

*Invisible women  
of Montenegro*



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## Introduction

*We have these “invisible” women in Montenegro, whom you cannot hear, see or meet unless you are lucky enough to trade directly from the producer at the market or come across them while hiking through villages or katuns <sup>(1)</sup>. These women are out of the public eye, and little is known about them, it is even difficult to get information about them because they live in a parallel universe that does not overlap with yours. If you ask about them in institutions, the employment bureau for example, they categorize them as “difficult to employ” because they lack work experience and often have little education. The land registry does not have them on record, no property is registered on their name. If you search the business register, you won’t find them there either, as they don’t have any businesses. Agricultural services will tell you they know their spouses because they work with them only.*

*However, if you are lucky enough to visit rural households, especially katuns, you will realize that our entire traditional way of life rests on these “invisible” women. They are responsible for caring for the entire family, almost all the processing on the farm, and therefore a significant portion of the family’s income. A katun without a woman, without a “planinka” as we call women in katuns, is an unthinkable thing; men can be anywhere, but a katun without a woman cannot exist. The village is not much different ei-*

*ther. Things are as simple as that, that is how it has always been. As we enter the second quarter of the 21st century, as we communicate through social media, get intrigued by what artificial intelligence can do, there is a parallel world existing next to us, where these topics are distant, a world that deals with the fundamental things - planting, harvesting, processing for the next winter, a world that revolves around agricultural seasons, weather conditions - simple and genuine things. The invisible woman is at the center of this parallel world, as it is slowly disappearing in front of our very eyes, simultaneously with the diminishing presence of women from rural areas.*

*This publication is a tribute to that world and those invisible women. To bring them closer to you, explain them, to incite you to think about them, to turn our attention to them in the era of human rights and freedoms, to focus on those who have no advocates, associations, representatives, about whom we have a number of prejudices or whom we take for granted at best. This publication is dedicated to women who live in villages, who raise their daughters to study and leave the village to make their lives easier. We hope to reach out to them, we hope they will read these stories about successful women in rural areas. That they will inspire them to follow in their footsteps, which is our most important goal.*

<sup>1)</sup> Katuns are temporary, summer settlements high up in the mountains, where livestock farmers take their cattle for grazing. This is centuries old tradition of Montenegro, same as transhumance in Europe.



- *It is clear that Montenegrin villages are neglected in terms of infrastructure. The roads are bad, electricity is unstable with the first bad weather, there is a lot of snow in the north during winter, and villages are not a priority for maintenance, rural schools are closing year after year, so people who have children move to suburban settlements and towns for their education.*

- *The issue of women in rural areas is still not in the spotlight of public interest and political actors, often not even discussed by women themselves and organizations and institutions dealing with women's issues.*

## *Something about the women* from the rural parts of Montenegro

Rural areas in Montenegro have been suffering from depopulation for decades. We all know and have heard about it, and we do not want to hear it again because, paradoxically, when we repeat something a thousand times, it becomes an imaginary concept that we have no emotion towards. We stop caring. However, the fact is that our villages get deserted gradually, especially katuns, that is a fact and it is visible. As we often visit rural areas and talk to people there, we constantly discuss this phenomenon and try to understand the reasons why it is happening. We come across some rural inns, which are often authentic, looking like time machines, where rural men, mostly unmarried and drinking rakija to pass time, tell us that villages are deserted because women no longer want to live in rural areas, they marry urban men and flee to towns. And indeed, there are always more unmarried men, men in general, in rural areas, and younger women are much less common.

Why is that so? It is clear that Montenegrin villages are neglected in terms of infrastructure. The roads are bad,

electricity is unstable with the first bad weather, there is a lot of snow in the north during winter, and villages are not a priority for maintenance. Rural schools are closing year after year, so people who have children move to suburban settlements and towns for their education. Internet is scarce too, except via mobile phones, and even the network signals are questionable in some places. There are no jobs in rural areas, incomes depend on agriculture, and we all know agriculture is uncertain: a bad season, bad weather, one hailstorm, and incomes disappear. Rural health clinics and cultural facilities are rare. So, it is clear that life in rural areas is not easy, and it is equally difficult for everyone, men and women, but there are still fewer women.

Why do we have fewer women living in villages? We have read various strategies, analyses, and reports done in Montenegro to see if someone has addressed this issue. Indeed, the issue of gender equality is louder and louder as we approach the EU. We analyze violence against women, women's participation in important de-

- *In the last twenty years, on average, 100 girls are born annually for every 110 boys in Montenegro, while the natural ratio is 102 or 103 boys to 100 girls.*

- *The Strategy for the Development of Women's Entrepreneurship in Montenegro states the following data - women own only 4% of houses, 8% of land, and 14% of vacation homes.*

- *According to the 2011 census, women make up the majority of the total population in Montenegro (50.60%), similar to EU countries where women make up about 51% of the total population.*



cision-making in the country, talk about the number of women in parliament, high positions in management structures – these types of reviews can be found. However, the issue of women in rural areas is still not in the spotlight of public interest and political actors, often not even discussed by women themselves and organizations and institutions dealing with women's issues. Somehow, we have forgotten them. We, as a society in general, have not dealt with their problems, which are specific, we have not asked them why they are leaving, we have not asked them what they would like in order to stay. And most importantly, what they need in order to thrive. We do not see them; we do not hear them. They are invisible.

The data we have found is quite sparse, related to women in Montenegro in general and not specific to rural women, but it can still help us to understand the situation a little better. We have also checked some analyses of neighboring, related countries, because the situation there cannot be significantly different and their experiences and statistics can also help us.

According to the 2011 census, women make up the majority of the total population in Montenegro (50.60%), similar to EU countries where women make up about 51% of the total population. However, as medicine has advanced and determining gender has become an es-

tablished practice, what has happened in the meantime is the occurrence of selective abortion. The Council of Europe (CoE) requested an investigation into selective abortions in Montenegro as early as 2012 and warned of alarming data on the gender imbalance of newborns based on data from the United Nations Population Fund. In the last twenty years, on average, 100 girls are born annually for every 110 boys in Montenegro, while the natural ratio is 102 or 103 boys to 100 girls. The American Institute for Population Research observed the numbers of female children born compared to male ones from 2000 to 2014 and compared them to the naturally expected numbers and it estimated that about 50 baby girls are deliberately aborted each year in Montenegro.

Let's take a look at the situation regarding property. The Strategy for the Development of Women's Entrepreneurship in Montenegro states the following data - women own only 4% of houses, 8% of land, and 14% of vacation homes. The situation is only slightly better in Serbia, where 12% of women own the houses they live in, and only 16% own property, while over 50% of women in rural areas are unemployed. If women in Montenegro own only 4% of houses and 8% of land, and if land in rural areas is a key resource and a prerequisite for any agricultural activity, how can we expect any female initiative? If registering an agricultural holding is a pre-

- *When it comes to employment and income, the situation is as follows - in the northern region of Montenegro, which lags behind the southern and central regions in all economic parameters, women's unemployment is seven times higher than in the south and three times higher than in the central region.*

- *One area where women in Montenegro, especially in rural areas, dominate is unpaid work. If we try to translate that work into numbers, as shown in a UNDP analysis, women in Montenegro spend an average of 10 years of their lives doing unpaid domestic work.*



requisite for support measures targeted to rural tourism household, and if women only own 4% of houses and 8% of land, it means that if they want to do any serious work in rural areas, they need formal consent from their husbands to engage in agriculture or rural tourism on HIS property. Our laws speak differently, but our tradition often carries more weight and prevail, even with institutions.

When it comes to employment and income, the situation is as follows - in the northern region of Montenegro, which lags behind the southern and central regions in all economic parameters, women's unemployment is seven times higher than in the south and three times higher than in the central region. Women are mostly in lower-paid professions and tend to not advance up the decision-making hierarchy at the same rate as men. According to an analysis by the Ministry of Human Rights, which also dealt with rural women, more than half of unemployed women in rural areas have never attempted to find an employment. One-third of them are housewives, have never been employed, and have no pension insurance. What is somewhat encouraging is the statistics related to entrepreneurship - in recent years, there has been a noticeable increase in the number of women in entrepreneurship, so that women who own micro, small, and medium-sized enterprises today account for about 23%, while among female entrepreneurs, there

are about 32%. A decade ago, these numbers were an unattainable dream, but a progress can be seen, and that makes us happy.

