5 or 1.68%) and Požega-Slavonia County (5 or 1.68%). In Zadar County, where the RCC centre is located, there are 15 vocational schools that offer two-year, three-year and four-year education programs, and according to data from 2021, a total of 3,977 students are enrolled in them. A total of 91,833 students attend vocational schools in the Republic of Croatia. A comparison of these data with previous years shows that the number of students in vocational schools (two-year, three-year and four-year) decreased significantly in the period from 2013 to 2021 (Figure 1).

The number of students decreased by 24,489 (21.05%) from 2013 to 2021. It should be noted that the number of female students decreased more (24.28%) than male stu-

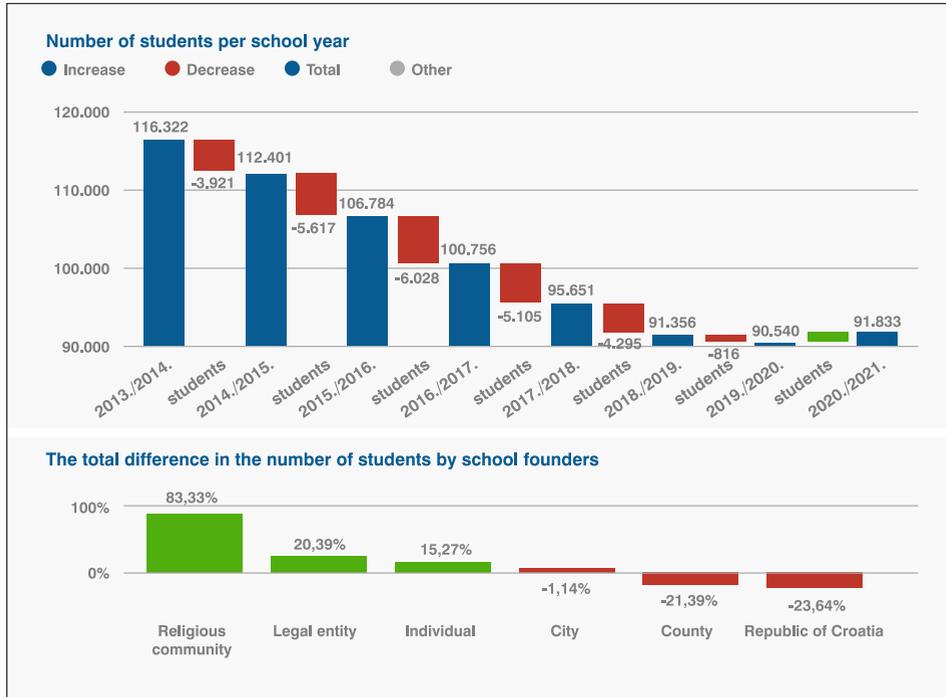


FIGURE 1 Trends in the number of students in vocational schools in the Republic of Croatia 2013-2021
 Source: Ministry of Science and Education, 2021

dents (18.65%). According to the same data, the City of Zagreb had the largest decline in the number of students (2,924) and Osijek-Baranja County (2,534), while Istria County (332) and Lika-Senj County (420) lost the least number of students. In general, the largest decrease in the number of students was recorded in Požega-Slavonia County (37.55%) and Lika-Senj County (34.15%), and the least in Istria County (7.66) and Primorje-Gorski Kotar (7.77%) [10].

The labour markets for vocational education and training have also seen some changes. The manufacturing industry, whose progress significantly depends on the progress of the (sub) engineering sector, in 2018 compared to 2017 was marked by positive trends. They are seen in an increase of merchandise exports (0.5% nationally and 2% regionally), growth in the number of registered active companies (3% at national and regional level) and an increase in the number of employees (2% at national and 0.3% at regional level). This was also reflected on the labour market, showing large differences in the staff supply and demand. According to the 2018 records of the Croatian Employment Service in sectoral occupations in the Republic of Croatia there were 10% more vacancies than exits from the records based on employment, while at the

regional level this difference is as much as 44%. According to surveys by the Croatian Employment Service, as many as 60.2% of employers in the manufacturing industry pointed out that there is a shortage of candidates with a suitable education as one of the most common difficulties in employment, and 36% believe that these difficulties could be solved by hiring foreign workers. Similar trends in industrial production and the labour market continued in 2019 and part of 2020 [11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16], when they were disrupted by socio-economic developments caused by the COVID 19 pandemic, whose negative effects continues in 2021, with certain signs of stabilization since the middle of this year.

