Restoring the Underwater Forests of Lošinj islands

Lošinj Islands, Croatia
Mali Lošinj Tourist Board
Local Destinations (including villages, cities, municipalities, islands)
Nature & Environment

Summary of Good Practice Story

Lošinj, a Croatian Adriatic island with over 140 years of tourism tradition and some of the best-preserved Posidonia oceanica seagrass meadows in the Adriatic, faced growing pressure from uncontrolled anchoring and nautical tourism on this vital but widely misunderstood ecosystem — many residents and visitors saw it simply as "seaweed" or beach waste rather than the plant foundation of the island's exceptionally clean sea. The Blue World Institute partnered with schools, tourism stakeholders and creative professionals to make the invisible visible: school workshops turned children who once called it "black grass" into marine conservation ambassadors, while underwater photography, an animated film and social media campaigns translated marine science into engaging public stories, culminating in the first Posidonia Day celebration in 2025. This visibly shifted public understanding of Posidonia's role in water quality, biodiversity and climate resilience, and built new partnerships between scientists, schools, tourism operators and authorities that continue to shape marine spatial planning and interest in ecological anchoring solutions. The lesson: effective conservation starts with communication, not regulation alone — people protect what they understand and feel connected to, and involving young people creates lasting, multiplying impact.

Setting the Scene: Destination & context

Located in the northern Croatian Adriatic, the island of Lošinj is a destination renowned for its first-class sea quality, exceptional natural environment, and more than 140 years of tourism tradition, where tourism and nature have evolved together. Recognised as a climatic health resort since the 19th century, Lošinj built its reputation on excellent air quality, a mild climate, and rich biodiversity that continue to shape the island's identity and quality of life.

Home to Mali Lošinj, the largest settlement on the Adriatic islands, the destination combines a strong maritime tradition with a commitment to sustainability. This dedication has been recognised through the Green Destinations Gold Award certification, making Lošinj one of the leading sustainable destinations in the Mediterranean.

The island's waters contain some of the best-preserved meadows of Posidonia oceanica in the Adriatic Sea and support a resident population of bottlenose dolphins. As one of Croatia's leading nautical destinations, Lošinj faces the challenge of balancing tourism growth with the protection of the marine ecosystems that are fundamental to its future.

The Turning Point: Why change was needed

For years, the Posidonia meadows surrounding the Lošinj archipelago remained largely invisible to residents and visitors alike. Most people saw them simply as "seaweed," unaware that these underwater meadows were among the island's most valuable natural assets and the foundation of its exceptionally clean and healthy sea.

At the same time, scientists, divers, and local stakeholders observed increasing pressures from uncontrolled anchoring, marine pollution, and growing nautical tourism. In some bays, anchors and chains repeatedly scarred the seabed, damaging seagrass that had taken centuries to develop.

The contradiction became impossible to ignore: visitors were drawn to Lošinj by its crystal-clear sea and natural beauty, while the ecosystems responsible for these qualities were being gradually degraded.

What was at stake was not only biodiversity, but also the future of a destination whose identity, economy, and quality of life depend on a healthy marine environment. The turning point came with the realisation that protection measures alone would not be enough. Lasting change required people to understand what Posidonia is, why it matters, and how closely its survival is linked to the future of Lošinj itself.

The Vision: What you set out to do

The vision behind the initiative was to transform Posidonia oceanica from an overlooked underwater plant into a recognised symbol of Lošinj's natural heritage, climate resilience, and sustainable future.

The first step was taken by the Blue World Institute, whose researchers had spent years monitoring the marine environment and witnessing the increasing pressures on Posidonia meadows caused by anchoring, coastal activities, and growing nautical tourism. Although these underwater ecosystems are essential for biodiversity, water quality, and carbon storage, their importance remained largely invisible to the wider public.

This realisation became a powerful motivation for action. The team understood that long-term protection could not rely solely on regulations and conservation measures. It required people to value and care for what they could not see.

The goal was therefore to build a stronger connection between the local community, visitors, and the sea by raising awareness, encouraging responsible behaviour, and creating partnerships between scientists, schools, tourism stakeholders, businesses, and public authorities. By making the invisible visible, the initiative aimed to secure the future of the marine ecosystems that support Lošinj's identity, economy, and quality of life.

The Journey: How change happened

The project began as a collaboration between the Blue World Institute, schools, local institutions, tourism stakeholders, and creative professionals. Together, they set out to make an invisible ecosystem visible.

One of the first challenges was changing perceptions. Many local children knew Posidonia only as "the black grass" beneath the sea, while dried leaves on beaches were often seen as waste. Through workshops, field activities, and school programmes, students discovered that Posidonia is a flowering plant essential for a healthy Mediterranean Sea. Many became enthusiastic ambassadors for marine conservation within their families and communities.