One area where women in Montenegro, especially in rural areas, dominate is unpaid work. If we try to translate that work into numbers, as shown in a UNDP analysis, women in Montenegro spend an average of 10 years of their lives doing unpaid domestic work. A UN Women study conducted in Serbia states that women in rural areas are most often employed as informal labor, and 93% of women listed as "assistant household members" do not have pension insurance, making them one of the most vulnerable groups when it comes to the risk of poverty. Jobs such as house cleaning, child care, agricultural work, and even harder physical jobs are unpaid, and women often have no control over household finances. This analysis also states that every woman who cares for children or elderly household members every day should earn 546 euros per month!

According to data from the Gender Equality Agency of Bosnia and Herzegovina, women spend between 10 and 30 additional working hours per week, or four hours per day, on household chores. Ironing, changing bedding, cleaning floors and bathrooms, preparing food, and even taking care of houseplants and pets are tasks that are done exclusively by women in 93% of cases in



Bosnia and Herzegovina, even when they have full-time jobs.

Croatia, as an EU member state, has not solved these problems either. Gender inequality here is a consequence of a value system that fundamentally has an uneven distribution of resources - time, power, and money. Women still make up the majority of the unemployed, the majority in underpaid sectors, and do not have equal opportunities for advancement. In rural areas, although actively involved in work on estates, preserving families and cultural traditions, only 30% of women are owners of agricultural households. The Croatian Parliament's Agriculture Committee concluded that women's access to land ownership is difficult or limited (less than 15% of women own agricultural land), they are economically dependent, exposed to a higher rate of risk of poverty and unemployment, less represented in decision-making bodies, have weaker education and computer literacy, and the social and communal infrastructure necessary for a dignified life is still not fully accessible to women.

Now let's take a look at how women spend their free time, if they have any left. As women are usually the primary caregivers in the family, it's natural that they have less free time, and therefore engage in fewer sports, cultural or recreational activities. MONSTAT conducted an analysis on gender equality, which was not focused on rural women but on women in general, and found that 19.6% of women spent some time in sports, cultural or entertainment activities at least every other day, compared to 25.8% of men. We are absolutely sure that the data for rural women would be even more notable, considering that rural women have even less free time and fewer options for spending their free time engaging in culture or recreation.

What we must mention is the following - rural women are also the most diligent guardians of our traditional cultural heritage, ensuring its preservation for future generations. They do this in several ways - the most important are the traditional processing technologies of our products. Our cheese, for example, all the typologies that we have, the recipes are passed down from generation to generation and preserved until today. If the recipe is innovated and some new products are created, again the innovations are carried out by women. Recipes for our national dishes are again kept by women, mostly women in the countryside. Our traditional gastronomy is a reflection of our culture, which has

been handed down from generation to generation by women. Our women give a seal to our food, and our food should be the seal of our tourism. Beyond food, there are other elements of our cultural heritage that are worth noting. Transhumance - the age-old, nomadic practice of cattle breeders moving their cows and sheep to mountain pastures (katuns) during the summer months is perhaps our most significant cultural heritage. It is a centuries-old tradition that is deeply rooted throughout Montenegro. Without our "planinkas", the women in Katuns, that tradition dies.

What is the conclusion we can make from all of the above-mentioned things? One thing we can agree on immediately is that society does not address the specific situations and needs of women in rural areas, and there is no analysis of this group (at least we couldn't find one) that could be used to create policies and strategies to improve their situation. They are mentioned, quite broadly, as a marginalized group that rarely deserves the attention of decision-makers at both the national and local levels.

Whether this is how it should be, judge for yourself after looking at the stories of the women we have selected for you, because they are typical, yet each one is unique. Then let's try to draw conclusions based on their stories and common sense.



## Traditional women

*Traditional women are a typical example of women in rural areas. They are the most common of those who are left there. They are usually born in villages, their mothers who raised them were also born there, and somehow it seems as if the village was predetermined for them as if it is difficult to break out of that mold. These are hardworking women, among the most diligent workers. Their workday is long, and their faces often age quickly from so much work and the many hours spent in the sun, rain, and wind. However, new eras bring changes, and new generations are different already and there will be less and less of these traditional women in the future. That is why we want to dedicate the most attention to traditional women, to show them the respect they deserve because they are the most invisible of them all. And, they deserve great respect, whether you know it or not, whether they know it or not. The examples we show you are examples of women who are adding a new modern spin on tradition and are active in rural tourism. Not only active but also very successful. Every woman in rural areas can identify with them, and their example can be followed. They did not have greater knowledge than others, nor significant resources on their property, nor any significant support from the environment or household members. What they have is a fierce commitment to their family, their strength, and their work—and that's all that is needed.*







## Gordana Jokić

### A HOUSEWIFE FROM THE FOURTH GRADE OF PRIMARY SCHOOL

The Jokić family spends their summers at Vujov Katun, on the Čakor mountain, Plav municipality, not for vacation, but for the traditional moving of livestock to summer pastures. They used to have a spring katun high up in the village of Velika, so they moved twice a year, to spend winter in the village of Murino. For the past few years, they have also been involved in rural tourism at the katun, and are one of the first examples of katun tourism. Tourism was started here by Goca, a “planinka”, a wife, a mother, a daughter-in-law, a key person for the survival of this katun and the backbone of tourism activities here. These are some of the reasons we’ve selected her as one of the examples of traditional women.

She was born in the village of Šekular, into the Lekić family, for whom agriculture is also the main activity, just like for the Jokićs. Her mother was also a “planinka” and gave birth to seven children, five daughters and two sons, just like Goca later did. Goca was the sixth child in the family. When she was still in the fourth grade of primary school, during the period when her mother and older siblings were at the katun, Goca stayed with her grandfather in the village, and circumstances forced

her (and grandfather nudged and helped) to learn how to make pies, and later other dishes. Her grandfather told everyone that there were no better pies than Goca’s, so even today Goca’s pie is considered the best among the Lekić family. Her mother soon fell ill, so Goca left school for good, she was in the fifth grade then, afraid of losing her mother and wanting to spend as much time with her as possible and help her with all the work. That was the moment when she became “a housewife”, even at such a young age. She got married at the age of eighteen and moved to Murino, then she became “planinka” responsible for all cheese making and other katun delicacies, giving birth to seven children - a picture and a copy of her mother.

The Jokićs also traditionally engage in agriculture, growing practically everything they need for food. They produce high quality cheese and skorup (clotted cream), and Goca is the main expert for all these tasks. Her day is long, she gets up at 5-6 in the morning, and is on her feet until night. Activities are various - from taking care of livestock, daily milking and cheese-making, tending to the garden, picking blueberries and mushrooms, to routine and invisible household chores that almost



every woman faces. She raised her daughters the way her mother raised her - to be good girls, good “housewives”, so they could be good mothers in the future. But knowing how hard life can be for a woman in the countryside, she also taught her daughters to be good students, to find jobs and have easier incomes in the future. However, history seems to have repeated itself, as four of her daughters got married in the village and followed in their mother’s footsteps. Goca now has ten grandchildren, and two on the way, she is full of strength, life, and energy, and has not yet turned 50.

She did not inherit anything from her family, she says “at that time it was not customary to leave anything to daughters,” and nothing from the Jokićs’ property is registered under her name. Goca has never worked anywhere else, she has no work experience. She has always been engaged in agriculture and household chores, and all income from agriculture is considered family income, although she says that most of the work is on her shoulders. She started with rural tourism a few years ago when the Katun Road project was implemented in this area, and her family was one of those selected for support.

Goca’s family and even her surroundings did not have much understanding of her interest in rural tourism. No one believed in tourism, and they thought she was delusional. But her son supported her, and little by little, with uncertainty and fear of failure, she created the

conditions to start receiving guests. Now, every summer, Vujov Katun on Čakor is the place where tents, campers, motorcyclists, and cyclists can be seen, and the chatter of people and children can be heard in various European languages. And, Goca proudly shows her guestbook containing numerous praises for her culinary skills and the beauty of the region. Goca’s grandfather would be proud to see that today people from all over the world comment on her cooking, which he encouraged her to learn. Nowadays, Goca looks at her everyday life and assumed responsibilities differently, more proudly, because she now sees herself through the eyes of other people who appreciate her work, comment on it, and are willing to pay for it. She says she has learned a lot through tourism, has met various people and cultures that she would not have had the opportunity to meet otherwise. She also likes the earnings from tourism, which she practically made on her own, although now other family members are also involved in these activities when dealing with larger groups. Today, Goca is mentioned as an example, and has inspired the community to follow in her footsteps, she has already included some families in tourist activities, and her youngest daughter, who married there, practically in the neighborhood, plans to start rural tourism in her new family.