In addition, the local community and households should not be neglected, especially in the context of tourism development. Their needs for the installation and maintenance of heating, air conditioning, gas and plumbing and other installations are continuously growing. Therefore, the strengthening of vocational education and training in the (sub) sector of mechanical engineering becomes an indispensable condition in order to adequately respond to the stated requirements of the economy and the labour market.

Vocational schools deal daily with the challenges arising from the inconsistency of (over) abundant regulations, strategic and other development documents, as well as the disagreement of different aspirants on the same human, spatial and different material resources. This forces them to further strengthen their organizational, human and material capacities for implementation of effective vocational education and training, none of which is possible through the independent efforts of schools. Educational staff in vocational education and training institutions, students enrolled in these institutions and adult learners are the target groups that need to be strengthened. The needs of educators relate to the improvement of their own capacities for effective management and administration of the institution and opportunities for professional development necessary in the implementation of vocational education and training, introduction of effective mechanisms for evaluation of their work and improvement of material working conditions which will allow the simulation of working conditions such as those encountered by students in future workplaces. Students need a stimulating environment and motivation, as well as support in career planning and future work after education, and adult learners need a central place that will provide them with new opportunities for training or retraining to ensure employment and secure survival in the workplace.

3. REGIONAL CENTER OF COMPETENCE AND PROJECT PARTNERS

The holder of the project “Be ready, be competent!” is the Vocational School Vice Vlatković. As a modern vocational school, it was named the Regional Center of Competence in the mechanical engineering sector by the Decision on the appointment of regional centers of competence in vocational education made by the Minister of Education on July 20, 2018.

Vocational school Vice Vlatković, Zadar

Vocational school Vice Vlatković from Zadar is a modern and well-equipped vocational school that is nowadays considered a centre of excellence in the field of mechanical engineering, electrical engineering, wood processing and especially auto mechanics and the use of renewable energy sources. The school has 628 students and has 71 employees.

Classes are held in five sectors and subsectors (mechanical engineering, electrical engineering and computing, wood processing, transport and logistics and other services) and 16 different occupations, of which four are four-year programs: road traffic technician, carpentry technician-designer, computer technician, transport and vehicle technician. The school has 12 three-year programs: car tinsmith, locksmith, electrician, wireman, telecommunications technician, electrical installer, motor vehicle driver, carpenter, house painter, CNC operator, car mechanic and installer of home installations.

The vision of the school is be contemporarily equipped school that will use equip-



FIGURE 2 *Building of the Vocational school Vice Vlatković, Zadar*

ment and teaching methods to follow modern technological and pedagogical trends; a school known for its good atmosphere and friendly relationship between teachers and students; a school that will say “no” to any discrimination, hate speech, fear, prejudice, stereotype; a school in which every student feels the right to freedom, equality, dignity, cooperation and acceptance; a school that will provide all students with an equal chance to achieve the professional competencies required by the labor market.

In recent years, the school has implemented a large number of projects funded by European funds, which were implemented in partnership with domestic and international partners. Our most significant project is the Regional Center of Competence in Mechanical Engineering. With its realization, the school plans to become a center that will be the foundation of economic development of its region, basing its work on cooperation with the regional economy, other centers of competence and excellence, secondary and primary schools, University of Zadar, local government and all social partners who contribute development of vocational education. [17]

The following partners participate in the project “Be ready and competent!”:

High school Biograd na Moru

High school Biograd na Moru has been operating under various names and statuses since 1970. From the regional department of the Zadar gymnasium and teaching in the premises of the then elementary school “Marija Eškinja”, through the construction of a new school building in 1974 and the establishment of the Centre for Education “Ante and Dečan Zorica” in 1977, through several additions and adaptations, until today’s High School Biograd na Moru.