At the same time, researchers worked with tourism stakeholders, divers, and maritime organisations to encourage dialogue about sustainable nautical tourism and the pressures affecting Posidonia meadows.

Visual storytelling became a key tool. Underwater photography, educational materials, social media campaigns, and an animated film helped translate marine science into engaging stories. The journey culminated in the celebration of Posidonia Day in 2025, bringing together residents, visitors, scientists, and local organisations around a shared commitment to protecting Lošinj's marine environment.

The Breakthrough: What you achieved

The project transformed Posidonia from a largely invisible underwater ecosystem into a recognised symbol of Lošinj's natural heritage and sustainable future.

Through workshops, public events, media campaigns, information boards, and an educational animated film, awareness of Posidonia and its ecological importance increased among residents, visitors, students, and tourism stakeholders. Misconceptions that Posidonia was

merely “seaweed” or beach waste began to change, replaced by a better understanding of its role in maintaining clean water, biodiversity, and climate resilience.

One of the most significant achievements was the active involvement of the local community, particularly young people, who became ambassadors for marine conservation through school activities and public events. New partnerships were established between scientists, educational institutions, tourism stakeholders, public authorities, and local organisations.

Today, Posidonia is no longer hidden beneath the surface. It has become part of the public conversation about the future of Lošinj, helping to strengthen local pride, encourage responsible behaviour at sea, and support the long-term protection of marine ecosystems.

Reflections: What you learned and what others can learn

One of the biggest surprises was how quickly perceptions could change once people understood the value of Posidonia. Many residents and visitors initially saw it as “seaweed” or beach waste, yet through education, storytelling, and direct engagement, it became a source of local pride.

The project confirmed that effective conservation starts with communication. Scientific facts alone rarely change behaviour; people are more likely to protect what they understand and feel connected to. We also learned that involving young people creates lasting impact, as students became enthusiastic ambassadors for marine conservation within their families and communities.

A key lesson was the importance of collaboration. Bringing together scientists, schools, tourism stakeholders, public authorities, and local organisations created shared ownership and stronger results than any single organisation could achieve alone.

For destinations facing similar challenges, our advice is simple: make the invisible visible. Connect conservation to local identity, focus on positive messages, and engage communities early. Lasting change happens when people see nature not as a resource, but as part of their future.

The Ripple Effect: Lasting impact

The project created momentum that continues beyond its initial activities. Posidonia conservation has become a more visible topic in local discussions on tourism, climate resilience, marine spatial planning, and the sustainable development of Lošinj.

Educational materials, the animated film, and informational panels continue to raise awareness among residents, visitors, and boaters, ensuring that knowledge about Posidonia reaches new audiences every year. The initiative also strengthened the involvement of young people through cooperation with local schools and the School & Community (ŠiZ) programme, encouraging a new generation to take an active role in environmental stewardship.

Partnerships established during the project have created opportunities for future collaboration on marine ecosystem restoration, responsible boating practices, and citizen engagement. Interest in ecological anchoring solutions and long-term Posidonia protection has also grown. Most importantly, the project helped shape a new narrative about Lošinj. Today, the island is increasingly recognised not only for the beauty of its sea, but also for its commitment to protecting the ecosystems that sustain it. The story of Posidonia continues, inspiring a more sustainable future for the island and its community.

Awards or Certifications
Green Destinations Gold Award 2024., Natura 2000, Skal International 2013.,

Web Articles
https://www.otoci.net/u-razno/21186-prvi-put-dan-posidonije
https://www.facebook.com/blueworldinstitute/
https://www.plavi-svijet.org/cime-se-bavimo/nas-utjecaj/
https://www.blue-world.org/conservation/research-large-marine-vertebrates-blue-world-institute/posidonia-oceanica/

Other Relevant Links
https://youtu.be/4GDOBpHIBIM?si=dMQTQZinmLpDR_ta
https://www.visitlosinj.hr/
https://www.blue-world.org/

Quotes or Testimonials
“By taking part in this project, I learned that Posidonia is not just seagrass, but a vital part of our marine ecosystem. I now look at the sea around Lošinj differently and understand how important it is to protect it for future generations.”
— Student, Ambroz Haračić Secondary School

“This project has demonstrated how important sustainable marine management and Posidonia protection are for preserving our natural resources. Educating the local community and sea users is a key step towards the more responsible use of marine space.”
— Director, Mali Lošinj Port Authority

“The workshops helped students understand global climate challenges through examples from their immediate surroundings. Connecting classroom learning with the local sea and natural environment proved extremely valuable in fostering environmental awareness.”
— Teacher, Maria Martinolić Primary School