For an “invisible” woman, Goca has come a long way, and the whole second half of her life is still ahead of her.



# Ermina Redžematović

## FROM A TOWN TO A VILLAGE

The famous Katun Bajrović, where the Redžematović family has been moving its livestock to pristine summer pastures for decades, is situated underneath the Hridsko Lake, in the Prokletije National Park. It's no wonder since this area has always been known for livestock farming, and more recently, it has become popular among hikers because of the lake, one of the most beautiful in Montenegro. Since the establishment of the national park, it has also become a real attraction for tourists in general. Samelova koliba is here also, a well-known rural household, especially because of Ermina, the wife of Ramo Redžematović, a pioneer in rural tourism in this area.

Ermina was born into the Lalić family in Plav. When she was a girl (it was still the time of Yugoslavia and booming industry), her father got a job in Cetinje, so the whole family moved there. She spent almost her entire childhood and teenage years in Cetinje, and her family is still there today, so she is called a Cetinje woman in Plav. As a child from a working-class family, she never had any contact with agriculture. Although she did not

continue her education after primary school, she easily found a job as a young woman in the once-famous Košuta shoe factory in Cetinje. But just a few years later, a period we don't recall with joy began. During "those years", many jobs vanished overnight, and factories closed down one after the other. The transition period began.

Visiting some relatives from Plav, she met Ramo, who himself was a victim of this transition and had just returned from Belgrade to Plav. And, a great love was born. Ermina was destined to return to her hometown from Cetinje, this time as a member of the Redžematović family. The family Redžematović are a respected family in Plav, descendants of the famous master Bajro (after whom Katun Bajrovića was named), and a traditional agricultural and livestock family. The day we talked to Ermina her mother-in-law, Haska, was there by chance, she came to katun to collect some medicinal herbs. She remembered the years when she was the lady of the house and "planinka" in charge, and told us how this life was, "difficult to the core in those days."



She reminisced how she walked so many kilometers on foot, experienced so many terrible mountain storms while she was taking care of the livestock, and how she was so afraid of being completely alone in the mountain. And she said, among other things, that she did not believe Ermina really wanted to come to the katun when it wasn't necessary anymore.

But let's get back to Ermina. As a bride from an urban environment, Ermina had to learn about cows, cheese, and agriculture, mostly from her mother-in-law. She gave birth to three children, a daughter and two sons, and there was no work for her or Ramo. At some point, she decided to open a small boutique in Plav and worked there for twenty years. She never had a big income, but some money trickled in for everyday needs, although she was always afraid that some inspection would come and find some unknown mistake, and the penalty fee would take away all her earnings for that month. The boutique was a prison, says Ermina; she would exchange it for the katun at any moment. She found a new freedom. When Prokletije was declared a national Park and tourists began to come, and Ermina went to Bajrovića katun to visit her mother and father-in-law, resourceful and shrewd as she is, she realized that many people passed through the katun, and that this was an opportunity for some family tourism business. The children were already ready for schools and

universities, their education had to be financed somehow, and there was no stable income. That's when she turned to us from the Regional Development Agency for Bjelasica, Komovi, and Prokletije, and we have her noted in our books as the first woman in our career who asked us for help to start rural tourism, and we did not have to convince her of it first.

Ermina closed her boutique and started regularly going up to the katun, now not just for agriculture, as she could easily keep cows in Plav, but also for tourism. She carefully worked on her household, consistently attended trainings, followed advice, and implemented what she learned. Now, all her hard work is paying off. She named her household after her youngest son, Samelova koliba, but her oldest son is her biggest help as he manages all communication with guests and promotion. Meanwhile, she encouraged her daughter to complete her education, a feat she herself never achieved. Her daughter recently got married into a good neighboring family, and she brings a diploma as her "dowry". Thanks to the incomes from cheese, boutique, and rural tourism, Ermina already has two university graduates in the family, and she hopes that Samel will follow the same path. Alen, the oldest, graduated in hotel management, and he says that he got into that field because of Ermina, that she is his inspiration. When no one believed in her story, not even himself, she succeeded in creating



this beautiful story with room in it for the whole family, and it gave him ideas on how to direct his career and follow in her footsteps.

Samelova koliba and Ermina are now the trademark of Prokletije. You will always find Ermina there with a smile, serving you top-quality kačamak (a traditional mountain dish), which is why our diaspora often comes to Prokletije, and you can also stay overnight at their katun. Ramo is also always there, no longer skeptical about tourism, but thinking of starting beekeeping because "honey goes perfectly with fritters, guests would surely love that."

Ermina inherited nothing from her family, nothing is registered in her name even today. She says, "It's not our custom, but there are more possibilities for women today, today farms can be registered to women, and rural households too, this is a good sign." These obstacles did not stop her from achieving her goals because life as a "planinka" taught her well. This made her persistent, a fighter for herself and her family, she works hard and learns quickly, and expects nothing from anyone. Her success did not require formal education, and for her success she is a proud winner of the Wild Beauty national tourism award.



# Gordana Goca Dulović

## THIS IS UNIVERSITY, TOO

When you go from Kolašin to Sinjajevina, you pass through the famous village of Lipovo, a beautiful valley that resembles Switzerland and the Alps (except for the road, which of course indicates that you are still in Montenegro). The Dulović family lives at the very edge of the village, but you won't find them there in the summer. They spend summers in Gornje Lipovo, at the katun, because they make their living from livestock farming. And there, in Gornje Lipovo, you will find a cozy valley, an isolated place with an old stone house and a wooden kitchen run by Goca, the heroine of this story.

Goca was born in the village of Bojiće, in Gornja Morača, in an agricultural family that had eight children - four daughters and four sons. Three grandmothers from both her father's and mother's side were also part of that family, so Goca had someone to learn from about agriculture, cooking, weaving, and similar skills. She finished primary school there, and she didn't continue her education because, she says, at that time girls were not educated, it was important for them to know those "fe-

male" jobs. She got married at the age of 20 to Dragan Dulović and traded one large, agricultural family for another. She gave birth to five children, three daughters and two sons, and with a smile she says that she grew up in a big family and always wanted to have a big family herself. Two of her daughters are married, so Goca, although no one would imagine it when they see her, also has three grandchildren.

She always taught her children to respect the village and to learn all of the necessary work for life in the village. But based on her own experience, she wanted them to finish school. That's why her children were mostly top students in primary and secondary school, some have already graduated from university, and some are excellent students today with stellar grades. They are the pride of Lipovo and Kolašin, not just the Dulović family. Their education was paid from incomes from Kolašin's layered cheese <sup>(2)</sup>, because neither Dragan nor Goca have ever had any stable jobs or income elsewhere. Agriculture, no matter how much people say that it is unreliable, is their only reliable source of income. Goca



often spends up to 12 hours on her feet, doing daily work that knows no breaks, no weekend, holidays, or sick leave. A few years ago, she suffered an injury that left her with a metal rod in her spine. Yet, anyone who sees her - always busy, always working, and always smiling - would never suspect it. She says the following: "Now I can't lift this pot full of milk at once, I pour it little by little, so I can still do everything, just in different ways." Every day her Kolašin cheese is made as if there is no rod, the cows are milked, the grandchildren are taken care of, the blueberries are picked, and lunches are prepared for guests, without anyone realizing that this lady has some health problems. She is only afraid of two things - snakes and lightning, and it would seem that all other monsters that life can bring can be easily overcome. Even lightning wouldn't be a problem, she says, if she didn't have that rod in her spine.

She has been engaged in rural tourism for 7-8 years, out of curiosity, because hikers constantly pass by her house and because she recognized that she could make additional income, just as her older children were starting university. Their location is excellent, the place is fairy-tale-like, the products they offer to guests are of top quality, everything is idyllic, without any exaggeration. Dragan agreed, the children too, and Goca, of course, ready as a loaded gun to use the support given to her to improve conditions and start a business. She

went to training courses and brought something new to her household from each one and used each one in the right way. That is why today, on the doorstep of her house, alongside regular work that no one can replace her in, she performs another activity that doesn't take up much of her time but brings in new income.