FIGURE 3 *Building of the High school Biograd na Moru*

During the 50 years of its existence, it gave many generations educated in various professions, in accordance with the needs of the labour market and the local community.

Today, High school Biograd na Moru has 275 students and 52 employees, and implements the following programs: general high school, economist, salesperson, cook, waiter, ship mechanic, shipbuilder and shipbuilder of non-metallic ships. Good equipment assures quality education, and participation in various projects and student mobility provides many additional opportunities. The school is preparing the extension of the school restaurant, i.e. the practicum for catering, and the adaptation and equipping of the newly purchased building for the practicum of mechanical engineering is in progress. [18]

Technical School, Rijeka

The Technical School began education in four-year technical occupations in the field of mechanical engineering and shipbuilding in 1945. Due to the needs of industry, the Technical School merged in 1972 with the Shipbuilding School with practical training in Kraljevica and the Shipbuilding School with practical training in Rijeka into the Technical School Centre. With the education reform in 1978, the Technical School Centre was integrated into the Centre for Oriented Education of Industrial and Technical Personnel, which provided education for the mechanical, shipbuilding, chemical and transport industries. The separation of the school and its independent operation, called the Technical School of Mechanical Engineering and Naval Architecture followed in 1992. In 2003, the Centre of New Technologies of Primorje-Gorski Kotar County was established with practicums: computer-aided constructions; comput-



FIGURE 4 *Building of the Technical School, Rijeka*

er-controlled machine tools and industrial robots; automatic regulation and control of hydraulics and pneumatics. During 2016, specialist classrooms were equipped for the implementation of practical exercises in the electrical engineering sector, and in the jubilee 75th year of operation of the School, after 38 years, the shipbuilding workshop was reopened. In 2017, the school changed its name to *Technical school, Rijeka*, and in 2020 it became a partner of the Vocational school Vice Vlatković from Zadar, which was named the Regional Centre of Competence in the mechanical engineering sector.

Today, the school is active in the educational sectors of mechanical engineering, shipbuilding and electrical engineering in 12 classrooms in educational programs: mechatronics technician, mechanical computer technician, energy technician and is the only school in Croatia to implement the shipbuilding technician program. It is recognized as a quality school that is gladly chosen by students, which is confirmed by the fact that professions are chosen by a significantly larger number of students in relation to the prescribed enrolment quota. The vision of the Technical School, Rijeka is to create an atmosphere of quality and safe school that monitors and adapts to modern trends in science, education and profession. A school where it is pleasant to study and work, where new ideas are born, knowledge is improved; the school in which individual and collective abilities and positive human values are created and developed. [19]

Industrial Craft School Pula

Industrial Craft School Pula (IOŠ Pula) is a three-year vocational high school with a tradition of more than 70 years. It is a public institution founded by the County of Istria. The school educates students between the ages of 15 and 18 in the fields of mechanical engineering, shipbuilding, electrical engineering and construction. Through



FIGURE 5 *Building of the Industrial Craft School Pula*

its program, the school offers education for the following professions: tinsmith, car mechanic, car electrician, installer, CNC operator, installation electrician, electrician, electro mechanic, electronics engineer, potter-paver and painter. IOŠ Pula currently has 9 classrooms, 27 teachers and 11 extracurricular employees.

Classes are held in the form of theoretical lectures in the school premises and practical classes in school workshops and outdoor workshops in crafts, services, small and medium enterprises and industry. With its location in the city of Pula, it covers the needs of that city and the southern part of Istria. It is the only school in the county that trains students for certain occupations.

The school strives to be a centre of professional competencies, participate in EU projects and constantly monitor the development of techniques and technology in order to develop the local community. [20]

Electrical Engineering Vocational School, Zagreb

The building of today's Electrical Engineering School was built in 1948. It housed the Electrotechnical school Zagreb until 1945, when it became the Centre for education of students in the electrical and mechanical engineering professions and personal services in three-year and four-year programs. Today, the Electrical Engineering Vocational School in Zagreb educates students in electrical engineering and mechanical engineering programs for three years. The school is the oldest and one of the largest craft schools in Croatia.

