

## THE INNOVATION JOURNEY

The masterminds behind the project are geographers Petra and Janez Matos, both of whom have been volunteers all their lives. Park Istra is an innovative initiative that addresses the needs of the local environment through volunteer work.



Figure 1. Petra and Janez Matos are the masterminds behind the Park Istra project (author: M. Jordovič Potočnik).

The couple were inspired to set up Park Istra during their stay in India, where they took part in a similar volunteer project. With a strong desire to do something good and enjoy life to the fullest, they moved to the outskirts of Primorska and started a new story.

Park Istra has existed since 2013 and at any given time hosts around 15 volunteers from different parts of the world who live, work and learn in the community for an average of two to four months. The volunteers carry out daily activities and help tackle various challenges in the local environment.

Park Istra is committed to creating green jobs in rural areas, bringing young people back to the countryside and strengthening solidarity and volunteering. Through their work, they support other organisations and individuals. Five years ago, the Slovenian army rented out for free the old guardhouse in Kastelec which they renovated and set up a welcoming volunteer centre. In the early years, it

was also difficult to secure continuous funding, but in recent years this has been made easier by the European Solidarity Corps programme. Petra is the project manager and mentor for the volunteers, while John coordinates the volunteers and the work with other work organisations.



Figure 2. Park Istra responds to the needs of the local environment through volunteering.

## THE INNOVATION IMPACT

In 11 years, they have hosted (and trained) 1,250 volunteers from 56 countries, working successfully with more than 50 organisations in the local area. Together they have carried out 3,400 work actions and donated around 105,000 working hours to the Obalno-Kraška region.

Park Istra acts as a supportive environment for other organisations, innovative, active and needy people in the local area. Through their activities, they contribute to the creation of green jobs and the promotion of sustainable development in the region. Through their voluntary work, they take care of the people in need and thus contribute to a fairer society.

## USEFUL LINKS

[Park Istra website](#)  
[Facebook page Park Istra](#)