Nothing is registered under Goca's name in terms of property, in the Dulović family nor in the family she was born into, except for cows, for which she says with a laugh: "They are mine!" It is not typical for traditional communities to register anything under a woman's name, but Goca says and her Dragan obviously agrees: "We are determined that what we have will be divided among all our children, male and female, because they are all equally our children." Only one of Goca's daughters was not interested in school and got married here in Lipovo, and Goca says:

"She married young, but she gave birth to fine children, and this is university, too!"

If life experience and wisdom can be measured by university degrees, our Goca has graduated with honors. It is a privilege to know her.

<sup>2)</sup> Kolasin layered cheese is a type of folded cheese, special for Kolasin area and is one of the first Montenegrin products protected by geographic indication.



# Milijanka Pešić

## THERE IS PLENTY OF TIME FOR EVERYTHING

In Bijelo Polje, along the beautiful Vraneška valley, at the end of the village of Tomaševo, just across the river, lies the household of Vučko and Milijanka Pešić, unique for their production of layered cheese, which is not typically made in these parts. If you're traveling towards Žabljak or Pljevlja using this road, they're on the way, so call them to make a reservation and take a break here. We guarantee you won't regret it. Don't let the chaos caused by the large volume of agricultural production and constant renovation of buildings for livestock, food, and housing discourage you; it's inevitable on a farm. Milijanka, the heroine of this story, doesn't have time to take care of the entire estate, but everything inside and around the house is well-kept. And now, let's hear her story.

Milijanka was born in the village of Mioče, in the municipality of Bijelo Polje, on the border with Serbia, in a five-member farmer family, where she learned to help her parents with all their work from a young age, along with her sister and brother. In addition, she was always an excellent student and graduated from pri-

mary and secondary school with straight A's. Somewhere towards the end of secondary school, she met Vučko. The love between them was instant, and to this day, anyone who sees them together can witness it, so it's no wonder they got married right away. At that time, Vučko worked at a petrol station, they lived in a suburban area, and they had to buy everything they needed for food. Children started arriving, living costs increased, and Vučko lost his job at one point. With four children at the time, they decided to return to the village and start farming. They bought a cow, then another, then a third, and Milijanka learned how to make layered cheese, which became their main source of income because they never had another job or income since Vučko lost his job at the petrol station. Today, they have seven sons and one daughter, large family. They also have 25 cows, a cheese factory, agricultural machinery that makes their work easier, a large field and greenhouses, bees, fruit, and they boast that this year they have their own wheat, so they will have their own flour. Therefore, they produce 90% of the food they need, and their main source of income is cheese.





It's hard to imagine a day in the life of Milijanka, a woman with eight men in her family and the task of making cheese from the milk of 25 cows, because Milijanka is a quiet and smiling woman whom no one ever has seen frowning, tired, ill or in a bad mood. Her smile spreads across her face every time Vučko comes back from the meadow, and they are such a good match because he automatically brightens up, and his fatigue disappears. Vučko is the engine in this family, an innovator and an initiator, but his initiatives would be hard to implement without her to complement his ideas and give them full meaning and purpose.

When Vučko became interested in rural tourism, we were sure that Milijanka would refuse, because why would she need additional responsibilities in the midst of her daily ones. However, she surprised us, after the initial and usual hesitation from nervousness and fear of embarrassment, she said: "I already cook for an army, a few extra people won't be a problem." Unfortunately, they still don't have accommodation facilities, so they only offer meals, and Milijanka is a first-class cook who can confidently host even a royal family for lunch.

However, food is not the only and key part of the attraction of this household. You should come here, sit under an apple tree (it is so normal that every house in the village has a favorite tree for shade and a table!)

and observe this bee hive called the Pešić family farm. Every part of the household is busy, boys of different ages drive machines, bale hay, feed cows, activate milking machines, all with laughter and the usual childish and boyish chatter. Your eyes and soul will be filled with the youth that has tied their lives to the village. Well-mannered, sharp as bees, full of energy but also full of love for what they do. Full of understanding for a mother who has a lot of work. They all run to help her as best they can, and they take care of Kristina, the only sister. Kristina is of course her father's favorite, Vučko imagines her getting married at every wedding he attends, and he cries every time, so the boys tease him, and Milijanka laughs.

Milijanka inherited woven things, memories from her family, as is customary, and of course, no real estate. Even today, nothing is registered in her name. "I never thought about it, it's all ours even though it's registered under Vučko," she says. But Vučko knows, and everyone who knows the Pešić family knows, that there would be no property or income without her. She is the center of this hardworking and unique family, and it is nice to see how everything revolves around her. We don't know if she deserves a pension, subsidy, whatever, but this full of love wife and mother definitely deserves a medal for her contribution to society in so many fields.



# Velinka Vera Pavićević

## THE BEST HOSTESS IN 2022

Visiting majestic Durmitor mountain at least once is a must, it would be a sin not to see it and not fill your soul with its beauty. And if you happen to be there, you shouldn't miss a meal at the Pavićević family in the village of Kovčica, in the municipality of Žabljak. The Pavićević family live in Žabljak, and Kovčica is like a summer pasture, a katun, where they stay in the summer. The term "katun" is a bit confusing here, because Žabljak used to be a katun itself a long time ago. They produce almost everything that grows at this altitude and are particularly proud of their certificates for organic production for a large number of products. We will talk about them, but our intention is to introduce you to Vera, the central figure of this household.

Vera was born in a village near Pljevlja, in an agricultural family, so agricultural work was never unfamiliar to her. She finished primary school there, then a secondary school for vocational training I – where she studied tourism, which she says was perfect and it's a shame that such programs don't exist to-

day because that school enabled her to work in different positions in different hotels, at the seaside during summer months, and in Žabljak the winter months. That's how she met Zoran, while working in Žabljak, and got married to him at the age of 21. The Pavićević family are also an agricultural family, so when their children were born, two daughters and a son, and her father and mother-in-law grew old, Vera decided to leave her job and dedicate herself to raising children, and also milk processing, taking over the helm from her mother-in-law.

Vera is an innovator, creating some types of cheese that you won't find elsewhere. Her famous "Durmitor rope" cheese looks just like a rope and immediately catches your attention. All of her children are university graduates, and their education was financed by incomes from Vera's cheese. One daughter is married, as well as a son, and Vera is happy that her grandchildren are now running around her and "bothering" her in all her work. When we visited Vera, we were lucky enough to have her entire



family there, so it was nice to see the towering, handsome Durmitor men and women, and the beautiful Pavićević family. Zoran was the only one who we missed, always busy with mowing, growing grains, and other agricultural work. But what brings Vera's children together in Kovčica is rural tourism.

Rural tourism was Milan's idea, and what kind of Montenegrin mother would not support her son's idea? So, Vera immediately said - we will try, despite initial fear. Žabljak is a tourist place, full of various sites and services, and there are plenty of apartments and accommodation facilities for tourists. But Milan wanted to position himself differently, to deliver an authentic experience relying on the products of this household and Vera's culinary skills. And they succeeded, not only succeeded but exceeded their own expectations. Vera can no longer handle so many people alone, so during the peak season, both daughters help her, and there is work for all family members. Neither the cheese nor the meat need to be sold anywhere else, they sell everything at the doorstep of their house. Breads, fritters, all pastries are made from their organic flour. And Vera has refreshed her knowledge of foreign languages acquired in

that famous tourism school. Another one of the subjects was etiquette, which is often neglected today. But now it serves in Vera's advantage, she has etiquette acquired by upbringing, then refined in school, and she passed all of that on to her children. Guests benefit from this etiquette as exceptional customer service. Vera takes care of them, their peace, and enjoyment, in a traditional sense with a high level of professionalism, ensuring a pleasant stay. This is reflected in the excellent reviews and impressions of guests staying at this household.

Vera renounced her inheritance in favor of her three brothers, although the brothers were against it. They wanted their only sister to have a share in the family inheritance, but Vera was persistent. Nothing is registered in her name at Pavićević's either, and she says that it doesn't matter, it's all for the children anyway. Vera is also a proud recipient of the award for the best host in a rural household in 2022. The prize went in the right hands, to the right person! Perhaps after Vera's story, and all her successes as a housewife, the term housewife that people sometimes use derogatorily will gain new value. It's time for the prejudice that usually accompanies it to disappear.