The School of Electrical Engineering is organized in 30 classrooms and has 638 students in the following professions according to Unique model of education (JMO): auto mechatronics (280 students), car mechanic (73 students), car electrician (56 students),



FIGURE 6 *Building of the Electrical Engineering Vocational School Zagreb*

Car bodyworker (29 students), gunsmith (12 students), goldsmith (10 students), computer engineering technician (37 students), electro mechanic (37 students), electrician (104 students) and 74 employees.

The school provides retraining, additional training from three-year craft and industrial programs to four-year programs for mechanical technicians and electricians, training or promotion to the title of master and enrolment in colleges or universities at the discretion of the university, and students participate for generations in various competitions.

Students acquire practical knowledge and skills in laboratories for exercises in electrical engineering subjects, as well as in practicums and specialized workshops for mechanical engineering subjects, of which stand out the modern Ford practicum for car mechanics, bodywork and car electronics and Renault cabinet for car mechanics and car electrics. [21]

School for Montage of Installation and Metal Structures, Zagreb

The School for Montage of Installation and Metal Structures was founded in 1970 for the needs of construction and installation operations under the name *Centre for Building Industry and Construction*. To date, it has changed its name and headquarters several times, but has retained its core business, which is the education and training of installers. Today, it is the only school in Zagreb that educates for three-year professions of home installation installer, locksmith, heating and air conditioning installer, tinsmith, gas installer, operator of self-propelled construction machinery and plumber,



FIGURE 7 Building of the School for Montage of Installation and Metal Structures, Zagreb

and four-year profession of mechanical technician.

During the year, students visit companies dealing with water, gas, heating and solar technology to have the opportunity to meet the latest tools and devices. The school participates in various projects (in Croatia and in the European Union), and win first prizes in national competitions WorldSkills (IKI) and in almost all national competitions for plumbers, heating and air conditioning installers and gas installers.

All craft occupations provide opportunities for further education in the 4th year, taking the master's exam and the opportunity to start private business. The employability of students at the School for the Installation of Installations and Metal Structures, Zagreb, according to exit surveys, is 92% immediately after graduation. [22]

Technical school Zadar

Technical school Zadar began to work back in 1910 under the name School of Trades and Crafts and had a great social and economic importance for the city, Zadar region, and beyond.

Since September 1, 2004, the Technical School has been operating in a newly built, modernly equipped school building called the Technical school centre. The classrooms are equipped with a personal computer, overhead projector, LCD projector and internet network, as well as air conditioning.

The school is equipped with the following laboratories: for testing technical materials and measurements in engineering, for the basics of electrical engineering and measurement, for electronics and digital technology, for electrical machines and a



FIGURE 8 *Building of the Technical school Zadar*

workshop for exercises in electrical engineering. Laboratories and workshops are modernly equipped, so they enable mastering of teaching contents at a high level. Each laboratory has 15 workstations, so it is possible to work in two groups, as required by vocational curricula.

Since 2017, the Technical school Zadar has been cooperating with the Ministry of Defence. The Ministry of Defence improved this cooperation by providing scholarships to third and fourth grade students and by offering permanent employment in the profession. Students who have completed some of the professional educations at the Technical school Zadar have played and continue to play an important role in development of industry and crafts in Zadar region. In addition, a large number of military pilots were trained in that school.

The following programs are performed at the Technical school Zadar: mechanical computer technician, aircraft technician (ZIM), aircraft technician (IRE), mechatronics technician, electronics technician and architectural technician.

Students who complete schooling for any of the six occupations at the Technical School gain excellent prior knowledge to continue college and high school at various technical and other faculties. [23]

Zadar County



Zadar County is a unit of regional self-government and the founder of primary and secondary schools. As a unit of regional self-government, it was established on April 16, 1993. In its self-governing scope, the Zadar County performs tasks of regional significance, especially tasks related to education, health, spatial and urban planning, economic development, traffic and transport infrastructure, maintenance of public roads, planning and development of the educational network, health, social and cultural institutions and other activities in accordance with special laws.

Counties have services and other county bodies established to perform tasks within the self-governing scope as well as to perform delegated tasks of state administration. They have 12 administrative departments, including the administrative Department for education, culture and sports, which implements projects of regional competence centres.

The administrative Department for education, culture and sports performs administrative and professional tasks in the field of secondary and primary education, cul-

ture, sports and technical culture, proposes public needs and monitors the execution of public needs in its area, coordinates investments and maintenance and proposes network development from its scope, monitors and encourages the development of science and technology.

Zadar County successfully participates in the application and implementation of a large number of projects, including the project “Be ready and competent!” In which, as the founder, it provides comprehensive support for the implementation of the project. So far, it has implemented more than 45 EU-funded projects worth more than 70m euros, resulting in the development of expertise and experience and the development of strong support for regional development in all segments. [24]

University of Zadar

The city of Zadar has a centuries-old university tradition, which is mentioned in Zadar as early as 1396, when the Dominican higher education institution Studium generale, later called Universitas Jadertina was founded on the traditions of church education. The modern development of higher education in Zadar began in 1955 with the enactment of the Act on the establishment of the faculty of philosophy in Zadar at the University of Zagreb. Today, the University of Zadar is the largest fully integrated university in the Republic of Croatia, with 27 university departments. The departments conduct studies at three levels: undergraduate, graduate and postgraduate. About 6,000 students study at the university, and it has 620 employees, of which 420 teach.



FIGURE 9. *Main building of the Old Campus of the University of Zadar*

The 200 employees are employed in the University services, and an additional 38 employees in the Student Standard Agency.

The University of Zadar cooperates with numerous Croatian and foreign institutions and academic associations. Involvement of the University in international projects, entry and exit mobility of students, joint studies with foreign universities, meetings with representatives of the academic, political and economic domestic and foreign communities are encouraged.

The mission of the University is as follows: the University of Zadar is a space for the creation and transfer of new knowledge and technologies. Relying on international orientation, Mediterranean background and high ethical standards, the image of the future University of Zadar is designed as an important stakeholder in the creation of new knowledge and drivers of innovative processes in the environment. The vision of the University of Zadar is identified as: The University of Zadar sees itself as a modern international university that is a generator of knowledge and a driver of innovative change based on the needs of society and the principle of equal opportunities, socially responsible behaviour and high ethical standards.

The University of Zadar performs university scientific, teaching and professional work, and it grows more and more every day and contributes to the general development thanks to the diligent and responsible work of staff and students. [25]

Craft College, Zagreb

The Craft College is an institution for adult education, founded in 2006 by the Association of Craftsmen of the City of Zagreb, the Zagreb Chamber of Crafts and the Croatian Chamber of Crafts, with the aim of connecting the needs of crafts and the labour market and harmonizing training programs with EU standards.

By continuously researching the needs of crafts and entrepreneurship for appropriate staff and the development of curricula based on occupational standards, the College ensures its own development. Training and development programs that contain a lot of practical work allow participants to acquire the necessary competencies for independent work.

In addition to vocational programs, the Craft College implements programs for learning foreign languages, education in the field of entrepreneurial knowledge and skills, and preparation for taking master's exams and professional qualification exams.

The tasks of the College are: implementation of adult education programs, connecting vocational education with the economy and regional development, establishing



FIGURE 10 *Building of the Craft College, Zagreb*

a network system with companies and other educational institutions, taking on an advisory role for other education providers or companies in the region, encouraging innovation in crafts, advisory services and information service for parents and students, future participants in the process of education for crafts and cooperation at the European level.

The College cooperates with vocational schools through various teacher trainings within the ESF: workshops for teachers “New teaching methods” and “E-learning”, then “Curriculum modernization” and teacher training and mentoring for curriculum development of extracurricular activities that encourage digital, reading, financial literacy through “Improving literacy - the foundation of lifelong learning.” [26]

Profine Croatia Ltd

Profine Croatia Ltd is a member of the Profine Group GmbH from the Federal Republic of Germany, one of the leading manufacturers of PVC profiles for windows and doors, sun protection systems and PVC panels.