## Young women

*There aren't many young women in rural areas, but there are some, and that gives us hope that there are ways to keep them in the rural areas. Usually, these are women who have already had one foot or even both feet in the town, but something still ties them to the village. It could be family tradition, love for the mountains, the possibility of earning income, or the desire to move their children out of the town and live a healthier life. There are great examples of these successful, young, rural women, and we are happy about that. We hope that they will inspire other young women to follow in their footsteps.*



## Mira i Jovana Bogavac

### A DAUGHTER TAKES OVER AND ANOTHER LINK IN THE CHAIN IS ADDED

High above Mojkovac, a rough, gravel road leads to the Lanište katun on Bjelasica. You can reach the Katun only with a 4x4, but don't let this road discourage you. - When you climb to the top of the mountain, a treat awaits you- a well-maintained katun, vegetable gardens, and cows grazing freely on the slopes dot this idyllic landscape. The view from the katun extends in all directions, which is why this climb is worth it. The Bogavac family from Mojkovac is based here, and they also engage in rural tourism. This is supposed to be a story about Mira, but has evolved into a story about her daughter as well. It's a story of two strong yet distinct women, past and present, and the unfolding chapters that await us in the future.

Mira was born in Polje near Mojkovac, in a family of six. There were four children, and of course, they all learned about agriculture because their family lived off it. They moved their livestock to Sinjajevina, a mountain completely different from Bjelasica, but the work and responsibilities were similar. She finished primary school but did not continue her education. At the age of 16, she got married and crossed the Tara River to

become part of the Bogavac family, as Tomo Bogavac's wife. She became a mother very early in her life, she gave birth to two sons and a daughter named Jovana. Agriculture is also a family tradition for the Bogavac family and their main source of income. This means hard work from dawn until dusk and moving to the katun during the summer. None of this was unfamiliar to Mira; she quickly adapted and took on the role of "planinka" in charge as soon as her in-laws grew too old to handle those duties. Tomo, Mira's husband, is a ranger in Biogradska Gora National Park and had the opportunity to see an increasing number of tourists coming to Bjelasica every day, either for the park or hiking and mountaineering. Tomo was the initiator of the idea of rural tourism. Mira accepted it, and so did their children. They have been offering accommodation and food services for several years now. Guests are satisfied with their service, enjoy the landscape and walks (they only complain about the road), and Mira is also content, even though she has additional responsibilities. Mira says, "Tomo took over this business from his parents, our sons will take over from him, I took over from my mother-in-law and mother, Jovana will



take over from me. That's how it goes; it's one chain."

Jovana, Mira's daughter, grew up with her grandfather and grandmother at the katun, and she has fond memories of it from her childhood. She has learned everything she needed to know and can do everything her mother can. But Jovana is a product of the 21st century, albeit with traditional roots, so she understands what is rooted in our customs and traditions, and she knows what young people's needs are, wherever they may be. If we fail to understand the differences in generations, we can say goodbye to katuns and traditional ways of life forever.

Jovana is, of course, familiar with the digital world and is crucial for communicating with guests. She speaks English, manages reservation systems, and keeps up with all the news. She is a mix of two worlds, and she is very interesting to listen to but also to learn from. Jovana says, "I don't want to live my mother's life; I want someone to hear me and understand me because if we invested this much effort and work into a business in Germany, we would be rich." And Jovana is right; institutions need to understand her a little better. For example, the famous fiscalization in rural tourism, now mandatory under a new law, is a hot topic among rural tourism households. This is because the tax requirement is applied uniformly across the board, regardless of the vast differences in operations and incomes. It

doesn't differentiate between a restaurant in busy Mojkovac or tourist-packed Budva and a one room katun situated atop a mountain, devoid of electricity or phone signal. Jovana, rebellious in her youth, cannot understand such a lack of understanding, so she resists, explains, and debates to try to bring the decision-makers closer to the katun and explain the living conditions so that they can make better informed and more meaningful policies that affect her life. Her parents get angry about it and say, "You'll offend someone you shouldn't, it's not nice". We left that katun contemplative because Jovana is entirely right, but it seems like her voice isn't heard.

Jovana is 24 years old. Tall, beautiful, and educated, she is articulate and fearless, a modern version of a Montenegrin "planinka" with the same strength, passion, and courage as her ancestors. If Jovana loses her will to fight windmills, she will go to the coast or Podgorica, or she will go to that Germany to cash in on her strength and intelligence because we haven't heard or understood her. And when our Jovanas leave, and Miras becomes old, then everything that has been the centuries-old tradition of Montenegro, the hallmark of our mountains, will come to an end, and it will be challenging to bring back katuns. Our only hope lies in Jovana's stubbornness and the deep love for the katun and the mountain to keep her place as a link in the chain and fuel her fight for some time.



# Danka Šekularac

## POLISHED NAILS AND A TRUCK

Suvodo katun is situated close to the Biogradska Gora National Park, on the Berane side of the mountain. Nobody knows why it's called Suvodo (Dry Valley) since it's full of water. Because of this water, livestock breeders have been coming here every summer since ancient times, including the Šekularac family from the Berane village of Lužac. Besides livestock breeding the katun has also become important for tourism. The location is prime, with its closeness to the national park and convenient access to Bjelasica and its glacial lakes, making it a magnet for tourists. Danka, the young heroine of this story, recognized this opportunity and embarked on tourism with her family, successfully developing and managing this business.

Danka is a college graduate who finished school a few years ago and hoped for a job, like all young people. She applied, tried, got some short-term jobs, and lost them again. She speaks several languages, she is hardworking and fast, and thought that somehow a job should follow her diploma and intelli-

gence, and she would keep it with her responsibility and hard work. But, as Jovana from previous story says, this is not Germany. Such stories are rare here. As her parents were staying at the katun, and Danka, the youngest of their four children, instinctively stepped up to help. She often stayed at the Katun during the demanding agricultural season. It's a pity we didn't take a picture of her one day a few years ago when we met her driving a truck loaded with hay on the narrow road to Suvodo, wearing a hat and long polished nails. That could have been an excellent picture to depict Danka - agile, sharp-witted, and nimble. Somewhere around that time, we started talking about rural tourism. Danka, her brother Mirko, and her parents were interested, and this business fell into Danka's hands.

Danka was thinking at the time - she is at the katun every now and then anyway, there is no other work anyway, so why not. The Šekularac family started building new buildings. Danka's late father D Mitar, an excellent craftsman and hard worker,



was in charge of the construction and built several cabins, one each year. Danka negotiated with agencies, attended training courses, went on study trips, and added knowledge that was necessary to start this business. Her mother watched everything and wondered if they could manage all of this with their many other duties in agriculture - cows, fields, hay, and smaller livestock, everything needed work and attention. But Danka was persistent.

When we visited her for this publication, the estate was lively, with noticeable progress compared to two years ago. It is clear that tourism has become established here and that everyone has adapted to it. Young people from different European countries were everywhere on the estate. Some played with Badi, Danka's dog and the estate's mascot, others chased roosters to take pictures of them strutting around, while others lounged in the sun and rested after a long hike in Bjelasica. Danka's mother Rada, as if they were her own children, visited each one to serve them homemade cheese and refresh them with homemade juice, scolding her daughter: "These children are tired, hungry, and thirsty, Danka." Danka laughs, letting her mother feed the guests with something she won't charge them for, something that isn't included in the price but is part of the im-

pression and experience on the farm because no one has ever left the katun hungry or thirsty, and that tradition is nurtured by the Šekularac family.

Danka is an example of the new generation, present on social media, following technology trends. She likes to dress up, put on makeup, and spend evenings in Berane bars like her peers, and the long polished nails from the beginning of this story. She likes to ski in winter, travel and learn, and "hang out" on Instagram. As part of the new generation, she is not afraid to speak at meetings and gatherings, point out something that is wrong, something that hinders her work or is illogical to impose on katuns. She has no fear of speaking up, no doubt about whether she should speak up, she knows what bothers her and what she needs, and just like Jovana Bogavac, she is open to saying it. They don't listen to her either, because they don't like what she says, or because "it's not appropriate for a young woman to speak up", especially if she's "poisonous," as is usually said of a woman who protests about something. But Danka is not affected by this. She goes her own way, as far as she can. Although the estate is not registered to her, and tomorrow when she gets married, she will leave it behind and start somewhere from scratch, she still works hard to develop the business.





## Different women and stories

*There are several stories here about women who are not typical and who do not fit completely into the previous categories. We have chosen them because they've linked their lives to rural areas and it wasn't really expected from them because either they don't come from rural areas or they are returnees. On the other hand, they also have some skills which are not typical, and these skills have become important for their lives and work in rural areas. Their life in the village is not a matter of not having other options, but it is a matter of choice. They bring something fresh to the village. Something can be learned from that novelty, and maybe some future opportunity can be developed from it.*



# Gordana Goca Stevović

## OUR ITALIAN LADY

We are returning to Durmitor, this time to the village of Njegovuđa, not far from Žabljak. Now we are guests of the Dedeić family, where Goca Stevović, also from Žabljak, married into. Recently, on Goca's initiative, the Dedeić family renovated their old family house of typical Durmitor architecture and planted fields that had not been sown for years. This season, they've ventured into rural tourism. Goca, the central figure in our story, shares how this transformation unfolded and how a return from the town to the village was made possible.

Goca is a young woman and has family roots in agriculture and tourism. The Stevović family spent part of their lives in Italy, where Goca learned to speak Italian fluently and she can in addition to speaking English. They returned to Žabljak, where Goca's father renovated the family farm. They began producing cheese infused with mountain herbs and started to work in rural tourism as a family. As part of the new generation, skilled in digital skills and with knowledge of two foreign languages, Goca was naturally the key person in her family for marketing

and promotion, which she did excellently and still helps her family in this part of the business. Meanwhile, Goca got married (practically to a neighbor from Žabljak), got a job in Podgorica, and gave birth to two wonderful girls. Living in Podgorica as a Žabljak woman and constantly seeking parks and green spaces for her two energetic daughters to play didn't align with Goca's expectations. And how could it fit? After being accustomed to the expansive landscapes of Durmitor, raising kids in a cramped urban environment just did not seem right to her. That's why, during the year of COVID, Goca and her husband started thinking about renovating his family farm in Njegovuđa. Goca wouldn't be Goca if she didn't push it through, and her husband Jovan supported her enthusiastically. Jovan's father Zoran immediately rolled up his sleeves to help and, as the more experienced one, manage the work. After hard work on the renovation, not only of the house but also of the yard and fields, they have opened their doors to guests this year.

They named their farm in honor of Jovan's grand-



father, Vuk, who built the house. We visited them in Njegovuđa to get a firsthand look at 'Vukov Konak'. We found an unusual scene for Montenegro: Jovan taking care of the girls, collecting washed bed linen from the clothesline, and warmly inviting us for coffee because Goca was at a meeting. We thought it was a temporary situation, it happened once, but in conversation with Jovan, we realized that Goca travels from Podgorica to Žabljak every weekend because she works, and the girls travel with her, and Jovan is the one who welcomes guests and practically spends most of the week dealing with guests, house, and garden. He even says that the breakfast he prepares for guests, from produce grown on the farm, receives numerous compliments in guest comments. And he says it with great pride, as it should be. He is also part of the new generation, not accepting customary norms and molds but erasing traditional

lines in household jobs, and it is a real refreshment to see something like that.

And not only that. It feels good to see that a young family who could live anywhere in Europe (Jovan worked on a ship and travelled the world, and Goca lived abroad and could easily do so again if she wanted to) has chosen to not only stay in Montenegro but also tries to direct their lives towards Njegovuđa. A real wonder, many would say they are not normal. But they really are. Without hesitation, Goca says: "I want my children to live in a healthy environment, I want them to eat healthy food, I want them to be close to nature, I do not want to spend our days taking them from one enclosed space to another, from home to school, to music school, and similar extracurricular activities." Is there any healthier logic than this?



# Mia Jokanović

## “PLANINKA” FROM FOČA

Since we're talking about Durmitor, Pivska mountain is nearby and it's only fitting to take a tour along the “Durmitor Ring”, one of the most beautiful panoramic routes in Montenegro. Along this route, after passing through Sedlo, descending to Pišče, and passing through Trsa, there is a turnoff to the right for the Ljeljenak katun. Mia Jokanović from Foča has been living there for 12 years since she married Stevan Jokanović and traded her town life for the traditional Montenegrin katun scene, bringing new energy and modern approaches that have influenced not only the Jokanović family but also their surroundings.

Mia is different in that her parents provided her and her brother with housing in Foča, equally. She had not previously been involved in agriculture on a large scale. Although Foča is not far from there, some customs are different than in Montenegro, especially in traditional mountain areas. But Mia says she has fit in nicely. The Jokanović family owns 18 cows. They've recently built a new dairy at

the top of Ljeljenak mountain, equipped with tiles and other contemporary materials, in compliance with the latest regulations. Let's put aside that it is not really logical to ask these conditions on the katun but, what is even more important, as Mia says, is that the cheese will lose its specific flavor that comes from the wood and other traditional processing materials. But you can't fight institutional regulations, so the tiles have been installed, and we'll see what happens.

Mia supplies her products to the ethno village of Sastavci throughout the summer season. It's good for the Jokanović family to have a stable customer who buys almost all of their cheese and clotted cream from the katun, and it's good for the ethno village of Sastavci to have traditional mountain products of high quality available from the nearby area, which affects their offerings.

In addition to the traditional cheese, the Jokanović family produces excellent potatoes, carrots, on-



ions, beans, and many other products, like most people in Trsa. But what sets the Jokanovičs apart, and what Mia has brought here, is entrepreneurship in terms of sales. Mia is digitally literate and active on social media. She has connected with a courier service, so she literally sells all her products throughout the country. She takes orders online or by phone, calls couriers, and soon someone in Bar receives potatoes from Trsa, which to many people in Montenegro sounds like a remote and inaccessible place. And not only that, when she runs out of her own products, Mia “searches through” the neighborhood, the people she trusts, who she knows have good products, and sells theirs as well. So, at the top of Ljeljenak, in a harsh mountain environment, we have a fully thought-out sale of agricultural products that flows smoothly despite distance, bad roads and prejudices, all because Mia knows that nothing is impossible if a person is persistent.

Since last year they have also been involved in tourism because they are in an excellent location on the Durmitor Ring, just steps away from the Piva Nature Park. They already have guests, mainly for their food, although the Jokanovičs are adding new accommodation units to complete

their offer. Guests, of course, mostly comment on the food like Mia’s kačamak that she learned to make here, and they praise Mia. Neighbors also praise Mia. We found Milijana Bogdanović Drinčić from the neighboring village of Pišče visiting Mia, a mother of four daughters whom she supports by making cheese at the katun above Pišče, and there are no roads leading there. Milijana tells us that she is also interested in tourism, despite not having a road, because she has seen that it can work at Mia’s place. Her daughters are also interested, the youngest already runs over to help Mia when guests arrive, and she is “learning the trade.”

So, Mia milks cows and makes cheese, grows various fruits and vegetables, welcomes guests, does all traditional work on the estate and in the household, but also drives, is present on social media, and uses digital tools for marketing her products and services. This combination has enabled her to differentiate, be successful in her business, and mobilize her surroundings and involve them in some new activities. We take our hats off to her for the energy she has!



# Žizela Marković

## A PIANIST WHO MAKES GOAT CHEESE

We saved this story for last because it is truly atypical.

First of all, if you want to visit this household, you have to go south, to the seaside. Yes, this is the only seaside story we offer this time. But it is located in Luštica, in the village of Tići, and if you didn't see the blue sea and Mamula through the olive tree branches, you wouldn't believe you're at the seaside because everything is so rural. This is not the Luštica from the Luštica Bay story; this is the Luštica as it used to be, sleepy, full of aromatic and medicinal herbs, ideal for goat farming and olive growing, of course. And here we have Žizela, an unusual heroine of our last story.