FIGURE 11 *Logo of the Profine Group*

The group distributes its products in 70 countries, and is represented with its brands KBE, Kömmerling and Trocal at 29 locations in 22 countries.

Profine manufactures in locations in Germany, France, Italy, India, Spain, Russia, Ukraine, the US and China, and employs around 3,000 people worldwide.

Profine Group has been present on the Croatian market since 1989, first through direct cooperation between manufacturers and suppliers in Germany, then as a rep-

representative office, and in 1997 the company was finally established as a Croatian legal entity - Profine Croatia Ltd.

Profine Croatia Ltd is the general representative of the parent company for all products from the Profine Group product range and with its three brands KBE, Kömmerling and Trocal is one of the leading distributors of PVC profiles for construction joinery and successfully cooperates with almost 100 authorized partners of PVC joinery throughout Croatia.

Through its activities, the company has set new environmental and energy standards in its industry and has contributed to the development of business cooperation between the Republic of Croatia, the Federal Republic of Germany and the Republic of Austria. Profine is a leader in the industry in terms of energy efficiency and CO2 reduction, the use of unleaded green line stabilizers, and the recycling and protection of natural resources. [27].

Auto Hrvatska automobili Ltd



FIGURE 12. Logotype of Auto Hrvatska Automobili Ltd

Auto Hrvatska Automobili, a member of the Auto Hrvatska Business Group, specializes in the sale and servicing of passenger cars and light commercial vehicles. As part of the personal program within the business of the company Auto Hrvatska Automobili, there are six sales and service centres for personal vehicles: two centres in Zagreb (Peugeot and Fiat professional) and one each in Karlovac (Volkswagen and Škoda), Rijeka (Mazda), Zadar (Volkswagen and Audi) and Split (Renault and Dacia).

The Authorized service centre for Audi, Volkswagen and Škoda vehicles operating within the Auto Hrvatska business centre in Zadar at Franka Lisice 85. It is participating in the project "Be ready and competent" as a partner of the Vocational school Vice Vlatković in the working group for development of the curriculum for the profession Auto mechatronics, and Service for hybrid and electric vehicles and diagnostics of motor vehicles.

Authorized service centre for passenger cars and light delivery vehicles in Zadar continuously educates its staff to monitor technical progress and increased complexity of motor vehicles, which requires constant development of expertise during the implementation of maintenance and repair of motor vehicles. In addition to modern service equipment and a modern information and diagnostic system, the authorized service centre in Zadar also provides repair services in the body shop and car paint shop. [28]

Vaillant Ltd

Vaillant Hrvatska was founded in 1992 in Zagreb and is 100% owned by the parent concern Vaillant Group from Remscheid, Germany. The Vaillant Group unites eight national and international brands, the most famous of which is the Vaillant brand. The headquarters remained in Remscheid, Germany. Production is divided into 10 plants in 6 European countries and 1 plant in China for the Asian market. 14,000 employees in more than 20 countries ensure a market presence in about 60 countries around the world.



FIGURE 13 Logotype of Vaillant Ltd

The Zagreb office is also in charge of the Southeast European region with Vaillant headquarters in Ljubljana, Sarajevo, Belgrade and Macedonia, and is additionally in charge of the markets of Montenegro, Kosovo and Albania.

Vaillant is a leading European manufacturer and brand offering energy-efficient and environmentally friendly heating, cooling and ventilation systems with an emphasis on renewable energy sources. The production program includes high-efficiency gas condensing devices for heating and hot water preparation, solar systems, heat pumps, air recuperations, electric devices for heating and domestic hot water, air conditioners, radiators and a complete control program.

With its products and services, Vaillant wants to maximize the comfort of living and thus offer the best sustainable comfort solution for its environmentally conscious customers. [29]

4. STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES OF THE REGIONAL CENTER OF COMPETENCE

The strategic goals and principles of the RCC derive from the values pursued by the socio-cultural community in the wider and narrower environment. The value framework of the RCC consists of the following socio-cultural values [30]:

- Health and safety
- Knowledge
- Solidarity
- Identity
- Responsibility
- Entrepreneurship.