Žizela, like her husband Nesa, is actually a trained musician. They both graduated from the music academy in Belgrade - Žizela as a pianist and piano professor, and she also trained for solo singing, while Neša graduated as a percussionist. That's where they found each other, and it's obvious from the first moment you meet them that they are meant for each other. They were also brought together by their love for jazz, so they have since specialized in jazz interpretation, among

other things. They loved the sea and often spent their summers on the Adriatic. They lived in Belgrade, but big urban areas are not the best fit for atypical artistic souls. Crowds, fast-paced living, dust, noise, political crises, economic crises, supermarkets and industrial food, chronic lack of parking and crazy traffic, all of that exhausted and irritated them, and they couldn't find peace. At one point, they decided to completely overhaul their lives from the roots up. They bought an estate in Luštica, an old neglected olive grove with a view of Mamula and the Adriatic Sea. They moved from the urban jungle to the village of Tići to start a new life there. Sounds like a fairy tale? It's all true, and you're about to hear the story.

Žizela wouldn't be Žizela if she didn't spice up the fairy tale with animals. She studied veterinary medicine in parallel with the music academy, but at some point, music prevailed because she had to choose between the two, and there was no time for both. She didn't finish her fourth year of veterinary medicine, but today she deals with animals every day. They acquired goats, then ponies, then donkeys, then Pramenka sheep, and



they are looking for a ram of the same autochthonous breed. They also have geese, and of course cats and dogs are a given. So now their household is called Pony Art Garden.

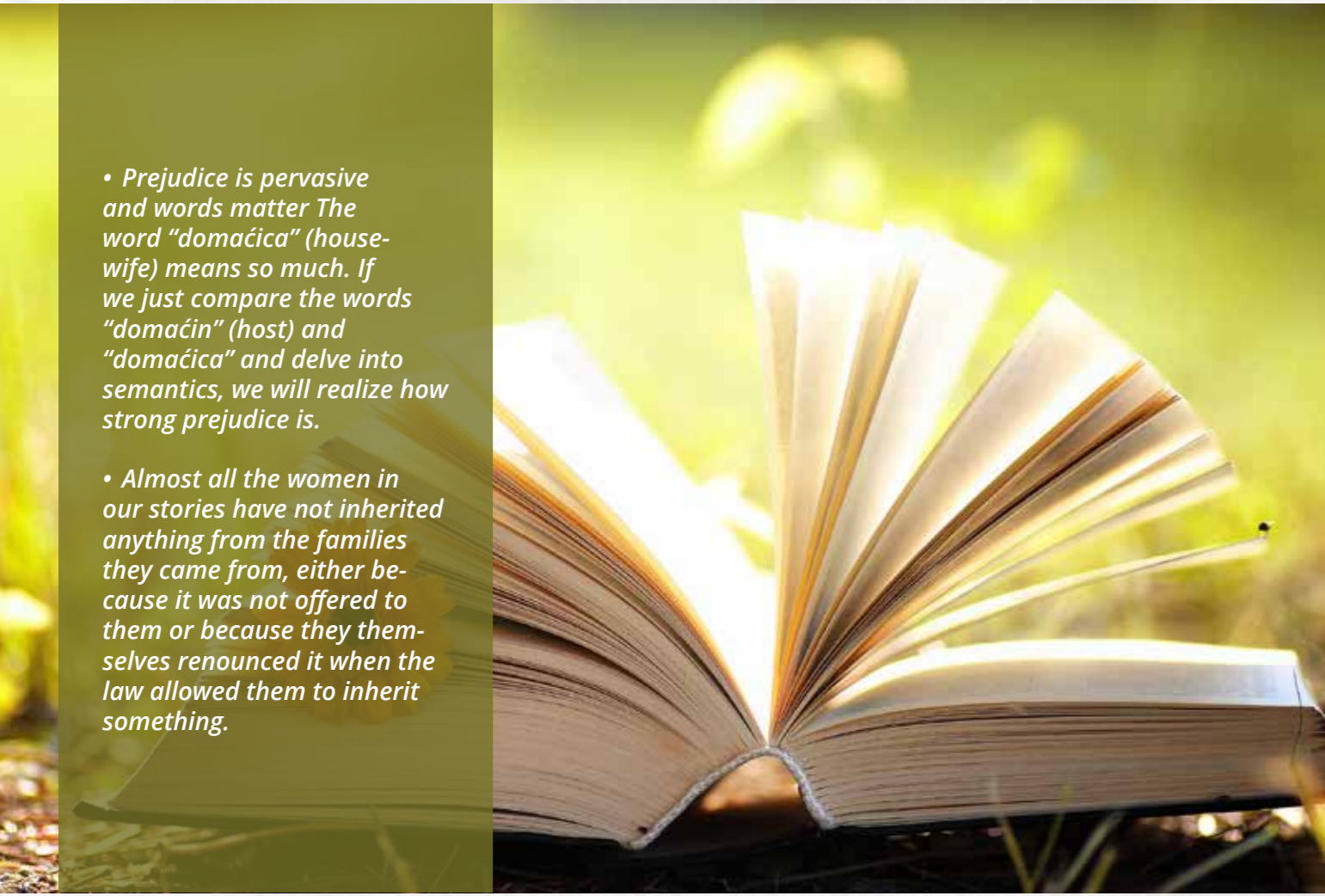
The olive trees around them were quite neglected, but they worked hard to revive them. While staying with them we heard for the first time a coastal story about how the olive tree is like a mother - if you abandon her, whenever you return, she will welcome you with open arms and bear fruit. On the other hand, the grapevine is like a woman - as soon as she is left without care for one year, she will wilt. Well, in this situation, that coastal story proved true. These olive trees were revived and are now bearing fruit, and they are autochthonous varieties characteristic of Luštica. Then Žizela, Neša, and Žizela's mother Zorka, who is somehow like an olive tree from this coastal story and who is almost always in Luštica to help "the kids," started studying how to make olive oil and how to preserve olives. Žizela had to learn how to milk goats and make cheese. And she learned everything! Now she loves to experiment with spices and prepares all sorts of delicacies because what kind of artist would she be if she didn't break the mold and constantly explore something new? Her liqueurs and various delicacies made from Luštica herbs are especially noteworthy. On the other hand, Neša takes their boat out to sea and catches fish for a gala coastal lunch. We were fortunate enough to try their symphony

of flavors from the sea, in which all three of them participate. It was a special experience. Perhaps because we, mountain people, do not have seafood on our menus very often, so for us this was like a holiday feast. Fortunately, at some point, when they renovated the estate and built a house, they set aside part of the space for guests, so now other people can enjoy everything this household has to offer. You can probably imagine the comments. Imagine being a guest who spent the day at the beach or on Neša's boat, then returned for a feast, visited Žizela's animals, took a nap in the shade of an olive tree, and in the evening, watched the sunset with a view of the sea while two top-notch musicians played jazz in the garden! Can you imagine the comments now?

Žizela and Neša also have a band and play and sing at the seaside during the season. Did we mention that Žizela sings perfectly? They have so many obligations in the summer that it's not clear how they manage to do it all. Every day, Žizela has to milk goats, chat with them as friends, and then make cheese. With love. We've seen her tired and frustrated because she shares similar problems as the women from the previous stories. There is no vacation, sick leave, or holiday - there is a lot of work every day. But Žizela chose this life, she loves it, and it shows and is felt. Even in her cheese. And especially in the olives!







- *Prejudice is pervasive and words matter The word “domaćica” (housewife) means so much. If we just compare the words “domaćin” (host) and “domaćica” and delve into semantics, we will realize how strong prejudice is.*

- *Almost all the women in our stories have not inherited anything from the families they came from, either because it was not offered to them or because they themselves renounced it when the law allowed them to inherit something.*

## *The moral of our stories*

*We are not experts on gender issues, and we do not aspire to be. But experience tells us, because we have been working on rural tourism and rural development for a long time, that as a society we have neglected women in our villages. We have worked with most of the women in our stories for years, and we already knew a good part of their stories. We certainly visited them again, to complete the mosaic with other details, because we never asked them some of the important questions either, and we wanted to correct that mistake. And now we ask you to correct the numerous mistakes we have all made together. We can*

*do something right away, something maybe in the coming years, and something will be corrected by new generations. But it is important that we begin to think of them as productive, valuable and important members of our communities. We may not have showered you with significant statistical data and scientific analyses, but we have presented you with real-life, true stories of women who live around us, and their stories have some moral, some individual and some common lessons. We would like to extract them, and we would like to ask you to complete them, because we must have missed something.*

**1** We have not been able to find any analysis, research, report, or any document that deals with women in rural areas. We do not have data to understand their situation, find out their needs, or meaningfully influence their position with any policies. Isn't it time we do that before they leave us?