The purpose of the RCC is to increase the number of employed persons with a completed professional qualification. The affirmation of vocational education and the value of vocational qualifications will be permanently supported through work on innovative ventures.

The main objective of the RCC *Be Ready and Competent* of Vocational School Vice Vlatković in Zadar and its partners is to enable students to acquire high-quality vocational qualifications and occupations that meet the needs of a smart, inclusive and sustainable economy.

A student who completes vocational education will have developed “basic and vocational competencies of a certain level, scope, profile and quality necessary to obtain the qualifications required by the labour market, and for further education and life-long learning, i.e. for the purpose of personal development of students.”[30]

Achieving this goal involves:

- to provide students with quality vocational education based on modern requirements and principles of the education system;
- to enable students to acquire knowledge, develop skills and abilities, and form attitudes that truly meet the needs of the labour market and employers;
- to enable students to acquire occupations that provide employment or self-employment in the local and wider social context;
- to enable them to develop basic competencies necessary for work and further

- education;
- to educate and train students for lifelong learning and coping with crises in an appropriate manner;
 - to professionally train teaching and non-teaching staff.

The specific objectives of the RCC are:

- creating vocational curricula and vocational qualifications that correspond to the labour market and the changing world of work
- curriculum planning and programming with appropriate coverage of all educational areas and cross-curricular topics [30] considering the development of student personality traits
- use of modern teaching methods and tools, from direct work with students to digital and blended learning, and individualized approach to the student
- encouraging innovation in industry, the economy, entrepreneurship, the green economy and digitalisation
- application of apprenticeships (professional practice) and learning based on work in a simulated or real work environment
- creating a work culture that reflects a collaborative spirit and tolerance for diversity
- showing special care towards students with disabilities and socially deprived persons
- identifying talented and gifted students and creating special modules for them
- incorporating entrepreneurial competencies in students and teachers
- encouraging innovation and creativity in students and teachers
- creating a learning environment with new technologies
- quality assurance of RCC work with all components.

5. PRINCIPLES OF WORK OF THE REGIONAL CENTER OF COMPETENCE

The basic principles of work of the RCC *Be ready and competent* of the Secondary Vocational School Vice Vlatković in Zadar with partners are:

- dialogue and cooperation
- shared responsibility (“horizontal” hierarchy)
- scientific validity
- flexibility
- inclusiveness, equality of educational opportunities and social justice
- respect for human rights
- professional ethics
- the European dimension of vocational education.

6. CONCLUSION

Regional Centres of Competence are the foundation for improving vocational education and training. Their implementation will enable the strengthening of management capacities of vocational schools, systematic improvement of their own work quality through development and implementation of quality systems, but also the improvement of capacities for modernization, development and implementation of regular programs for vocational education and adult education. In addition, Regional Centres of Competence include stronger cooperation with higher education institutions, the business sector and other organizations, which will reflect the application of innovative approaches to increase the relevance, attractiveness and efficiency of vocational education and training, especially in the (sub) sector of mechanical engineering. A stronger link between vocational schools, the economy and the labour market provide opportunities for the continuation and career development of adults, especially the unemployed and those who are changing careers. This also implies the introduction of mandatory professional orientation of upper primary school students. The establishment of such a collaborative and partner interdisciplinary network will

enable continuous monitoring of labour market needs and new competencies and learning outcomes that need to be implemented in existing and new vocational programs for the economy. Ultimately, these activities will promote the attractiveness and relevance of vocational occupations in order to strengthen the social reputation and interest in vocational occupations and the importance of dual education.

The development strategy of the Regional Centre of Competence is the starting point for further activities of the project *Be ready and competent* of the Vocational school Vice Vlatković with partners. It defines the framework for the development of an action plan for the implementation of the set strategic goals. This strategy is in line with strategic development documents at the European and national level, and is guided by the idea of cooperation and togetherness with the aim of realizing the public interest and improving society as a whole. Accordingly, it is to be expected that all project partners and other relevant stakeholders will provide full support and commitment in its realization.

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