**2** Prejudice is pervasive and words matter The word “domaćica” (housewife) means so much. If we just compare the words “domaćin” (host) and “domaćica” and delve into semantics, we will realize how strong prejudice is. Because these are words of essentially the same meaning but of different gender, but they are perceived differently. When we

• *Unpaid work is worth 565 euros per month. Our women record hours and hours of unpaid work. We have already said that a woman in Montenegro spends an average of 10 years of her life in unpaid work.*

• *Social protection services for rural women almost do not exist. Clinics, schools, kindergartens do not exist in villages. Support system for elderly, for persons with disabilities does not exist, and the burden of care is on rural women.*




say “domaćin čovjek” (male host), it means skillful, hospitable, smart to develop his estate; wealthy. And when we say “ona je domaćica” (she is a housewife), then we think of a woman who does not work. When someone does not work, then immediately they have less importance, not very useful to society as a whole. Are the women we presented useful to our society? Multiple times. Very much so. It is difficult for us when presenting households in rural tourism to present any woman as a housewife because we do not want to diminish her importance, so we struggle to find an adequate term.

**3** Tradition prevails over the law. Almost all the women in our stories have not inherited anything from the families they came from, either because it was not offered to them or because they themselves renounced it when the law allowed them to inherit something. In their new families, the ones they married into, nothing is registered on their name. Those who have a farming or household registered on their name had to obtain permission from their husbands. If we want to promote entrepreneurial spirit, push women to develop family businesses on agricultural farms, if we want to overcome traditional discrimination that is widely rooted, we must act with laws and their

consistent implementation, and immediately. We know stories of women we had to think and think to come up with ways to allow them to engage in rural tourism, in houses where they have lived for decades, which they maintain, where they invest hours and hours of unpaid work, where they are not equal.

**4** Unpaid work is worth 565 euros per month. Our women record hours and hours of unpaid work. We have already said that a woman in Montenegro spends an average of ten years of her life doing unpaid work. We hear about one year in the army from our men for a lifetime, from the period when the army was mandatory. Women spend ten years of their lives on jobs that will not be compensated, and often not properly valued because it is assumed that these are women’s jobs. But if we encounter any misfortune and have to hire a “woman” to help us with children or elderly parents, to take care of them and prepare food and clean for them, we have to pay for that. It costs. If they are done by a woman from the family, they cost nothing. Don’t you think that these jobs, related to bringing up children and looking after the elderly, or taking care of the household or agricultural production and processing are socially useful jobs?



- *By processing and selling agricultural products and investing their unpaid work, they gave this society highly educated citizens.*

- *The issue of women in rural areas is still not in the spotlight of public interest and political actors, often not even discussed by women themselves and organizations and institutions dealing with women's issues.*

**5** Young women do not accept old roles. Can anyone blame them? Women in the 21st century will not easily accept traditional and often marginalized roles. And we need young women in rural areas. That's why it's important to listen to them and respect their opinions. They bring digital literacy to rural areas, which we lack, and will make our villages part of the global community, contribute to stronger connections, information exchange, education, and enable innovation. Young people in general do this, but young women are significant for preserving rural areas and all those activities that were and are likely to remain in the domain of women's work.

**6** Social protection services for rural women almost do not exist. Clinics, schools, kindergartens do not exist in villages. Support systems for elderly or for persons with disabilities do not exist, and the burden of care is on rural women. Not to mention cultural content, that does not exist in villages. The internet, which could fill some of these gaps, is not easily accessible there. It is what we often hear from our partner rural households and they need the internet for guests, and it has become necessary for any booking system. What comes up always as a topic is retirement insurance for rural

women without employment. Because they are not entitled to it, they are in constant worry over how to wait for the old age, and what they will live on. They are in huge risk of poverty due to such policies.

**7** Education is not a barrier to starting a family business. We have seen from our stories that our traditional women do not have any major education, some have only primary school, and some also high school. But that did not prevent them from being successful in what they do. By processing and selling agricultural products and investing their unpaid work, they gave this society highly educated citizens. Then they supplemented family budgets with rural tourism. They attended training on specific topics, sometimes went on study trips, and that was all they needed to learn some technical details they needed to develop their businesses. They lack digital skills, which would make them even more successful, but their children usually help them.

**8** Administrations dictate rules without knowing what is happening on the ground. Interestingly, and perhaps not just with us, decision-makers do not take into account the real situation when introducing new rules. We heard from women in our

- *Support system for elderly, for persons with disabilities does not exist, and the burden of care is on rural women.*
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stories that milk processors, those who produce cheese, must have tiles in the processing rooms and on the dairy farm. But they did not think that if they want tiles, then they must provide a road to the dairy farm, which will transport these fragile tiles. And they did not think that our traditional cheese has been made on the katun for centuries, in a wooden or stone room, on a dirt floor, and that a Frenchman would never give up the traditional method of preparing his cheese for any food safety law. This is not strictly a women's issue, but women are key to rural tourism and cheese and other product production, so they are very much affected by these policies. Like the rule where rural households have to renew their registration every year, as if the time of the person in charge of collecting that documentation is not valuable and as if it is a small job - the ownership certificate, then filling out the same forms, paying fees, and so on every year, even when there have been no changes compared to the previous year. Then there is the fiscalization that rural tourism households often mention. The new law requires the registration of every invoice in real time, so it requires people who have digital skills, stable electricity supply and stable internet. We can hardly find that in the villages. Isn't there

a way to collect taxes differently, so that the rules that are imposed are realistically enforceable?

**9** A driver's license and digital literacy are extremely important. Our subjective experience is that women who have a driver's license are far more mobile, confident, and independent in their business than those who do not. And those who successfully use smartphones and computers are more informed and connected than others. Being informed in a timely manner and from reliable sources is a great advantage in any business, including agricultural and tourist activities. Digital literacy also enables the improvement of knowledge on various topics, and is particularly important for rural areas where it may not be easy to access specific training and similar content. It seems that the mobility provided by driving a car and the connectivity that comes with digital skills reduce isolation and broaden horizons.

**10** Perseverance and persistence are key. The heroines of our stories did not have an easy path. They had fears and insecurities, worried about failing and embarrassment and often their environment did not understand them. But they

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were persistent, year after year learning new things and adding content to their households. It paid off, not only in material sense, but also in terms of self-confidence. That's why people now see them differently.


**11** Social life are enriched. Many of our heroines do not have the opportunity to travel. Rural tourism has enabled them to constantly meet people from other countries and learn about other cultures. Some of them are also interested in

*And now you, as citizens, draw your own conclusions. And send them to us, so we can complete the mosaic and share it with decision-makers.*

*In the end, we owe thanks to the women whose stories we have told, who were willing to share their lives with us. When we asked them to tell their stories, we told them that we needed them because we wanted to encourage other women in rural areas to venture into rural tourism, to provide additional income for themselves and their families. Nothing else needed to be said, none of*

learning English, and have started to learn. Interestingly, older women also want to learn English, to communicate more easily with guests. Isn't that lifelong learning we all strive for? Guests who come to rural households expect interaction with the hosts, friendships and contacts are created, so it is not uncommon for households to exchange letters with their guests for years, receiving and sending congratulations or gifts for important events. In general, it is not uncommon for guests to return to the same rural household.

*them refused us. And that is a conclusion in itself. So, "dragon" ladies, thank you for everything you do for your family, your environment, and society as a whole. Thank you for being the seal of rural tourism in Montenegro, because you are its face, and for preserving small agricultural farms where the highest quality food in Montenegro is produced. And thanks also to those women whose stories remain untold for now, but who may recognize themselves in these stories. And greetings and good luck to you, new women in rural tourism, whose stories we will only begin to tell!*



The women presented in this publication contributed with their recipes to the publication of the collection of mountain dishes of Montenegro “Mountain Bounty”, and most of them are part of the gastronomic route of the same name. All the presented women are also members of the Association of Rural Households of Montenegro, an organization that gathers families active in rural tourism. Most of them are connected by the thematic route Katun Road, which connects katuns in several Montenegrin mountains. Explore more at the links:

[montegastro.me](http://montegastro.me)  
[ruralholiday.me](http://ruralholiday.me)  
[katunroads.me](http://katunroads.me)

